

Alessandra Fanelli

2020-07-10

KRISTEN LEIPERT: Okay, so my name is Kristen Leipert, and I am here with Alessandra Fanelli to talk about her experience in the Lehigh Valley LGBT community during this time of COVID-19 pandemic as part of the Lehigh Valley LGBT Community Archive. Our project has funding from the Lehigh Valley Engaged Humanities Consortium, and we are meeting on Zoom on July 10th, 2020. Thank you so much for your willingness to speak with us today. To start, could you please state your full name and spell it for me?

ALESSANDRA FANELLI: Sure. My name is Alessandra Fanelli, that's A-L-E-S-S-A-N-D-R-A, F-A-N-E-L-L-I.

KL: Okay. Will you please share your birthdate?

AF: Sure. August 30th, 1995. [00:01:00]

KL: Okay. So, and this is the consent portion. Do you consent to this interview today?

AF: Yes, I do.

KL: Do you consent to having this interview being transcribed, digitized, and made publicly available online in searchable formats?

AF: Yes, I do.

KL: Do you consent to the LGBT Archive using your interview for educational purposes and other formats, including films,

articles, websites, presentations, and other formats?

AF: Yes, I do.

KL: Do you understand that you will have thirty days after the electronic delivery of the transcript to review your interview, identify any parts you would like to delete and/or withdraw your interview from the project?

AF: Yes.

KL: Okay. This project has been approved by Muhlenberg's College's Institutional Review Board, and if you have any questions about that, you can contact Dr. Erika Iyengar, and if you do, just [00:02:00] let me know and I can give you her email address. Okay. So, how has the coronavirus pandemic affected your life? And this could be in any part of your life, work life, personal life, social life, anything? (laughs)

AF: I mean, it definitely has affected me in all of those aspects. So I'll start with work. So I work in theater and education, so I'm one of the many who unfortunately did become unemployed. I have not lived at home since I was seventeen, so I am now living at home (laughs) in my parents' basement, which is fine, they're very lovely for extending that to me, but you know, there were a lot of reasons why I was not living at home at that age. A lot of that had to do with my identity. A lot of great

conversations have happened since then. I'm very fortunate to have such supporting parents. But at first, it was not an ideal situation. [00:03:00] But obviously financial, that's just what had to be done, and I'm very fortunate to be in the situation that I'm in, given how many others are off a lot worse than I currently am. But not just financially, just with my fields that I work in, but just emotionally, just kind of seeing, you know, that I do firmly believe that the arts are essential, but kind of seeing how essential -- that word now is just, grocery stores and whatnot, and healthcare workers, which are fabulous, just kind of seeing my own personal theater kind of go down with that, it's just a little eye-opening. You see, okay, well what else can we be doing to engage the community? A lot of creative things have been happening, a lot of virtual performances, fundraisers, so it's been nice to kind of explore my creative outlets that way to kind of put all of our minds together to aid the vitality of organizations, especially in the arts. But yeah, that was a big eye-opener, and kind of [00:04:00] scary for a while, still a little scary, but obviously as we approach the green phase and start talking about 2021 with our season, and schools opening up again, that's obviously a positive thing, maybe not so positive about the schools quite yet,

obviously for other reasons. But yeah, that definitely took an extreme mental toll on me as far as work life goes.

And personally and socially, I like to think of myself as an extroverted introvert. You know, I'm a theater person. I thrive when I'm in groups where you're kind of almost forced to be together because, oh, you decided to do this shared activity because of your talent, skill, and ability, and here are other people and you have to kind of work together, so I'm great at socializing there. But the first couple of months of quarantining and staying home and social distancing was completely ideal for me. (laughs) I loved it. I love watching things [00:05:00] online. I love streaming; you know, *Hamilton* just came on Disney+, and now we're seeing this transitioning into having more accessibility with musicals and Broadway, and people are now seeing the importance of it online, so that's pretty exciting.

But after a while, you know, it did get a little taxing, like okay, I'm stuck at home. This is not ideal, and I'd be lying if I didn't get a few messages from previous relationships, like oh, like how are you doing? It's like, well you're only reaching out to me because we're in this

pandemic, and uh. And you know, there are lots of different applications out there for dating, meeting, just for companionship, you know, if you're bored and whatnot, and that's kind of been fruitless in my personal journey, but somewhat entertaining, because you get some nice conversations, and I have done some socially-distanced activities with some of my friends. We'll watch *Queer Eye* almost on a nightly basis virtually on Netflix, [00:06:00] we've gone to like parks and we've distanced and wearing masks and whatnot.

But it's been eye-opening to see, you know, who is kind of willing to do that in your life and who really is struggling right now, which I think is a great thing to be focusing on, the mental health of not just the LGBTQIA+ community, but just, as a globe, just understanding that at-home situations might not be ideal for everyone, and how these creative outlets and hobbies and extracurricular activities provide so much more than just, you know, like something fun to put on a resume or whatnot, it's really kind of a saving grace for a lot of people. So that's kind of where I'm at in this pandemic. (laughs) That was a lot.

KL: I know, but it's everything, it's really true. So, theater is your main [00:07:00] go-to for anything for like, mental

health. Would you use it for that outlet too? Is there anything else you've picked up along the way?

AF: Sure, which is another thing, so I used to be a fitness instructor, and I did swim lessons. I did [hits?] formats and Zumba and all that. Obviously, gyms, and then, you know, you're seeing a lot of virtual workouts, whatnot. Obviously, I think it's really great to get your stamina up and build your endurance and have that wellness about you, not just physical fitness but physical wellness, a good relationship with that. But again, gyms are closed. Now they're reopening, and that's mind-boggling to me personally, but to each their own, I suppose. But, yeah, I'm all about trying to find mindful things to find those outlets, but I'm also a firm believer in, you know, you also need to be taking care of our body. I'm someone who has fibromyalgia, so I love physical activity, but also I hate physical activity (laughs) because sometimes it's just not doable. [00:08:00] But sometimes even theater would help with both of that, because you might be cast as something where you're in a very active role. You might be dancing a lot, or moving a lot, which you know, is nice for three months out of your year, because that might be the most physical activity you see within a season. So yeah, it's definitely a balance worth pursuing in terms of this

pandemic. It's kind of interesting to see your own accountability, like okay, will I actually look at this Instagram guru that I love and do their at-home workouts, or will I go for a walk outside after my mom asks me 17 times to do, go for a walk? Or am I going to stay inside and watch more *Queer Eye*? So, and the answer is both.

(laughs) But yeah, so that's where I'm at with that.

KL: Yeah, so right now, so your theater background and what you do in theater, does that include teaching? Do you go to school? [00:09:00] Do you teach?

AF: Sure, so it's been a combo. I used to be a box office manager and volunteer for Civic Theater of Allentown, and through that, I started kind of working with other nonprofit theaters within Lehigh Valley and Chester County and in Berlin, and just kind of functioning almost as an ex-administrator, and digital content creator, and I'm a substitute teacher at Charter Arts. So I get to do a lot of different things within theater education. My time at Civic, I was the admin, or assistant for the theater school, so I got to have a lot of experience with the K-12 students working on their showcases and their classes, which was amazing, because that's something I've always been passionate about. I was supposed to start grad school this summer, which definitely also didn't happen within

arts administration, because that's something that I was looking into within my personal career about, all right, is it theater education I'm going to go full force into, or am I okay [00:10:00] just kind of living over here in this bubble where I kind of get to taste everything? But obviously, everything's on hold, so that's a little confusing, overwhelming, but somewhat exciting, because I have the freedom to have more time to think about it, I suppose.

KL: Right, yeah. I mean, do you still have those grad school plans? Do you plan on doing that in the future? Does it start later? I know, it's like colleges are just --

AF: Yes, it's insane, right? Because one, there's little-to-no communication from my program reps for probably various good reasons as well. But there's also the financial component. I had a couple of interviews for grad assistantships which would be of course the ideal situation to do for this program, not hearing back for a few months after that's a little disheartening, but then being unemployed, it's kind of like, is this even a possibility right now? Whereas it was a few months ago, and you know, I'm sure these program directors are looking at their own programs saying, all right, well clearly, this can happen right? This pandemic can happen. Is our [00:11:00] program

adapting for a lifestyle where the arts can function virtually, can function at home, can function in a way, you know, arts administration goes into development and fundraising, you know? Are we hitting everything that we can be hitting to doing that? So, I'm excited to see if I end up doing this program, to see what kind of approach, or if there is even an approach to situations like this, or just, you know, preserving the vitality of the arts, because that's kind of the point, right, is to be able to preserve and to help that grow. So, I'm sure there's a lot of different reasons why everything has been put on hold. My program was supposed to be online, so that's why it's kind of slightly confusing and so I haven't necessarily heard back. But again, you know, I'm sure there's plenty of good reasons, and I can only send so many emails without (laughs) being borderline, all right, this girl needs to stop. But yeah, I mean ideally, it is something I absolutely want to pursue. I actually did a year [00:12:00] at Temple in their public health program for social and behavioral sciences, and it's designed for people who do work full-time. At the time, I was working full-time, and I absolutely loved it. But I don't know; it just didn't seem like the right path anymore, and my professors were great about it, saying, you know, maybe it's just not the right

time. You can come complete it whenever, this type of a deal, but they were in the same mind process as me, as why are you putting money into this if it's not necessarily what you want to be pursuing, because every single time I would talk to them, it would be about theater, or education, or together, which is definitely applicable within the program that I was studying. But you know, seeing that arts administration is a thing, and knowing where my experience professionally has been, and knowing what I can do, and not that you necessarily need to have a master's degree to do that. I just am very passionate about pursuing my education, and I have a somewhat healthy relationship, competition rather with my father, you said, you can't have more degrees [00:13:00] than I have, and I'm like, oh, watch me. I graduated college in three years, and that was a big to-do for him. Why would you do that, it took me four years. And I was like, I saved a lot of money, I did that though. So, yeah, and I'm very fortunate to be able to even pursue that, so yeah, it's kind of up in the air. I would obviously love to do that, but I also kind of believe that everything happens for a reason, so maybe this is happening for a reason; you know, maybe I shouldn't be doing this, which is a great thing to be thinking about for me. Like oh, maybe I shouldn't be doing this. Maybe I

should be doing twelve million other things, so it's kind of crazy, but you know. (laughs)

KL: Yeah, I think it's interesting to see how things are evolving, or you know, the reality of, look at all these things that can be done online, and you know. Not that this is about me and I shouldn't be talking, but you know, I mean I follow a lot of dancers on Instagram, and it's been interesting to see. I mean, you just think, oh my gosh, now where [00:14:00] does their job go? But at the same time, it's like, they can reach out and teach classes to people who would never be able to do it, you know? So it's been interesting in my world to watch that. So like, your world is like in it and talking about it, you know.

AF: Yeah, it's insane, you know, and my experience has been within nonprofit community theaters, right? And love that world. There's so much about that world that I love, and I do have a few friends who work on Broadway, so I was there March 13th when, you know, they were calling me. Like, I'm unemployed, and I'm thinking like, ha ha, I am too, but knowing that I have a lot more benefits, because they're like, no, no, I'm unemployed, like don't know where rent's going to come from, and you don't really think about that, you know, as, I guess a consumer for that world, you're like, oh man, I don't get to see this show I bought tickets

for, but at least I have the option to get a refund for it, not knowing, or not realizing like, my free-time hobby,

[00:15:00] I mean, I've had contracts where I've been paid for, to be a performer, but that's nothing on the scope of a Broadway performer, where it's not only their life; it's their career, that's all I know. It's eight shows out of a week now down to nothing, and obviously, each show and each contract is different, but just kind of seeing those dates slowly get pushed back further and further, there's the side of people who are heartbroken, right? Everyone's heartbroken, and I'm heartbroken too. But on the other side of things, it's like, lives are at risk, you know? And it's, we're in a pandemic and no one is saying we're shutting down Broadway, we're shutting down, we're canceling theater, and I have seen a lot of these people, my friends, and their friends, and the community have a lot of freedom to do so many unique projects, and again, I don't know what's in the realm of what they're able to do for contract reasons of producers and whatnot. But like you said, it's been interesting to see how they've been adapting, but also kind of sad, because you're just like, all right, are they doing this just to kind of keep going? Like how are they actually feeling right now? Are they not really exposing us [00:16:00] to that for various reasons?

Because they are people, and entertainment is a job. It's not just, oh I get to enjoy all those great songs and dances. It's like, well, that is how they pay the rent. That's how they (inaudible) their healthcare, their insurance, and all this other stuff. So seeing that on a smaller scale has provided some perspectives, because you know, especially since everyone's home now, and they're on social media, and they're seeing things, and they're engaging a lot more with these shows and productions on social medial, so the news is hot, and everything is blowing up on it, so everyone's fine-tuned in as opposed to, oh, people are at work, so you might have a conversation with your friend about it over the weekend, but now it's, every two seconds there's an update; every two seconds you're talking about it because you have the free time to do so. Yeah, it's just, again, it's crazy.

KL: Yeah, I know. So, in the mental health aspect, which again, like you mentioned [00:17:00] *Queer Eye*, and you know, like the new season of *Queer Eye* couldn't have been more perfect, for me to be like, all I want to do is watch *Queer Eye*, because it's like, it makes me happy; it's like where I can be. You know, and yeah, even that, you think, well now they're not filming, and everything's just stopped. Yeah, but for everybody. So then you're like, well

everyone's in this situation, and we don't know what the future is. There's no predicting anything. I don't know.

(laughs)

AF: You know, my friends joke because they're obviously, "the corona coaster" they're calling it, with the ups and downs and the ebbs and flows within mental and emotional state within the pandemic, which is funny, and memes are funny to a point, but I take mental health actually very seriously, and you know, I'm the friend in the group who's always like, hey, you know, have you guys ever tried to talk to someone? You know, there's all these resources, [00:18:00] and I'm also like, oh my gosh, *Queer Eye's* going to be my therapist today, so it's like, the spectrum of like, you know. It is a great thing they achieved, you know. It started out as a joke. I'm watching the newest season. I'm like, wow, I should, you know, redo my closet and learn how to cook some more things. And now it's like, wow, I really have not been taking care of myself. I really have not been putting into relationships that I should be putting into, and with that, you know, everything expands, but it's also just so entertaining. (laughs) And so, whole sum, especially within the political climate that we're in right now, it's just so wholesome, and it's so uplifting, and it's so genuine, you know? I watched a few episodes of the

OG of *Queer Eye*, and it was entertaining, and I definitely enjoyed it, but my hesitations for watching the newer *Queer Eye* and the newer cast was always like, oh, what am I going to get out of it? It's going to be entertaining, but I was like, really amazed when I watched them and I'm in love with all of them, and it's just, it's great, and [00:19:00] I want my hair to look like theirs. (laughs) It's so, every one of them. It's amazing in the conversations that they have, and the inclusion that they have within the people that they're helping is just, it's amazing, and it's accessible in Netflix, and it's crazy to me that this little monthly fee which I'm fortunate enough to be able to afford, I was very much against, even at the beginning of this pandemic, I'm like, I don't need a streaming service. I don't have the time to watch anything, even if like, you know, it's going to be helpful to me, because I love mental health documentaries. So I would always just pause it whenever I would get into a season of, oh, I'm not going to have a lot of time. Now I have Disney+. (laughs) I have Netflix again. I did hop on the Disney+ wagon just for *Hamilton*, but I do know that I'm going to be spending many, many an hour watching those old films because that is just, that nostalgia, just, oof. But I wanted to wait on that because I know it's going to take up a lot of my time,

[00:20:00] and I'm trying to also read a little bit more. This is the first time in my life I've ever listened to an audiobook. I was not a big fan of audiobooks because I like to read fast and I often don't digest the meaning, which is probably bad. (laughs) I like to just skim. And so I'm like, if someone's narrating it for me, it's going to take forever. But then I thought, well this is the voice of the author. It's kind of a unique experience, and you also can toggle it and you can make it a little bit faster or slower. And also, it's nice, I mean you know, not social distancing, but if you're out on the beach or vacationing somewhere, it's a nice way to kind of take in information, whether it's like a collection of essays, or if it's informational reading, so that's been interesting to explore as well with all of my time that I have, not scrolling on TikTok. So yeah, it's interesting to see how when I truly have all the free time where I'm putting it, I guess is what I was trying to get at. [00:21:00]

KL: Yeah, and so like outreach with friends, or even work has been, have you been doing like video? I know you said you have seen people outside in the world, which is always nice. Also like, you know, I don't know, always makes me at least want to be like, oh my god, I can't hug you. (laughs)

AF: That's a huge thing. You know, we did a drive-in theater,

cabaret in a theater I'm a company member of, which was great. So we performed and we each had our own microphone, and everyone was in their cars and they turned on their radio and it was fundraiser and we donated some of the proceeds to the NAACP, so it was a great community event, and you know, then it ended, and we're like, I can't hug you, that's weird. (laughs) This is awkward. We're theater people, we touch. So that was odd, but also through that, those same people, those are people who text and okay, we're like [00:22:00] twenty-five-ish. Do you want to hop on Zoom and play a game? You're like, yeah, okay, that sounds fun. And Jack-in-the-box, I think it's called where you have your phone and then someone hosts it on Zoom and you just play a game, and it's really fun, and I do a lot of stuff with ArtsQuest, where we do movie talks, so I've been on and I've gotten to speak to Lee Grant. I've gotten to debate Pixar films and others and whatnot, while people just watch and they have feedback, or they communicate, and they also have games. I'm doing a game with them next week, which is exciting. Zoom has been huge, and I laugh at it because my friends were always like, I don't even have a Zoom account, and with online learning I had to have a Zoom account for Temple and for this program that may not be happening, but my online learning was strictly through

Zoom, so I'm like oh, okay, I know Zoom. And everyone's like, I haven't video chatted since Skype, I'll do FaceTime, and people are discovering group FaceTime which [00:23:00] I didn't know how to use until this pandemic. Yeah, lots of Zoom, lots of FaceTime. I'm lucky that I have WiFi here because my data would be through the roof. But it's great. You know, I like texting, like you know, I'll text like funny GIFs and chats and whatnot, but I'm a big, like I need a phone call and like, if I'm driving somewhere, I'll put it on Bluetooth. I just need to have that kind of conversation going, and my friends are very much visual. We need to be looking at each other. So video chatting has been great, especially with Zoom because you can do all these other external things with it, but I'm a huge fan of FaceTime, so. (laughs)

KL: Yeah. That's good. So, I don't know, is there anything else you want to talk about?

AF: Talk a lot. Talk about (laughter) a lot of other things.

[00:24:00]

KL: Let's see. I know I have like, my little list, but it's really up to you. Oh, I know you did mention, I think, about the Black Lives Matter movement, like all of these, everything that's coming up right now. I even think you mentioned that on your form.

AF: Yeah, the political climate, and just the humanity concept of everything going around, I'm Latina. I'm white, so I'm white, whatever people like to say. I like to say that I'm white and I'm Latina. My dad is from Peru. He did not come to this country until he was in college, and I'm very proud about that. My first words were in Spanish. I'm very proud about that. My mom's a Spanish teacher, and my sister's adopted from Guatemala. Very proud about all of that, so, and I'm packing my own privilege with everything. I hate saying everything that's going on; it's not everything that's going on, everything that's been going on, and the systemic racism that we're experiencing. [00:25:00] I'll just say it's been harder to navigate with my friend, because I have a mix of friends, friends who are BIPOC, friends who are white, friends who are able to unpack their privilege and start conversations, friends who are not, and that's, you know, even within the theater community, right? Because there's this, I don't want to say this challenge, but this whole big debate, and whole big conversation with cancel culture and theaters, whether it's on Broadway, or local nonprofit theaters, and obviously I serve on the board of one of them. I'm a member of all of them, I love them all. And, cancel culture when met with white fragility is just so incredibly toxic. I'm all about holding people

accountable, but I'm all about understanding a relationship needs to be had, and that hard work needs to be done, but it's a matter of, all right, who's doing the hard work, right? You can't rely on others to educate you. You can't just do things just for a check mark. You can't just slap things on it, you can't just post a black square and not [00:26:00] do anything about it. So, it's been kind of eye-opening, especially seeing people who, on the surface are doing the right thing and doing great things, but they're really not rooted in true meaning and genuine feelings towards it, which is heartbreaking for me because, you know, they'll look at me in the face and they'll be like, we're all white and straight and whatnot. And I'm like, no, you assume that about me. That's fine, because you know, that's reminding me that I do have the privilege of that, but you're incorrect, and this is why you're incorrect, and you know, being a woman, unfortunately, that is met with a whole bunch of other things, like oh, you're just overly emotional, or my age, like oh you're just a young, whatever. I'm not a millennial, technically. I'm that weird Gen-Z twenty-five cusp. I'm sorry, my animals are attacking me now. But I've had a lot of difficult conversations so far within these communities, and I'm really proud of some of them who are asking us to come

together, and they're just like, okay, [00:27:00] we don't know what's right, wrong, up, down, left, right, but we just want to talk, and that's the starting ground, and they're begging to know, how do we do this? And I always say, you know, you're doing it right now. You're having the conversation. It's not something that you can just, you know, we don't want people to get mad at us, so we're just going to put a band-aid on it and now we've done it. It's like, no, you're going to have to deal with a lot of uncomfortable things, and you're going to have to keep doing it, and you're going to have to make some changes that you should have been making before social media was trying to hold you accountable to canceling you, you know? It's been interesting to just kind of, to see a lot of arguments kind of fade away because they're realizing they're wrong, I'm still learning a lot of things obviously, which has been great, so it's been incredibly stressful and incredibly taxing, but rewarding in some sense to see small steps and you know, it's a lot of, it's not just with theater, you know? Like oh, performative action versus representation versus inclusion versus diversity and all of that, versus at the end of the day, [00:28:00] systemic racism is a thing. No one wants people to just say, oh, we checked it off, because we're now a

diverse organization. It's like no, we need to be anti-racist, and this is how we're being anti-racist. Like, we're not just going to tokenize and do this that checks off that box. We're doing something that, you know, promotes what we believe in and we do believe in it, and we are standing not just to again check off that box, but we're standing because it's the right thing to do. It's community organization, it's Broadway, or whatever still you're looking at. So, it's been interesting to see, you know, everyone's kind of, they have this confidence now with social media, and they're being bold, which is great, because they're vocalizing their opinions. I'm not one to be like, oh, you're canceled, but I also think once someone has shown their true colors, and their inability to open, or have an open discussion about it, I think you should take that into [00:29:00] account with who you're pouring into. But again, when cancel culture's being met with white fragility, it's just not a good scenario. But I'm also a firm believer in you know, if someone's not going to change their ways, then you know, that's up to you, but it should have a big impact on again, who you're pouring into either financially in support in your friendships, and your time, just in general. So, and that goes hand-in-hand obviously with everything going on within the LGBTQIA community, and

this question of rights still, and distraction tactics of oh we're looking over here, but now we're trying to erase some rights over here, and it's just appalling to me to see again, people that I fraternize with, I socialize with, having these viewpoints, and how they don't see how that's harmful, not just to me, but to everyone, right? And that's been a little crazy, because they're not -- [00:30:00] I don't know what I'm trying to say. I think everyone wants to think that you're making things political, and once the word "political" gets thrown into it, all of a sudden, it's like, now you're charged up and you're this, or you're that, and now it's, you have no credibility. When at the end of the day, my personal beliefs are, you know, if you're voting for a candidate, if you are in support of a candidate for reasons that that candidate can actually legislate, because that's what a president does, that's what whatever does, then that's fine. But if you're using this candidate, this person of authority, if you're using them and their words to disguise your own bigotry and racism, and homophobia, transphobia, that's where I have a problem with it, and that's what I'm seeing, which is unfortunate. I'm literally driving down and I see people with flags and just honking and saying the most horrible things in support of this candidate, and it's like, I don't

even think -- Trump never said the words that came out of your mouth. Do I think that he believes them? That's another story, [00:31:00] but you're using this as a scapegoat; you're using this as representation of it, and if that person is representative of that, that's what I feel, that's what the problem is, right? And it's just become a joke for so many people with people running for president, and you know, it's just, it's crazy to me. I have a late birthday when it comes to the year and the school year and what not. So when all my friends were voting for the first time, I wasn't able to vote, and when history was being made, I got to watch it in 8th grade, but I didn't get to like, fully, you know, talk about it because we weren't allowed to, and then in high school I wasn't allowed to vote because I was still 17. So, you know, I'm like, all right, I'm ready to go. And it's just like, this is the climate that I'm entering into, which is laughable, but to be taken seriously, and then just to have friends hide behind -- and I say "friends" meaning people that I've worked it, people that I've gone to school with, people that I've had to socialize with. Now I'm all about having open discussions about it, but it's, again, I've had people also look at me [00:32:00] saying, well you're this, this, this, within the little box I'm trying to fit you in,

so you must think this which means I have to be on the defense, and I have to fight you, and it's really just like, one, if you're trying to persuade me to think that Trump is great, this is not the way to do it. (laughs) But that's never going to happen. But also just, you know, democracy's a thing, you should have opposing views, but it should be rooted in actual plans and executions, not based off of hatred. And it's just, ugh, it's insane. I've had a lot of friends who were not married until it was legal for everyone, right? And then, you know, just seeing the bakeries and whatnot, and the organizations and people canceling fast food chains, to that, I say, you know, WalMart makes this Chick-Fil-A-like sauce, and I've heard it's pretty much exactly like the Chick-Fil-A sauce, so I love the Chick-Fil-A sauce, but I don't go to Chick-Fil-A, you know, it's just, it's crazy, again, with this whole cancel [00:33:00] culture thing, but there's also been times where I've needed to just kind of step away from social media because that is not a news outlet. It's a great community base, right, you know? I think people like to label it as toxic a little too soon. I think it's great to be starting the conversations. But again, if you're using that as a platform, which I don't care if you have twenty followers or one thousand followers, you still have

a platform, and I'm looking to see how you're using that platform, and if that's how you're using your platform, it's like, okay. But yeah, it's just, which is another thing to talk about, right? Because people were canceling their friends, like how dare you not share this on your Instagram story. And at first I was like, this is, that's great, you know, you should be holding them accountable. But then at the end of it I was like, again, performative action and virtue signaling, like I share a lot of stuff on my pages and I'm kind of shocked most of the time that I don't have people, like, oh, this, that and the other, because I also post about bagels on a daily basis, [00:34:00] so I don't know if people, they're just skipping through everyone's stories, but I also know that, you know, are you sharing this so that people don't yell at you? Are you doing the world? Are you having difficult conversations? Have you examined the microaggressions in your life that you haven't really thought about? You're enjoying *Hamilton*; are you acknowledging the systemic racism within that, even though it's something so great, which is something that I had to deal with, because I'm a white Latina; of course I'm in support of *Hamilton*, it's celebrating a white Latino's successes, but, and that's a great debate to have, is it this or is it that? But you

should have it, instead of just canceling it, canceling someone, and if it comes down to, hey, this is actually what you're saying it is, and I'm going to now normalize me apologize, and me taking ownership of saying something that was wrong, right? Like, oh, I was wrong. Thank you for correcting me. [00:35:00] Or, you know, like I didn't think about it this way, and you're right, and I'm changing my mind, and that's not erasing me from the fact that I believe it beforehand, but you know, just moving forward, just normalizing that, and normalizing, just learning things that you haven't learned before, and that goes, and the issues of race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation and gender identity, that's been exhausting for me personally. I've seen a lot of friends who are all, they're "woke," and they're like, oh, okay, great, racism, don't need that. Great, why are you still misgendering people? (laughs) It influenced my mind. Well, I'm their friend. Well if you're their friend, you should be using their preferred pronouns, or their pronouns in general, which has been crazy for me to kind of like, why do you have your pronouns in your profile? And I'm like, well why don't you have your pronouns in your profile? It's something I firmly believe should be normalized, along with, you know, when someone corrects you, when you misgender them or don't use the

correct pronoun, [00:36:00] instead of just apologizing profusely or making it a big deal, just thank you, and then moving on. Obviously, I'm a cisgender woman, so I can't speak to that and how you should be handling these interactions one hundred percent of the time, but as an ally, I think, you know, it's worth, again, a discussion, within the right time, place, and parameter, not outing someone. But you know, it's just, all these little infographics on Instagram, that's my main social media, have been great. I love seeing them because it shows that people care, and it shows that people can channel their creative outlets into this, because some of these posts, they're beautifully designed, and the meanings and the drawings and the digital art, and to see my friends share them, it's like, it's great, but it's also a matter of, are you actually reading it, or are you just virtue-signaling? But I think just, I hope that after this pandemic if that ever happens, when it happens, that we, meaning community-wise, society-wise, my age group wise, my [00:37:00] friend group-wise, we start having these conversations in person, and we start normalizing these behaviors, and calling people out in the right terms, especially within theater community about, okay, well let's just take what we learned when we were inside for all those

months, and we're not going to ignore it. We're going to actually apply it here, because we talked about all the scenarios that happened out here when we were in here, and now we're out here again, so I'm hoping to see more of that. (laughs)

KL: Yeah, and it'll be interesting, because this is going into the archives, so like in thirty years, whoever's watching this, and any of these, you know, they know what's going to happen now, and you know, hopefully, the political world is better.

AF: Yeah. (laughs)

KL: You know, they're like, what was this world of like racism all the time, and systemic racism? Hopefully that'll be like, gone. So in this grant we're also interviewing [00:38:00] people about HIV and AIDS, so who really like lived through that. So, and they've been saying a lot of, you know, the same like, you know, we can look back on it now. You know, all the steps that were taken, and kind of compare it to everything that's going on now. You know, it's just like similar things to look back on.

AF: Yeah. (laughs) My cat is jumping. Now my cat's here.

KL: I know. So all the animals are happy everyone's home.

AF: That's the thing, too. I'm kind of, I am a self-diagnosed workaholic, so you know, especially working for nonprofits,

some of my days start at seven AM, and then I would go to work, and then I would have rehearsals because I would like to jam-pack my schedule. So I wouldn't get back until ten at night, and obviously, whether I had a partner or a roommate or I had someone [00:39:00] come in and check on them, I would come back and they'd be like, all right, whatever, thanks for not being here or whatever. But now that I'm home all the time, do I really need to go pick up coffee at the drive-thru? I could just stay home and not, and I'm only getting coffee down the road because I just want to get out of the house, but then I look at my cat, and I'm like, oh my gosh, why am I leaving my cat and my dog right now? I don't need to be doing this. I got to go on vacation; my family has a house, and they're like, five siblings, so we reserve the weeks to ourselves and cleaned everything, so we were still kind of being distant, and we were still distanced on the trip, which you know, kind of kills the joy of being on vacation, but it's still fun. And I brought the dog with me, and he was just like, why are we leaving the house? It's hot here, but he did get to go on a dog beach, we went at dawn because he's a chihuahua and he will play with dogs, but then one [00:40:00] out of the ten dogs, like he'll just start barking, and I'm like, I don't need to deal with this. That owner doesn't need to be

dealing with this, and you want to bring friendly dogs to public areas, so we had the dog beach to ourselves, so he was like enjoying that a little bit I think. That was his little vacation. But yeah, I have their companionship, which is great. Before I lived in an apartment by myself with them, so that was still kind of interesting and fine. I don't really like the concept of being alone, but again, I'm still kind of an introvert, so like an extroverted introvert. But I think pets are great if you're willing and able to take care of them. And they're both rescues, so they have all their crazy stories, and they were so nice when I met them, and then they came home, and they're like, all right, we're gremlins, we're going to tear your bedding apart; we're going to bite your shoes, and all the good stuff that comes with being a pet owner. (laughs)

KL: Did you [00:41:00] live locally too when you were on, not at your parent's house?

AF: Yes and no. So, this time last year before that, I was an hour away, so I was in Plymouth Meeting, so I was a lot closer to Philly. And I was working out there, so it obviously made sense, but I was doing theater in Allentown, doing theater, and then I found a job in Allentown, and moved to Allentown, and then I started doing theater in Philly. (laughs) It was a mess. Yeah, I lived in the West

End Theater District for a while. Nice, quaint, little apartment. It was fun; it was fine, until I have an organ, until I had to move the organ down three flights of stairs. That was not ideal at all. But in case you're wondering, you can achieve that with a comforter if you put it on the comforter, and drag it down the stairs. So, never doing that again. But yes, I was fairly local. I was born in Westchester, and I [00:42:00] moved, and I lived in the Lehigh Valley middle school, high school, and then college, I went to Westchester, so I was back, and I've always been kind of back-and-forth between those two areas, and so I lived there for a while, and then I moved back here, and now I'm literally back in Allentown, and, which is fine. I love the area. It's a nice neighborhood that I'm currently in, so I can't complain too much. And if and when I move out again, it's not going to be an apartment, because my dog did not do well in the apartment space, for no good reason. Like he could be at home here alone, nothing, whatever, in an apartment. He's like, oh, I have to alert the world that there's a fly in the kitchen, and that's a problem for me, so. Yeah. (laughs)

KL: Okay, so, now if we can like wrap up if you want. (laughs)
Is there anything else [00:43:00] you would like to talk about?

AF: What else have I been doing? You know, I hate that I have that screen time on my phone thing.

KL: Oh my gosh, me too. (laughs)

AF: For a while, it was down a significant amount, and I was like, why is this happening? And then I was like, oh, I'm sleeping all day. I do digital content, so like some theaters even have commissioned me to like make -- they're doing virtual musicals, and that's so exciting, and I'm making their production videos with like 13 kids singing and dancing. So, instead of being a normal person being, oh, I'll have two in a week, I'll have two in a week, but I would stay up the first two days until seven o'clock in the morning editing it, because of my own anxiety, and then I'd be like, here, it's here. They were like, this is great; there's no amount of time in the day, how did you get this achieved? And I'm like, I don't know what you're talking about. (laughs) And so kind of unlearning that for a while. So then it was like staying up all the time, sleeping all the time, and you know, I have friends who as we are slowly getting [00:44:00] back into green phase and getting more comfortable with social distancing, I personally am completely fine with never eating out again. I have a lot of social anxiety, and I just feel weird, especially now eating out. Because I'm like, do I need to be eating out

right now? Is this waiter thankful that there's service right now, or they're just really upset, and you know, some of these tables aren't six feet apart, so why am I doing this? I could just take the food out, give them my tip and go home and enjoy the delicious food. As we're doing that, we meaning the collective we, doing that more and more, everyone's like oh, well you know, I was FaceTime dating this person, but maybe I can meet them now. Meanwhile, I'm like, no, no. (laughs) Let's not be silly about that, and for a while, I was just like, wow, like everyone is so, like concerned with online dating right now, and they're very concerned about not finding someone to quarantine with or whatnot, and that was mind boggling to me. And then I was thinking about it, like oh well, [00:45:00] I'm the type of person who before pandemic times, like I like FaceTime dates before you even go on a real date, and some people think that's weird. No, I think it's nice, you know, and it's a good way to get to know someone, or you know, learn things that might not sit well with you, or this, that, and the other. So I was like, well, you know, if I want to do that, I'll just hop on an app, it's fine. And then I realize, well everyone is on these applications now. It's not just like a select few, it's everyone, because everyone's home. So like oh, this will be fun still. It's

not been fun. It's just everyone is on these applications, and I, within my personal experience, I don't really like these, the catered apps that are for the LGBTQIA community, because strictly, with my own experience, they're not just as far-developed as the mainstream hookup and dating apps, right? Like, I have so many apps that I've known since I was in college, like when I was seventeen, and then [00:46:00] you know, I've been learning about them, and then I'm twenty, and now I'm twenty-four, I'm just going to be twenty-five, and I'm like, the app still hasn't changed. (laughs) There are bugs with it, and you know, you can't do certain features that, I mean I'm sure it costs money within development, but I'm just like, and then they want me to pay them for it. And I'm like, oh my gosh, this is ridiculous. So you want to go to the mainstream apps which are not catering to, but it definitely had a certain demographic within, in mind when it first came out, and I love seeing the updates with it within identity and orientation, and you have the ability to only be showing, for it to show you people of the same orientation first, but it's still, you know, being someone who isn't really necessarily looking for a polyamorous outlook on anything, and just like, oh, this person seems nice, and then you start messaging them, "Hey, my boyfriend," it's like, okay,

that's fine if that's what you're looking for, but there just seems to be a lot more of that, and then the argument of like, oh you're just fetishizing [00:47:00] this, that, and the other. But you know, everyone is looking for something different, and the apps that I found that are more fine-tuned with, this is what I'm looking for, this is what I am, and this is what I need; this is a dealbreaker, aren't the apps that are easily accessible to the point where like, you can actually "meet someone" a lot quicker. So that's just been my own personal experience. Also, a lot of my past relationships started with online dating, so I kind of can't say that it's completely bogus, but it's been interesting just to kind of see, like oh wow, so what do you do? Nothing, we're in a pandemic. Oh, okay. Well what are you doing for fun? Nothing, we're in a pandemic. Okay, what do you want to talk about? So, that's been interesting for sure, and I've had friends who have had many a successful date. And I'm like, that's lovely; that's great. So does that mean you're not going to be on Zoom tonight to go play a game with me? Okay, cool. So that's definitely been interesting. I'm hoping that [00:48:00] maybe that's eye-opening for companies and individuals, because an individual can just start an application like that, just to kind of see, and it'd be interesting to see some research

on that, like hey, now that "everyone" is focused on these applications, what really are we looking at? What really is missing from this, because the first intake of that didn't -- I mean it's not pandemic proof, you know, at least for an inclusive community as far as that goes, you know? You can swipe on someone all day, and then meet someone and talk to them, and that's fine, but if it's not what you're actually looking for, the same interaction that you would have had, should you have been in XYZ location, and I'm the type of person, you know, I do shows, so like, you're in a theater circle, so you meet theater people, which is fine, but then it's like, okay, well now there's no more theater. (laughs) And yeah, and it's just so crazy. And so, it's funny because, like, I don't know [00:49:00] if you've heard of the app HER. That was kind of bigger, maybe it still is kind of bigger, when I was a sophomore in college, right? And I'm looking at it, and it was kind of like, the stigma and the assumption like, oh, if two girls match, they're not going to want to talk to each other, so we are prompting you with a question, and you need to respond to it. And I'm like, oh, okay. And did it work? Yes, it worked. But seeing applications like Bumble now, you have the option just to do that now. And I'm like, wow, that's fine, right? It's perfectly acceptable within

communication. You have a prompt, and it's an icebreaker, but I'm wondering how many people are like, this is so silly. I thought, I can start a conversation. Who could possibly think about that, when it was a running joke with like, an exclusive woman-meeting-woman, whatever app, and I think it's changed then to be more inclusive. But just literally, after a certain amount of time, it was like, hey, you haven't talked to your matches, so we are making you talk with this exact prompt. So it's kind of funny to see [00:50:00] some of these mainstream apps adapt that, to see how effective that might be, and some people are put off by it. They're just like, why did you send me this question? I don't want to know what you liked to wear when you were 13. I don't even want to talk to you, I just swiped on you because I'm bored. So that's just, you know? It's a little crazy and again, so the screen time has gone up. That was my whole point with that. But with warm weather, people are laughing at me because for the first time, in my life, I have a bit of a darker complexion. I'm not even that dark right now, because my whole life, since I was 17, I've been inside a cool theater all summer long, like just working, doing shows, doing whatever, and I spent a week just going outside and everyone was like, wow, I didn't realize, you know, you aren't yellow. Kind of, oh,

okay. (laughs) Why are you saying that? So I've been going outside more, which is great, and I like to kayak, and the lakes that I've been going [00:51:00] to have been doing a great job with social distancing, which is amazing, and then, you know, me being the anxious person I am, I'm like, oh, this is so great, and then you hear the scary and unfortunate news about Naya Rivera in a lake, and I'm like okay. (laughs) Nothing is safe; we're going to stay inside for the rest of life. Which is another thing with Naya, that's a good segue. When I was seventeen and looking for that crew representation, obviously Santana Lopez was one of them, not like the only ones, you know, and every, I always find things that are problematic within queer representation, especially within cis-passing queer women, on television and musicals and plays and books and whatnot, but I love that character a lot, so obviously, it's sad for so many other reasons, and like, oh, I just, I keep refreshing that hashtag. That's all I've been doing all morning, I'm just like, looking at the hashtag looking for different news, [00:52:00] watching the press releases. When Cory passed away, I don't even know what year it was, I hadn't felt that type of like, loss within like looking at someone, since Michael Jackson. So, when Cory passed away, it was kind of eye-opening. Like oh wow, this is

someone from my generation, and we are not invincible, and you know, someone who picture perfect seemed so okay wasn't. Then all these conspiracy theories with the *Glee* cast, and everything bad happens in threes, it's just like, well again, these are people from our generation. These are the people that were entertaining us directly by representing our demographic. This is kind of, it's, I don't want to say earth-shattering, but it is in a sense, [00:53:00] especially because it's not something, it's something incredibly tragic because it's something that could happen to you for no outstanding circumstances, not to belittle the other two gentlemen from *Glee*, but you know, you're on a lake, and you're trying to just swim, this is presumably what's happening, and then it's just like, oh, you just lost your kid, and no one's around, and your son is on, it's absolutely crazy, not just within like the theater community, with being *Glee*, or the LGBTQIA+ community, being Santana Lopez, but just like, whoa, like this is a human, and this is a fun summer activity, and you know, we're trying to still, some of us are still trying to enjoy summer while remaining socially distant, and now it's just like, oof. And I'm a water safety instructor on top of that, so I'm just like, yikes. You know, one of the first things they teach you in lifeguarding when you're in a body

of water that isn't a pool, and you're with a small child, [00:54:00] it's like, you can't help anyone unless you yourself are wearing a life vest, which obviously doesn't apply if there's like debris underneath and you hit something, and you're untangled, and it's like, I can't really do much more about that. But I get really upset when I hear stories about drownings, especially for young children, because I instructed water safety for so long, and I think it's such an important life skill to have, which obviously, I was fortunate enough to have the resources to obtain and then go on to teach. But it's just, I also went to a high school where we had to take aquatics basically just to justify because we had a pool. But there was an option for non-swimmers, and it wasn't a water safety class. It was just, you stayed in the shallow and then you did some water aerobics, and while that's great, there are many different reasons why people were in non-swimmers, I was just like, you still could have taught them other things, because a lot of those people were there because they had a phobia of water, and it's like, well this is the perfect place [00:55:00] for you to be right now, because if something were to happen, god forbid, you should know what to do, and there are a lot of easy things, like I taught four-month-olds how to do it. And you know,

you feel a lot of shame because you're looking at the seniors over there diving, and you know, my dives aren't perfect, and you're just like, oh, I'm just going to sit over here because I can't swim and I'm afraid of water, but you know, you can drown in such a little amount of water, it's just, it's crazy to me. Like I took aquatics over the summer, I think, and I didn't really learn anything from it. I was like, okay, I needed it for one of my fall classes, but looking back at it now, I kind of wish, and I still wish, because you know, it's still a school, and it still has a pool, not just to justify and to enhance your swim team, but just to kind of be teaching that as a life skill, because it is a life skill. I mean, you can make here, well I don't live near a body of water, you never know where you go or what might happen, and even just knowing that, even in a bathtub, something horrible [00:56:00] can happen. So yeah, the Naya Rivera, I just, oh. (laughs)

KL: I know, it's so sad. And you know, getting back to the swimming thing, I feel like, because pools are closed this summer, and I just, you know, I mean I knew that it was going to happen, but I also thought, oh great. Here's a whole summer where my kids don't have swimming lessons. And like, I also think that's super important. And you know, we

love swimming, and they love swimming, but I'm like, oh god, one whole year where that's not going to be a thing. And that makes me nervous, and they're great, but I'm like, oh my gosh, all that progress they could have made this summer is not happening.

AF: No, it's definitely scary, and everyone's different. It's not something where it's like riding a bike, and not to segue off of that, but I forgot how to ride a bike.

(laughs) I rode a bike when I was ten, and then I started riding the big 40-mile tour in New York. I was like, I completely forgot how to ride this bike. (laughs) I don't know why you're all telling me that I wasn't going to forget. But as far as swimming goes, [00:57:00] you're growing and you're adapting as your body changes, that changes how it's able to move within the water, and changes how you're able to breathe, because a lot, within water safety is breathing. You're teaching, and you're learning how to breathe, and how to do it safely within the water, so yes, there's obviously a lot of opportunity for regression there, but hopefully not too much, but that's the scary thing is, it's different for everyone. It's not like, oh, I only miss this amount of time, so I'm only going to miss this checkpoint. It's like, no, everyone's different. And it's something that's supposed to be fun

too, so I know no one wants to stress about something that's supposed to be a fun, and it can be year-round, but typically, summer activity.

KL: Yeah. All right, so we're hitting an hour, so I don't want to take up too much of your time. (laughs)

AF: No, this was fun. Sorry, I talk a lot and in big breaths, big winds. (laughs)

KL: No, it was great. I know, the other person who's doing these interviews, I was like, I'm so nervous about this, and she was like, [00:58:00] oh my god, you're going to do great. People love talking. And I was like, okay, great. But I also don't want to be the one who's talking. (laughs)

AF: No, no, conversation, it's all about, like I love public speaking, after once I digested it as like, oh, I'm just having a conversation. Then it's like, now I'm rambling. (laughs) No one else is talking now, because I know I'm just going to ramble. But yeah, but it's fun.

KL: All right, well so thank you so much for doing this. Yeah, for your story, and your time, and everything.

AF: Thank you.

KL: You're welcome.

END OF AUDIO FILE