

**Cara:** This is Cara Vanderree at the Ashland City Library, speaking with Rhonda Swonger, local hairdresser. Today is April 29, 2020. And Rhonda, do we have permission to record this conversation?

**Rhonda:** Yes, OK.

**Cara:** OK, Rhonda, when did you first hear about coronavirus? Just a general time-- after Christmas, before Christmas.

**Rhonda:** Oh, yeah. Probably not long after Christmas.

**Cara:** Do you remember what your reaction was when you first heard about it?

**Rhonda:** Just mainly that I didn't think it would get here. I didn't think it would get... You know, maybe on the coast, but maybe not to the Midwest.

**Cara:** Why did you think we might not be affected?

**Rhonda:** I just figured that United States would get it under control before it got that far. But I probably really, truly didn't take into consideration. The fact that people travel so much.

**Cara:** Yes. Who lives in your home?

**Rhonda:** Just me.

**Cara:** So when did when did the virus really first become real to you or when did it begin to affect your life?

**Rhonda:** A couple of weeks before the shut down, I traveled to Manhattan to see Ervin. And I would say at least a good four weeks before, I started buying like canned groceries, beans and rice and things to have on hand just in case the grocery store couldn't keep up and we couldn't buy groceries here.

**Cara:** So what you were seeing on the media did make you a little bit concerned about food security.

**Rhonda:** Maybe not food safety so much, I guess. I didn't think then, just the shortage, that we wouldn't get supplies here after, you know, after it started getting closer to when we got quarantined.

**Cara:** Okay, what things changed right away for you after the virus hit America?

**Rhonda:** Well, for one, my brother had gone to Florida and came home and was one of the first people quarantined to his house for 14 days. We couldn't see the kids. And then after that two weeks, it overlapped. They had two days left of their 14 days and then they shut everybody else down.

**Cara:** Does your brother live in Ashland?

**Rhonda:** He works in Minneola.

**Cara:** Were there other things that changed right away?

**Rhonda:** Well, yes, it means I can't go to work?

**Cara:** Right. Were you shut down when the schools closed or at the same time?

**Rhonda:** At the same time.

**Cara:** Well, what is your job or your business situation right now?

**Rhonda:** I was lucky I had purchased several things at the lumber yard and the lumber yard can still do curbside service, which is good. I watched Youtube videos and learned how to mud and tape sheet rock. I figured if I had all that time, I could do it myself. I have mudded and taped; I have primed and painted. I had a bathroom cabinet in storage that I got out and painted and I started a garden. I learned how to make tortillas.

**Cara:** So you have not set at home and watched TV all day.

**Rhonda:** No, I was not. I actually just got done watching a video of a lady that is an artist, that said, "I'm overwhelmed. I cannot get all this stuff done." And then she had to shared her list with one of her friends, and she said, "There's no way you can get this list of stuff done. It's like six days of a list that you think you can get done in one day because you don't have to get to work." And I have found that to be true. My to-do list is extremely long because I don't have to go to work. I feel like I should be able to get all this stuff done.

**Cara:** How do you feel about that?

**Rhonda:** Fine, now. It stressed me out a little bit earlier and then I think I started to realize that my list was too long and then to hear someone else say it just confirmed that my to-do list was too long. But I have a couple of friends, you know, that... Now I feel a little bit better. They'll stop by. We still don't hang out more than about ten minutes. We usually stand outside in the yard, but they've at least looked in my door and said, "Holy cow, you got a lot of stuff accomplished."

**Cara:** Yes. When do you think life will get back to normal?

**Rhonda:** Probably six months from now.

**Cara:** Is there going to be a new normal and what do you think it will look like?

**Rhonda:** Now, there is going to be some... We have started doing church online, and although hopefully the few of us that still go to church here in town will still go to church, but the fact that we've been able to have church. And several of the people that used to go to church here, growing up, have been able to join us on a Zoom meeting for church on Sunday. That's been kind of nice, it's about doubled our numbers of people who have been joining us for church on Sunday.

**Cara:** Wow.

**Rhonda:** Unfortunately, I just think from all of listening to my friends that our kids are going to be behind in school. Some kids haven't taken as well to the online school as others.

**Cara:** Right. So you're worried about how things will look next fall when we try to start schools back up?

**Rhonda:** I worry about the group of people that really like doing the stuff over the computer versus the people that didn't. So I just feel like we're going to have some more separation from that. We've kind of already talked about hopefully maybe we could do two Sundays of Zoom meetings for church and then possibly two Sunday where we go to church. Or we always go to church, you know, the six or eight of us, but then have a Zoom meeting as well so we can invite some people from out of town. I don't know. I don't know how that's going to work.

**Cara:** Thank you. Because I had not considered that. How do you feel about the pandemic right now. What is your reaction to everything that we're going through? And do you think it's going to change Monday?

**Rhonda:** The biggest thing probably that I worry about over all with the whole thing is are we getting closer to... Like we've talked about how they want to have mandatory vaccines for this sort of thing. I don't know how I feel about that. The amount of time that I think it's going to take for them to get a vaccine, just from what I hear from the news. That's kind of like an uneasy feeling. I think they should be able to do it quicker.

**Rhonda:** But on the other hand, with Facebook and the internet and the news. It just. always amazes me how much, I guess fake news is what they call it now, that we get, you know how contradictory everything is from the news that makes it hard to know what to do sometimes or who to believe.

**Cara:** Yes, especially when the experts all disagree. OK, Rhonda, is there anything that you would like people 10 or 20 years from now to know about how we felt about what we were going through with such an uneasy time?

**Rhonda:** We were involved in the fire, and this is very similar in a way. We didn't know what to do then. And then we really didn't know what to do about this pandemic. There's always some guidance from like the government or whatever, but in some instances, you just have to use your common sense and make some of your own choices, because not all the... not rules, but the way that they go about trying to get you to deal with stuff isn't always really right for our little rural area. Does that make sense?

**Cara:** That makes perfect sense. We need to be careful, maybe not shut down completely.

**Rhonda:** Maybe, maybe not as long. I definitely feel like they could have done something different with the packing plant, that's for sure.

**Cara:** What long-term effects do you see from what's happening at the packing plants?

**Rhonda:** I'm a little bit concerned with the fact that I don't feel like we've had any kind of great information on the news, and maybe there is and I just don't see it because I don't have cable TV, about like should we be cooking our meat more? I mean, obviously, they're still shipping that meat out. Are we susceptible to get Corona virus from that? And should we be cooking our meat fully here?

**Cara:** OK, Rhonda. Thank you very much for talking to the library. And we will be talking to you in a couple months, hopefully, when everything is over, to see how you evaluate it.

**Rhonda:** Thank you. You're welcome, Cara.