

Interview of: Kate White
Interviewer: Michelle Little
Interview Date: May 15, 2021



Kate White
Wine consultant, Winebow
Athens, GA

Date: May 15, 2021
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Interviewer: Michelle Little
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Michelle Little: Okay. So this is Michelle Little. I am here with Kate White, and today is May 15th of 2021, and we're at Kate's house in Athens, Georgia, in person.

[00:00:18]

Kate White: Yeah! No masks.

[00:00:20]

Michelle Little: Fully vaccinated, many weeks out from vaccination. Couldn't have seen this day coming, honestly. So the last time I spoke with you, the last interview we did was June 8th of 2020.

[00:00:38]

Kate White: Nearly a full year. Okay.

[00:00:39]

Michelle Little: Yeah. And we were on Zoom, on Zencast, just—yeah.

[00:00:47]

Kate White: I was lonely in my study.

[00:00:48]

Michelle Little: Yes, you were in your study. I was in my little office at the house.

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[00:00:53]

Kate White: I hadn't even thought at that point about making my own fleet of masks, because I thought, "Oh, this'll be fine, these couple that I have. This'll be over soon."

[laughs]

[00:01:01]

Michelle Little: Yes! Yes, masking was still new to us. Yeah. So I've been prefacing all these interviews with the fact that I fully expect this round of interview to be a little rambling, a little unorganized. [laughs]

[00:01:19]

Kate White: Fine by me. It speaks to my life.

[00:01:22]

Michelle Little: I think we're all just still getting used to talking to other humans in person—

[00:01:28]

Kate White: True.

[00:01:28]

Michelle Little: And remembering time and just— [laughs]

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[00:01:34]

Kate White: Agree, agree.

[00:01:37]

Michelle Little: So what I wanted to start out with, since we spoke in June, just what do you even remember about the rest of that summer? What are things that stick out in your mind?

[00:01:50]

Kate White: Mostly a fear of will I lose my job and how Athens fit into the larger picture of the pandemic, if we were somewhat following suit of other cities or as a college town, if this was a more unique situation. Those are my two main takeaways, other than my yard looked great because I did a lot of landscaping because I had some time on my hands. Those are top three. [laughs]

[00:02:28]

Michelle Little: Yeah. I mean, how real was the job fear? Because I remember your company, they had sort of instituted a new way to pay you based on past commissions.

[00:02:44]

Kate White: Correct.

[00:02:44]

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Michelle Little: Y'all had just sort of settled into that, and I know you had a little bit of layoffs—

[00:02:49]

Kate White: We did.

[00:02:49]

Michelle Little: —initially, so, I mean, how palpable was that fear?

[00:02:55]

Kate White: After the interview, I would say that it kept becoming more palpable.

[laughs] Is that a thing? Because how far were the cuts going to go and how long would they afford to pay me a salary based on past work? I mean, it just seemed that there was only a finite bit of time that could sustain itself. And somehow, some way—and I almost hate to admit to you I'm not entirely sure how it ended up working out that I somehow ended up making enough money without salary to get by, even though there was a severe pay cut based on commission, but at some point, I just stopped worrying about it, and it's almost hard for me to fathom that I really did become grateful for even the pay cut and started—I do admit that I did something unhealthy and, quite frankly, unlike me. I stopped putting a certain amount of money in savings for reasons of security. I didn't want it tied up in a 401(k) when I felt like I should be more fluid with my earnings and have it in a checking account where, if I need it, I could have it without making an early withdrawal on a Roth IRA.

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[00:02:55]

Michelle Little: Sure.

[00:04:30]

Kate White: And then maybe the feeling of appreciation that I still had my job at all and that I was getting by, I just settled with happy to have something instead of nothing.

[00:04:44]

Michelle Little: Yeah.

[00:04:47]

Kate White: And all of that became real hard numbers when I did my taxes this year. My tax guy always likes to do this thing, “This is your earnings last year, and this year—.” I’m like, “Yeah, I did the math on that already, but having you say it to my face, for the purposes of turning in numbers to the IRS—,” was a nice little slap to the face, you know, just an open-handed one-cheek slap of, “Oh, yes, that’s why I stopped putting money in my 401(k), just in case that was an even worse number.

[00:05:22]

Michelle Little: [laughs] Gee, thanks, accountant. [laughs]

[00:05:27]

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Kate White: Yeah, yeah. I mean, I guess everybody needs that person in their lives to point out that, “Nope, this is true.”

[00:05:32]

Michelle Little: “It’s a hard cold fact.” [laughs]

[00:05:35]

Kate White: “This is a fact.”

[00:05:35]

Michelle Little: Okay. And so at what point did you all know—I mean, because I know so much is tied to the university and the students coming back or not coming back for this town, for here in Athens, so—and I did not look this up before our interview, just about how UGA decided to operate this year. So how did that play out in the fall?

[00:06:08]

Kate White: It played out not necessarily how your research would have indicated. For instance, I have a friend who is a professor at the film school, and even though UGA said, “Hey, this is a mandatory in-person class at some point,” professors were still finding a way to give the option of online learning, distance learning. And then there were plenty of students who didn’t have to be here, but, in fact, they already had leases signed, and maybe they didn’t want to live with their parents or—let’s be frank—maybe their parents didn’t want them back, and they were here anyway. But the regularly scheduled

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commerce of Athens, Georgia, especially in 2020, for graduation, which, of course, here we are at the year anniversary of that, was a totally different ballgame. So I guess to your question of what was the school's schedule officially like, maybe it matters but doesn't matter.

[00:07:26]

Michelle Little: Yeah, because it hits everybody differently, like you're saying. No matter what they decided collectively, different students had different obligations and situations.

[00:07:37]

Kate White: Or people were going to operate how they wanted to operate, no matter what the rules were. So, yes, UGA is saying, "You must do online learning." Well, this lab is not going to allow for that. Or UGA is going to require that this semester this class is going to be in-person, but a professor will see to it that they're going to operate a different way. So I think no matter what the rules, people kind of made their own.

[00:08:08]

Michelle Little: Yeah, that makes sense. So did more and more bars and restaurants start to open up to different capacities? Did things start to flow?

[00:08:24]

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Kate White: Yes. I think the first flow of business that I found very unexpected was businesses that opened during the pandemic probably around June. One of my favorites is a place called Café on Lumpkin here in Athens, and Luke [Martineac] had his plans and he was going for it. It made construction delays to get his operation up and going. The pandemic certainly helped him take those in stride, where maybe it didn't matter as much since it was a pandemic anyway, but, you know, he kept proceeding, and he's been a thriving business in Five Points here since he opened, with steady growth. So here this guy is seemingly beating the curve, and then there were other restaurants that just shut down entirely, and then there's one I can think of, Homemade, that did totally shut down, was very TBD as far as "Are we even going to reopen at all?" and only this past two weeks reopened their doors.

So everybody's on their own schedule, right? Some restaurants and bars kept on operating at whatever capacity they could, and then others took it upon themselves to slow their business and reopen it as they saw fit, paying no attention to governing guidelines, they're going at their own pace, and then some that quit altogether. It's everything in between.

[00:10:09]

Michelle Little: Yeah. And so what about your clientele specifically? Did you lose any?

[00:10:15]

Kate White: Well, I think one reason I can speak to the last question is that my clientele—there's an incredible breadth of business, and I have seen all of those first-

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hand in-person. So, yeah, I've seen every iteration, it seems, of what businesses are doing right now.

[00:10:40]

Michelle Little: So then even to the point of do you have some new clients?

[00:10:47]

Kate White: Absolutely. You bet. Community Roots in Madison is a brand-new, up-and-coming specialty grocery store with a lovely fine wine department, and they definitely opened during COVID and did all of their construction during COVID, opened a couple months ago and doing great. Café on Lumpkin, again. Both of those are just real highlights. There are more. Maybe a touch of being anxious is preventing me from recalling.

[00:11:16]

Michelle Little: Oh, yeah. No, I understand, yeah. But it's very hard [laughs] to remember names and dates and just for everyone, right? [laughs]

[00:11:24]

Kate White: Sure. Even in a normal week, month, year for me, the amount of information thrown my way can be much—there's a certain—it's exacerbated from 2021, just trying to keep myself personally sane and just be able to pivot at every turn with

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new—you know, how restaurants are doing and operating. It's been tough. It's overwhelming.

[00:11:57]

Michelle Little: What are things that you think helped you, like, stay the course and stay—I mean, I know that's a bit of a personal question, but is there anything that you realized helped you through the year personally?

[00:12:15]

Kate White: I'll get cheesy on ya. If it's a personal question, you get the personal answer. I was very happy, aware, and appreciative of being in a great relationship, and on an emotional level, I guess that's the obvious help, where if you're feeling overwhelmed, you have somebody to talk to at the end of the day about what happened and someone to keep you in check to stay on the right course.

And then something that Rob and I have gone over is having two homes to bounce back and forth to, from, just even though we spent most of our time at his place, even having the option to be somewhere else was great. So many people became cagey of their own homes and to be cooped up in one spot. Just the option of having somewhere else to go was terribly nice.

And then in Georgia, I want to be sure to mention there was so little regulation in this state compared to, let's say, my brother in California. He really was quite on lockdown. We were seemingly—not seemingly. We were much freer to roam here. There was no—it was not the same curfew. The restaurants were not under such strict guidelines. So

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maybe it's unlucky from a scientific, pandemic point of view that we did all this and maybe spread COVID more, but if you didn't get COVID and you stayed safe, then you had this free-to-roam, easier-going, less cagey, more mentally healthy place to be.

[00:14:22]

Michelle Little: Yeah, that makes sense. I mean, I understand, yeah.

[00:14:28]

Kate White: One more. To realize how lucky you are to be in a certain socioeconomic position to have a nice place to be. How awful would it have been to be quarantining in a pandemic in a less environment—and we're sitting here in a 1,200-square-foot home that has not been renovated all that much since 1958, but this is still a pleasant place to be, at least for me. [laughs]

[00:15:02]

Michelle Little: It is a delightful place to be. I can second that. [laughs]

[00:15:05]

Kate White: So what if this pandemic had started while I was in a cagey, dark apartment that I wasn't happy with in the first place, and then I found myself stuck? So I realize that environment has a huge bit to do with my coming out of here fairly optimistic and in decent mental health.

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[00:15:28]

Michelle Little: Yeah. Absolutely. Okay. So then shifting a bit back to work, I remember one really interesting thing that we talked about in our first interview was the kind of surprise things that were selling.

[00:15:48]

Kate White: Oh, yeah. [laughs]

[00:15:48]

Michelle Little: Due to new website and—so did that continue? Did they revamp websites at any point?

[00:16:04]

Kate White: Yes, absolutely. So things did continue to trend that way. My A-to-Z Pinot Noir sales—

[00:16:13]

Michelle Little: A-to-Z. [laughs]

[00:16:14]

Kate White: —are up. My Block 9 Pinot Noir sales are up, all because these websites very much remain, many of them, in alphabetical order, so, again, when people hit that

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new lower price point they're shopping at for their bottle of wine, the first things that would pop up in alphabetical order are these products. Fantastic for me! [laughs]

And here's another one that I just now thought of. So agave spirits continued to grow in popularity. This is an easily researched number. So I have a product, Cimarron, and in the grand scheme of tequilas in that price point, "C" is pretty close to the top of the alphabetical list, and, again, sold a lot of Cimarron Tequila, which is a good thing, because it's a good product. People really won on that alphabetized list. [Little laughs.]

So, yes.

And then maybe a progression since we talked last, when these liquor stores were, for the first time, they were expediting their move on to online sales. I mean, it really lit a fire under their butts to get it done—

[00:17:38]

Michelle Little: Right.

[00:17:38]

Kate White: —because it was very clear that the stores who were on that quick were being successful from it, and it became—I don't know if I said this in the last interview, but I certainly had already mentally predicted that that was the way of the future, and I think the online shopping for alcohol will not go away post-pandemic, if we are kind of on post-pandemic. I don't know where we are.

[00:18:11]

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Michelle Little: Right.

[00:18:11]

Michelle Little: So even when—because I’m imagining—I mean, I know at least in Birmingham there was a point in time when we could not go inside liquor stores, but then, you know, eventually we were allowed back in. I’m assuming that happened here. Was there a point in time when people could not go in and then were allowed back in?

[00:18:38]

Kate White: From the get-go—and maybe I do need to double check this—I know on the original list of businesses that were allowed to stay open—what did they call them?

[00:18:53]

Michelle Little: Essential?

[00:18:54]

Kate White: Essential. [laughs] I can’t say this and not laugh. Liquor stores were on the essential list.

[00:19:02]

Michelle Little: Right, right. Never closed.

[00:19:04]

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Kate White: Thank heavens at the bottom. [laughter] Liquor stores; second, hospitals.

[Little laughs.] So they did remain open. Oh, that's right. I don't remember if some of the local liquor stores took it upon themselves to do drive-up-only, but I recall that didn't last long, even if it was mandatory. I mean, people were rolling into bottle shops with their masks on, at least pretty soon after this initial "Hey, everybody's got to quarantine."

[00:19:38]

Michelle Little: Yeah. Yeah, it wasn't that ours ever shut down. We just couldn't go past—you could walk into the front door, and then you just had to point and say, "I want this, that, and the other." You weren't allowed to browse.

[00:19:52]

Kate White: Right, which would have been hard on some of these liquor stores to point 50 yards to the back of the store. "I'll take that beer." And, you know, maybe this is hard for me to accurately recall, because to a certain extent, I never stopped going into the liquor stores myself, and as everything was a touch of a blur in 2020, you know, were customers following me into the store? I think they were. So, again, I think if they shut down, it wasn't for very long, as far as going into the store.

[00:20:28]

Michelle Little: Okay. But you think people seemed to be taking to the online—

[00:20:35]

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Kate White: Absolutely.

[00:20:37]

Michelle Little: Okay.

[00:20:37]

Kate White: And even yesterday, when I was at Five Points Bottle Shop on Lumpkin, I vividly remember being surprised that the manager came out onto the sidewalk to talk to an employee and said, “Mrs. so-and-so, be on the lookout for her because even though they lifted the mask mandate, she’s still going to keep pulling up for curbside service.” And I’m ashamed that I was surprised to hear that, because of course people are—to a certain extent, even if they weren’t nervous about COVID in any shape or form, it’s developed a touch of convenience for people [Little laughs], especially older people who might live in Five Points and they don’t want to get out of their car. Why not, when a nice employee will come out and pack your case of wine in the trunk for you?

[00:21:36]

Michelle Little: Yeah! A case of wine’s heavy. [laughs]

[00:21:38]

Kate White: Turns out, yeah, yeah. Heaven forbid you’re getting the good stuff and the heavy champagne bottle and the heavy cabernet bottle. Really ups the ounces. [Little laughs.] For sure.

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[00:21:50]

Michelle Little: Yeah, we very much have gotten used to this, like, don't even worry about having to find a parking spot. [laughs]

[00:21:58]

Kate White: You know, I have been out on the streets tasting wine for months and months now, even with mask requirements by the CDC, and where we taste, a couple of stores its right by the drive-up delivery—excuse me—the pick-up line, and it's busy, I mean to the point where if a store had, you know, those little ropes that the car runs over and there's a bell to announce the car, it was so annoying, it was just constant. [Little laughs.] “Bing! Bing! Bing!” We've got to quit this. [Little laughs.] They took the ropes out and just had somebody there at all times, because someone will drive up. You don't need to be alerted, “Oh, by the way, there's a car out here waiting for their pick-up order.” There's just going to be a car.

[00:22:53]

Michelle Little: Wow!

[00:22:54]

Kate White: Yeah, you bet.

[00:23:00]

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Michelle Little: So has this changed your product line? I mean, the fact that people are maybe picking out different things online, I mean, does this eventually change what the company—their product lineup, like what they sell, what they’re going to provide? Is this really actually shifting?

[00:23:24]

Kate White: It has made them streamline what they sell, and the trades between distributors here in Georgia have certainly picked up. Companies have decided, “Well, we are doing really well with this product and we need to purge these other products, because at this point, we’re not wasting any money just sitting around in inventory in a warehouse.” So, yes, companies are on the move as to deciding what kind of portfolio they will effectively and profitably manage. Everybody’s looking for it. They’re trying to, you know, align themselves in the market where they want to be with those products. Chain grocery stores have been so successful during the pandemic for a multitude of reasons, but the most of which is people had to get groceries, they didn’t want to make a ton of stops, so grocery stores were some of the first places to be very successful with the pick-up wine order. So when, let’s say, Winebow—that’s who I’m working for—sees, man, chain sales are way up, they realize, “Okay, we want more chain wine brands.” So, yeah, they’re after them, so in trades with other distributors, “Hey, we have these products that we’re not doing real well, but maybe you can make something of them. Can we get that kind of mass-produced wine that Kroger is carrying? We want to sell that.” So they’re making moves in that direction, for instance.

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[00:25:21]

Michelle Little: Makes sense. And then what about just your routine? Do you feel like you are back to your weekly, you know, going out, checking in on people face-to-face? You know, when I first interviewed you, you were kind of relying more on email. At what point did that shift? Do you feel like you've fully shifted back?

[00:25:52]

Kate White: I'm going to try and start from the top here. In some ways, my routine is broken and I am a shattered human being. [laughter] And then in other ways, the routine had to rebuild itself in some capacity, and I do believe that if you're not—I am not selling wine to chains anymore. They revamped that. That's another question, another topic. But because I am still selling to privately owned businesses, email can only take you so far, because you're dependent on how good is this wine.

So another business that opened during the pandemic that I should mention is quite successful, The Lark. The Lark has a beautifully curated selection of wines that are—they cannot be called brands. They are family-owned businesses that produce an artful and drinkable product, and this isn't a brand. This is the opposite of a grocery store. Krista Slater, the owner of The Lark, doesn't want an email about Byrrhh Gruner Veltliner. She wants to taste it. So given a portfolio of fine wines, you have to go out and do it. So I had to change. And I think when everybody was very new to COVID and very, very cagey and we, you know, were thinking that it was more transferable and contact surface transfer of COVID was still more of a fear than now we know it wasn't as—I'm using the wrong words here. It wasn't as spreadable that way as we first thought.

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[00:27:53]

Michelle Little: We're not wiping down our mail anymore. [laughs]

[00:27:55]

Kate White: That's right. I am not bleaching my lettuce anymore out of fear that I will get COVID. Yeah, we moved back out and then definitely had to rebuild a routine, and then account to account, there were different routines. Some accounts, when we were tasting wine, were more careful than others. You had to acclimate to not only your own fears and standards of operation, but were forced into other people's operations as well. So maybe as far as answering the routine question, other people's routines affected ours. It was just clunky. There was no flow that we were once accustomed to. And if there were more parts in that question, I have forgotten them. [laughs]

[00:28:59]

Michelle Little: No, no. [laughter] I shouldn't have raised it as a double question to begin with. But what were some of those new routines that client—I mean, I know that you're developing your own routines and figuring out your own new way of moving about, but what were some things you came up against as far as clients' routines?

[00:29:22]

Kate White: My biggest hurdle with clients' routines is those who went straight back to pre-COVID tasting, and that we were in a small backroom of a liquor store with no

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ventilation at all, and we were a foot and a half—I mean, practically shoulder-to-shoulder and still tasting wine.

[00:29:39]

Michelle Little: Oh!

[00:29:39]

Kate White: So that personally, for me, and, of course, for those of you in the audience who don't know, it's hard to taste wine with a mask on. [laughter] So here we are, all maskless, and I want to taste wine *with* my customers. you know, sarcasm here. That's why I'm paid the big bucks [Little laughs], right, is that I've studied this and I kind of know what I'm talking about, so I want to guide them through the tasting. It's part of the sale, right? "This is what's great about this wine. This is why you should buy it." I can't not taste.

[00:30:14]

Michelle Little: Right.

[00:30:14]

Kate White: And it makes some people nervous, understandably, that why would I just let *you* taste the wine, but I'm not tasting it with you? So we've got to do this together, and here we are in this small box of a room when the pandemic is in full roar. So that was, again, my biggest hurdle.

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[00:30:32]

Michelle Little: Wow.

[00:30:32]

Kate White: I had much more ease with people who changed their tasting room. For instance, anybody who had an opportunity to open a window or taste in a larger place—and I had a couple of accounts where it was brilliant, you know, they'd get a nice cross-breeze and on a nice day, and I'd go over to one end of the bar with my mask on, pour a taste of wine, and then go back to my end of the bar and pour. Restaurants who already had a little outdoor seating and moved all of their tastings to purely outdoor tastings, no matter the weather, those—I liked that. Seabear, for instance, I mean, it could have been cold and pouring down rain, but I'm going to come by and taste you on this Heirloom Pineapple Amaro, and we're going to be potentially bundled up, but let's try this product because these are the things we need to do.

[00:31:30]

Michelle Little: Right.

[00:31:30]

Kate White: How else would you know what Heirloom Pineapple Amaro tastes like?
We must—the show must go on.

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[00:31:36]

Michelle Little: Exactly! Wow. So did you—I mean, in those backroom maskless circumstances [laughs], did you ever feel like you could say, “Hey, could we take this outside?” I mean, you’re in a sales position. Did you feel like you needed to do what the customer wanted to do in that moment? How did you—

[00:31:57]

Kate White: This is where I get to admit a little weakness. From somebody like myself that likes to think that I’m not going to put up with what you’re doing that’s wrong, and I know it’s wrong, you know, even I had the hesitation to be honest about being uncomfortable, and ultimately I did say something, but it was embarrassingly difficult, because what you’re saying to somebody is, “I don’t like how you’re operating,” and that could easily be offensive to someone. It makes you seem like maybe you don’t trust them, and a lot of great sales relationships are—“a lot.” All are built on a certain amount of trust. So you’re jeopardizing sales not just then, but potentially in the long run, because you might be offending someone by how you would rather operate or disagreeing with how they operate. Whew! [Little laughs.] And there were some accounts that I really recognized they were not going to change and withdrew tasting with them until things could be better, and by better I mean safer. “Let’s give them a little time to figure this out, and I’ll try again later.”

[00:33:29]

Michelle Little: Yeah.

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[00:33:29]

Kate White: And then maybe when I came back later, if they hadn't changed, I was a little more emboldened and acclimated to objecting to a certain tasting situation.

[00:33:39]

Michelle Little: Good. Yeah. So then that kind of dovetails into—I do want to ask about vaccination patterns and your experience, so you got vaccinated early on.

[00:33:58]

Kate White: I did. I got vaccinated scandalously early.

[00:34:03]

Michelle Little: Yeah. Can you kind of tell a little bit about— [laughs]

[00:34:08]

Kate White: I will.

[00:34:09]

Michelle Little: —how you got vaccinated?

[00:34:11]

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Kate White: I'll be fully transparent for the history books, and maybe some high school student can use me [Little laughs] as what, shamefully, can happen when people are scared in a pandemic and may take advantage of situations that they are in.

All right. So my mother is a pharmacist and lives here in Athens and practices pharmacy at a hospital very close. Let's get the embarrassing part out of the way. You know, vaccines were allocated to people over—was it sixty-five?

[00:34:59]

Michelle Little: Yeah, I think initially, yeah.

[00:34:59]

Kate White: Initially. And then people who were immunocompromised, and then there's the true news that people of certain socioeconomic backgrounds were not as likely or capable to be able to access getting a vaccine. So when my mother and I were having coffee outside during the pandemic and the vaccines had finally rolled out, Pfizer and Moderna were in circulation after a long wait, my mother asked me if she had an extra dose, if I would want it. And I certainly had an initial hesitance, recognizing that in the grand scheme of things, I am young and healthy, and other people are at more risk than I am. So she pressed me a little. I mean, it's a binary answer option. And I said, "Yes, but don't put me at the top of the list. I should not be a priority here."

And that's when she alluded to, "Well, if I call you, it's because we have given out of one vial all we can to our patients for the day, and otherwise they go in the trash." So that was something to think about.

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Also, I did not anticipate—and I was correct—that she would call me the next day, but as it turned out, not too long after that, I mean, maybe a month, I had come into my home at the end of a workday, and my cellphone rang and it was a fellow pharmacist of hers, who’s also a good friend of mine, and he asked, “Hey, I’ve got one dose left here at the end of the workday. We are fully vaccinated of our patients. Would you—can you be here before essentially it expires and we have to throw it in the trash? Would you like it?” And, you know, when they pitch it like that, my answer was, “Well, if you only have one dose, I have an immunocompromised roommate. I’d much rather her have it. She’s standing right in front of me, and I will bring her to the facility right now, and we’ll make sure that one dose doesn’t go to waste.”

So Tim did say—there’s a side story here—“Well, I can get two doses out of this.” And ultimately the side story is when the Moderna vaccine first came out, it was regulated to give a certain number of doses out of a vial, when, in reality, any pharmacist worth their salt knew that you could get more out of it. So they were just desperately trying not to waste a dose.

So this person says to me—I’ve already used his name, so I’ll use it again. Tim says, “Well, I can get two doses out of this.”

So my roommate and I hopped in the car, and before any forty-year-old and thirty-year-old should have been getting a first dose of vaccine, we had ours. We were so aware that we could be shamed, that even when we had our side effects of this, we couldn’t tell anyone, and we were *miserable*. We had fever, our hips hurt, you know, we were crampy and all the things, but if people asked, “Oh, why don’t you feel well?” you can’t say to someone else without risking an intense judgment, “I’m sick because this is the side

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effects of my first Moderna vaccine.” So we faked it. And the one situation where I did tell someone I, in fact, was shamed and learned my lesson there that I need to not tell anyone and kind of keep it on the down low. [Little laughs.] That might have been more of a story than you wanted.

[00:39:25]

Michelle Little: So how long did you hide it? Like, when did you decide, “Okay, I can tell people now that I’ve—”? [laughs]

[00:39:34]

Kate White: I think it wasn’t necessarily a timeline as much as it was groups of people who, at some political point in the calendar, would recognize that it was okay. Or maybe your question does deserve the answer you want, of, you know, about two months after we actually got the shot, maybe mid-March we felt okay alluding that we had been vaccinated, but not telling people, “Actually, we’ve already had our second dose at this point.” [Little laughs.] I mean, so we just didn’t—why make people mad or jealous who are already worried about things? We already have our own guilt. We just were ambiguous about when we were fully vaccinated.

[00:40:37]

Michelle Little: [laughs] So then did it—I mean, how did it change how you operated from day-to-day after that? Did you—

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[00:40:50]

Kate White: Fully emboldened.

[00:40:52]

Michelle Little: Yeah.

[00:40:53]

Kate White: And almost to the point, again, while we were trying to keep this under wraps, do people notice? Can they tell?

[00:41:06]

Michelle Little: [laughs] Do I seem different?

[00:41:08]

Kate White: At the risk of being embarrassing, it's like the first time you have sex, you know, and you go out in public. Can people tell that I'm not a virgin anymore? [Little laughs.] It was actually kind of like that. Are people going to know?

[00:41:26]

Michelle Little: [laughs] That's hilarious.

[00:41:26]

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Kate White: Right. I never once doubted “Am I going to keep wearing a mask?” Of course I’m going to keep wearing a mask. Am I going to blatantly share food with other people? No, of course not. I’m not going to be just flagrant in having been vaccinated. But deep down inside—who am I kidding? Not even deep down inside. Just under the surface, it made me feel so good to immediately shed the weight of worry. Going to taste wine with people was wonderful.

[00:42:15]

Michelle Little: Did you feel like you were back at that point? Like, did—

[00:42:21]

Kate White: I was back, but there was a business lag, right? [Little laughs.] So this is the gap of my early vaccination and when the masses were vaccinated. Yeah, I was ready to go, and other people were still, understandably, not ready to go.

[00:42:44]

Michelle Little: Right.

[00:42:46]

Kate White: I hope that answers your question.

[00:42:46]

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Michelle Little: It does. And that brings up another—do you remember when—because I think maybe it varied from state to state as far as when food and beverage workers were classified as eligible for the vaccine, and it wasn't early on.

[00:43:08]

Kate White: No.

[00:43:10]

Michelle Little: Yeah. So do you remember when your, like, clients and when bar workers were eligible here?

[00:43:17]

Kate White: And I enjoy your noting bar workers, because retail had been excellent. Retail was operating high function at that point, you know. Let's say I was fully vaccinated on Valentine's Day of 2021. [Little laughs.] Fully vaccinated and I'm ready to roll. Retail had it figured out, a well-oiled machine, and then it wasn't—here in Athens, I don't think restaurants, bars really got to—I don't want to say full steam again, but back to some sense of—I don't want to say normalcy either, maybe a month ago, so, at best, early April, at best.

[00:44:17]

Michelle Little: Yeah. Yeah, so that was a long in-between time for you.

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[00:44:23]

Kate White: Yes, it was. Yes, it was. But it allowed me to go to accounts and say, “Hey, this is on the horizon. Let’s start getting down to business now,” potentially when other sales reps or the accounts themselves were still being hesitant about planning for the future. Some, not all. Then again, I mentioned new businesses that never stopped anticipating the next step of their business. They were at it the whole time. So everyone experiences COVID differently.

[00:45:07]

Michelle Little: [laughs] Yes. So then you could—I imagine you could kind of see—like, you had this ray of light which—I mean, did that help you as a salesman?

[00:45:22]

Kate White: I think it did, and it’s not even—it was the idea of empathy. If I’m experiencing this, so many people will experience this. And can you harness this joy of being able to move forward? Because I’ve got it and I feel like I can move forward now in a way that I hadn’t quite anticipated, and it was almost as though I was banking on other people feeling the same way and the stars to align, that people would want to get out and start living lives again that were of some semblance to pre-COVID.

[00:46:09]

Michelle Little: Yeah. Because it was so dark before the vaccine, and I don’t know that any of us could imagine how we were going to react when and if we did get it, right?

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[00:46:20]

Kate White: I agree with you, and, you know, this is just a personal experience, but I had watched people who were dealing well enough being in food and beverage and being out of a job and things not going the way they had ever anticipated. People who were fine definitely hit a low point, you know. I can point to a handful of people that were suddenly—in February, the weather was bad. People couldn't eat outside. Not a lot of people were vaccinated yet. They were down. They were depressed and couldn't quite see the light, but I could. [laughter] No, no, no. Let's start singing some Beatles tunes about [Little laughs] it's going to be better here, good day, sunshine, it's around the corner. I feel it.

[00:47:13]

Michelle Little: Okay. Now, you mentioned something a minute ago about chains, that you were not—is that, like, a separate thing that has happened that—okay.

[00:47:23]

Kate White: Separate but totally related.

[00:47:23]

Michelle Little: Okay.

[00:47:27]

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Kate White: All right. So, again, a lot of companies and certainly Winebow recognized that their chains teams—chains essentially means a grocery chain or a chain of stores as opposed to a private retailer or restaurant—were doing exceptionally well, and the Winebow chains sales team was on commission, so the commissions that Winebow had to pay out were suddenly much greater. Meanwhile, they're losing a lot of money from the broad market sales reps because our restaurant sales were way down, if not out. So they realigned to have a financially advantageous situation for themselves, and they took the chains team and put them on salary, which was not what they were making on commissions, so it was a pay cut for them, and then took chains accounts from largely broad market sales reps such as myself and gave them to chains.

So my three Publix here in Athens, I was making a significant—they were floating my paycheck because I was still making commission on these grocery stores that were selling an increased amount of wine. So Winebow could save themselves money by taking the commission I was making away from me, put that properly onto the chains team that was being paid a meager salary. This is a situation of transferring the cash flow of the company that is not isolated. I think any company—and in a way, are they even at a fault? Of course, they're trying to save their hides, and a lot of that movement of who's getting paid what based on where we are making our profit, I mean, at least I still have a job. Again, where do you find that line of "Oh, this stinks. I'm being cheated out of this money that I was honestly making, but at least I still have a job"? [Little laughs.] Yeah. And I'll be interested to know where I stand on this two years from now, because certainly these changes that they made, they're not necessarily going to reverse them. "Hey, Kate, take these Publix back. Make an extra \$5,000 a year because you have these

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Publix now.” They’re not going to do that. So there are permanent changes from COVID that have long-term repercussions.

[00:50:30]

Michelle Little: Right. Yeah, I think that’s one thing we’re realizing with these interviews, or at least I’m realizing, is we can—even a year out from our initial interview, this still isn’t going to tell the complete story, you know. There’s going to be—I mean, in another year or two, then maybe we’ll know more about the lasting impact of all this.

[00:50:55]

Kate White: You bet.

[00:50:56]

Michelle Little: But that does kind of dovetail into what I’ve been—and I’ve wrestled with whether to ask people this, and you’ve hit on a lot of it, but I’ve wanted to know what people think the lasting impact of the pandemic is going to be for them personally and professionally. Like, are there things that you have changed in the way you operate that you think “I’m going to do this from here on out”? Like, even after the pandemic.

[00:51:25]

Kate White: Personally, I will be more appreciative of relationships that I have, whether because I enjoyed keeping them through the pandemic and that they floated me from a

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mental health standpoint, and then also appreciative because the ones that I didn't have, I have missed.

And then I can also say that about the professional aspect of it. I have a hard time separating personal and professional. One of the reasons I never moved away from Athens in the first place to have a sales job is that I use my personal relationships with these people I've worked with in the past to have a profession, a successful one. So, I mean, what I'm taking with me and what's changed is I am a more appreciative person, specifically of relationships, even the ones I don't particularly enjoy all the time, even the ones that slightly antagonize me and I have struggled with, I even appreciate that. Buyers who are just a little ornery [Little laughs.], you know what? I appreciate that orneriness a little more now. It's a story to tell. It's something that makes life interesting, even when it just frustrates you.

[00:53:02]

Michelle Little: Yeah. [laughs] A little spice there.

[00:53:05]

Kate White: Yeah, that's right. That's the cayenne pepper of life.

[00:53:09]

Michelle Little: [laughs] All right. Well, is there anything that we did not touch on that you've been thinking about through this year or that you want people to know about what you went through this year or are still going through? [laughs]

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[00:53:25]

Kate White: I feel like I cheated the system. I really feel in the grand scheme of what people have suffered through COVID and just being aware of what's around me locally and globally, I feel like I cheated the system and that I'm not—outside of my routine being shattered, I know that I've come out of this on the other side unscathed compared to many people. I kind of get a little lump at the back of my—the top of my throat when I say it. I am just fully aware that I didn't suffer that much.

[00:54:27]

Michelle Little: All right. Well, thank you for sharing that.

[00:54:30]

Kate White: Thank you. I feel like I discovered some things about myself that I hadn't really known, courtesy of your questions.

[00:54:41]

Michelle Little: All right. Well, that's where we'll end today.

[End of interview]