

Interview with
KOLE RICHINS

December 7, 2020

**THE PANDEMIC YEARS: COVID-19
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

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INDEX

accounting	7
economy	7
isolation	6
mask	6, 8
online [classes]	5, 7
pandemic	4, 5, 7, 9
social distancing	6, 8
vaccine	9
work	5, 6, 7

KOLE RICHINS

Kole Richins was interviewed by Haley Stromberg on December 7, 2020 on the fourth floor of the Grayhawk Apartments complex, in Washington, Washington County, Utah. He related his experience with living during the rise of the COVID-19 global pandemic.

HS: Hi Kole. If you could please state your full name.

KR: Kole Richins.

HS: Perfect. And how old are you?

KR: Twenty-four.

HS: Where do you live?

KR: St. George, Utah.

HS: And where did you grow up?

KR: St. George, Utah.

HS: What is your family like?

KR: We have a, I have a small family. I have just me and my wife. Who's, [laughter] and you're my wife. [Laughter.]

HS: Okay. Well, what about your birth family?

KR: Oh. Another small family. [Laughter.] It's my mom, my dad, I have an older sister, and myself. I don't know. [Laughter.] What more do you want?

HS: Do you feel like there is anything in your childhood that has shaped you to who you are today?

KR: I think for me, growing up and participating in sports has helped shape who I am today. As well as, I guess, my family didn't have a whole lot of money growing up. We lived with my grandpa to save money my whole life, and I would say that has shaped who I am as well.

HS: Alright. — Okay, what would you say is the most important thing about you that people don't understand?

KR: About me? [Laughter.] That people don't understand— Can we come back to that one? [Laughter.]

HS: Yes. Alright. So, this project is an oral history that is documenting our experiences with COVID-19 and how it's affected us personally. So, I'm going to ask you a few questions that is according to your personal life and your personal experiences. Okay?

KR: Okay.

HS: My first question is, and this is a broad question, so feel free to answer in as much depth as you like, or you, we can go from each thing that you said. Okay?

So in general, how do you feel like the virus and the pandemic has affected you?

KR: I don't think the virus has affected me. Just kidding. [Laughter.] No, the, I would say the biggest thing that it's affected is, I think it's been just different, um, everyday life stuff. My work environment hasn't changed a whole lot. Recently, our work decided to, we'd have the option to work from home, but other than that, it's probably actually brought more clients into my work. And, and so my company that I work for has had a really good year, actually, probably because [clears throat] of the pandemic.

I worked for a sales tax firm. And because of the pandemic, a lot of the states that collect sales tax have been running out of money more quickly because technically people have been, you know, selling less. So they've been collecting less revenue at the state level. However, each state has its own threshold for the amount of sales that you make and when you need to start reporting and remitting the sales tax and collecting it. And so, due to the pandemic and due to the low revenues of the states, a lot of the states have decided to lower those thresholds, which means a lot more businesses are now subject to pay self-sales tax on a monthly, quarterly, and annual basis. So it's actually brought a lot of business in and it's kept the company I work for really bus— really busy.

Other than that, I would say the biggest difference has been with school for me. Just, I take pretty much all my classes online. And it's actually been a blessing for me because I've been able to multitask and work and do school kind of at the same time, so—.

HS: Alright. So, you said that you work from home, and is that something that you have enjoyed or is there something that you would prefer?

KR: I liked the option to work from home, but I don't necessarily like working from home. I think if I had the choice, I would work from the office most of the time and I would work remotely or from home some of the time, just because I kind of like to have that space that's just for working, so that I can leave it. Whereas when I work from home, that space is our kitchen table. And so, I do everything there, it feels like, but yeah.

HS: How has it felt doing everything from inside and having to isolate yourself from public affairs?

KR: I feel like normally, I kind of liked going to, I wouldn't say large events, but I liked going to, like, small to medium sized events. I just enjoy being around small groups. What was the question? [Laughter.]

HS: How do you feel affected by being isolated from public affairs and having to be inside the majority of the time?

KR: Um— [laughter] It feels normal. [Harder laughter] No, no, sorry. That's an inside joke. Sure. No, it uh— Haley's laughing. [Laughter comes to an end.] I think that it has

changed my perspective on being outdoors and being able to go do certain activities. I think I've, it's something that you take for granted, like, that you never thought you would take for granted, but now that isolation and whatever has happened, it kind of takes a toll on you sometimes.

HS: Do you think that there are certain things you do that help ease the isolation?

KR: [Sneezes.]

HS: Bless you.

Like, let me rephrase. What keeps you busy during this time?

KR: [Laughter.] My wife.

HS: Okay. Now, will you explain?

KR: You know, she makes me do the dishes and take the trash out, she keeps me busy. [Laughter comes to an end.] What's kept me busy during quarantining and COVID? I don't know, I just, my life hasn't changed a whole lot. I still go to work every day. For the majority of, since COVID has happened in the majority of the time, I've spent going into work I didn't have to wear a mask. Yeah, essentially, I've, I've pretty much been able to go about my fairly regular daily routines, with a few minor adjustments, such as wearing the mask at the gym or, wearing a mask when we go out to eat. So yeah.

HS: You say a lot about wearing masks. What are your personal feelings of wearing a mask and its effectiveness?

KR: I mean, I think if, if you're sick, you should wear a mask, whether that's a coronavirus, or a cold or the flu, or just a cough. I think it would be nice to have that being more of a social norm. Like, "Hey, I'm kind of sick, maybe I'll social distance a little bit more and maybe I'll wear a mask." However, I feel like for the majority of people who aren't sick, who don't have any illnesses, I think forcing people to wear a mask, it's probably harming them more than— than not wearing a mask.

HS: Would you mind explaining why?

KR: I just think that it's a little bit, I don't know, kind of depressing. Like walking around and everybody's wearing a mask and it's just kinda, I don't know, don't get to see people smile anymore.

HS: When the virus first hit, explain what your life was like. What's the first thing you remember?

KR: I remember, 'cause we were, we were in school and then we had spring break, and Haley and I went up North to a wedding, and then the next day everything kind of shut down. And I remember, I don't remember which came first, but we, I remember we went to— like, a restaurant and nobody was there. And they didn't have any mask mandates or anything, but I remember us talking about, like, the lockdown and stuff. And I remember

St. George being, like, really quiet, like, there were no cars on the roads. And I remember obviously, like, school changing and goin' from, like, being in class and involved to being online and over just Zoom.

HS: How did you feel about going virtual and classes being over Zoom rather than in-person?

KR: I think originally, I was a little bit bummed. I had one of my favorite teachers teaching his last class of his teaching career, because he was retiring. So, I was excited to take his class. It was business tax class and halfway through it, we, you know, we got kicked onto online and it just wasn't quite the same. So, it was a little bit unfortunate. However, I will say that overall, it's been a good experience. I think that Dixie State [University], specifically, has done a really good job with the circumstances.

HS: Is there anything that Dixie State has done that you, that personally stick out to you with the mandate?

KR: I don't know. I just, I think just the way they've made their classes available, through Zoom or being able to go attend in person. I think having that option to that's been really neat and nice to have.

HS: Okay. What are your thoughts about the economy and how it's been affected by the virus?

KR: I think the economy— slowed down really quick and really fast and really abruptly. And I think the economy has rebounded just as quick. However, I think it's rebounded in a different way. I think we've lost a lot of businesses, which has been unfortunate, especially like brick and mortar stores and local businesses. But I also think that there's been a lot of new and creative businesses that have started, because of the pandemic. so—

HS: Could you provide some examples?

KR: Um— [soft laughter] no.

HS: Okay.

What is your field of study?

KR: Accounting.

HS: Do you see— Let me rephrase. Is there any, are there any ways that COVID-19 has affected your field of study in the long run?

KR: I will say this, I think that as far as accounting firms and public accounting, although it was already available for, to be virtual and to be completely remote, I think that because of COVID-19, it's opened a lot more doors for accounting firms to be completely remote, meaning that they can essentially work with anybody from anywhere at any time, just through their computer and through the web versus actually having an office and being more localized. That's it. [Laughter.]

HS: Okay. What are some of the things that COVID has brought that you wish weren't in conduct today? If there's any.

KR: In conduct, can you explain that?

HS: Sure. Like that have been embedded into the system, like the mask conduct, for example, or social distancing.

KR: I mean, if I could go back, I'd probably just say, like, all of it. I, I think life was, I mean different before COVID-19, as in wearing a mask or social distancing, like stuff that I never really cared or thought about before, unless somebody was actually sneezing on me or breathing down my back. So I mean, like, honestly, like, all of it. I don't really care for it.

HS: Do you think that there's anything that has been beneficial because of COVID? That has made, been made possible because of the COVID?

KR: Made possible? — I guess just the, our raised awareness of health and local health standards. That's it.

HS: What has gotten you through the hard times that COVID has brought? So, for example, quarantine, when everything was first shut down.

KR: [Laughter.] Personally, I don't really feel like I was affected terribly. Like I said, my daily life, my daily routine was affected marginally. However, it was tough, I guess, seeing my wife go through it because she sort of lost her job. She was a substitute teacher at the time schools shut down, they no longer needed substitute teachers. And I think it was a really hard time for her for those first couple of weeks, as well as she was busy with her own life in school. And it was just kind of a stressful time for her. So I think that for me, it was like a goal of mine was to help her feel, like, comforted and help her feel like she was valued and worth, like, every penny and every ounce that she is worth. I think those were just, like, maybe some of the thoughts that helped get me through it, was trying to help my wife get through it and those that were around me that were directly affected. Just trying to be a light in their life to help them get through it.

HS: So, there has been a lot of things that have been altered because of COVID-19 that would be a pretty big celebration in life without the virus, for example, graduations, weddings, ceremonies like those. Do you personally have anything that was affected by COVID-19 that would have changed the event or the process because of the virus?

KR: [Coughs] Like a personal event? Like that was an event for me or like any event that I was going to go to?

HS: Any event that you experienced personally, that has a pretty big— identification of your life?

KR: I wouldn't say I have personally had anything. Family and friends definitely have. I mean, I know a lot of people who got married and basically couldn't have a wedding, or a party, or whatever you want to call it, to celebrate it. Right, I mean, it's unfortunate. So—

HS: So, you got married in 2020, January of 2020, right?

KR: Yes.

HS: And you've been living with your wife, where have you guys been living?

KR: In St. George.

HS: Was there any complications that COVID has brought because— in regards to moving?

KR: I, I mean the only difference for Haley and I was, we really didn't get to view our apartment before we moved into it. Other than that, it was pretty much the same.

HS: What do you feel like society's role is, in regards to the virus?

KR: I think society's role, like what do I think it is? Or what do I think it should be?

HS: What it should be.

KR: I think society as a whole should be aware that it's out there, and they should be respectful of other people's beliefs or opinions. And I think that they should try to accommodate towards those opinions, and if their opinions are different and they don't want to accommodate towards those opinions, they should ask others to respectfully, you know, decline or whatever, for whatever the situation might be.

HS: Have you seen any examples where someone wasn't respectful in accommodating to others' needs?

KR: I don't think I've seen anybody, like, out of disrespect not accommodate to other people's needs, so—.

HS: Okay. And for the last minute here or so, if you wouldn't mind just explaining what gives you hope for the future with this pandemic. Do you think that there will be an end to the hardships that COVID has brought?

KR: I think there will be an end. Obviously, they've talked about having a vaccine come out, so I think that's played a big role and could potentially play a big role. However, I think COVID is probably something that the world as a whole will deal with for years to come. I don't think that we will be locked down or shut down, kind of like it has been this last year, but I don't think it's going to be going anywhere, if that makes sense.

HS: Okay. Well thank you so much for taking the time to answer all my questions. Do you feel like you got to say everything you wanted to about your experience with the pandemic?

KR: Yes.

HS: Perfect. Alright, thanks again. And we will end there.

[END OF RECORDING. END OF INTERVIEW.]