



1    Lawson McGrain: Alright. Uh This interview is part of the Columbia College Chicago archives  
2    as part of the Honors Oral History Capturing Quarantine project under the instruction of Dr.  
3    Erin McCarthy. I am Lawson McGrain, the interviewer, and I am joined by —

4

5    Alex Schmelter: Uh my name is Alex Schmelter.

6

7    Lawson McGrain: I am speaking from Lenexa, Kansas, in my home. And where are you  
8    speaking from Alex?

9

10   Alex Schmelter: Lake Villa Illinois

11

12   Lawson McGrain: Great.

13

14   Lawson McGrain: So, Alex, what was the neighborhood you grew up in like?

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16   Alex Schmelter: Um, well, I did grow up in Lake Villa actually. Um, it's pretty quiet, for the  
17   most part. I think it has expanded a little bit more since we've been here. It's a, it's a pretty—  
18   yeah, just normal middle population, I guess, area. Again, very quiet, not a lot to do. The only—  
19   like, the most exciting thing by us is a mall and there's a Six Flags, and that's basically where  
20   most of the business side of things comes in. Otherwise, it's a, it's kind of an empty area, to be  
21   honest.

22

23   Lawson McGrain: What's the first book that you remember having a profound impact on you?

24

25   Alex Schmelter: Oh, the first book, that's an interesting one. Um, well I, I do remember I was a  
26   very slow reader in first and second grade or something like that. Like, I really, really struggled

27 with it. Probably just I didn't have an interest in it. And then, I don't know if my sister gave it to  
28 me, or I just asked to borrow it, I started reading the first Harry Potter book because I'd seen the  
29 movie, and liked it, and literally something just clicked with that and it was like—and now I'm  
30 an English major. So it was kind of like a domino effect of getting really passionate about  
31 reading and things like that. Yeah, that series was like the first, first one.

32  
33 Lawson McGrain: So what generated your interest in becoming a filmmaker?  
34

35 Alex Schmelter: Um, that part of things, that's kind of changed a little bit since I've switched  
36 majors, but I still definitely have an interest in filmmaking. Um—again, there's a number of  
37 things like—same with literature—it's not like it was just Harry Potter that got me into reading,  
38 but it was like, that's the one I can pinpoint. And same with filmmaking, there's not really one  
39 thing, but the main one, I would say was Star Wars. I was—I adored those movies growing up,  
40 and—I remembered—I had like a box set of the DVDs for the original trilogy—the first three—  
41 and there was like a making-of-documentary, and I thought seeing all the puppets and stuff that  
42 went into it, I thought that was the most fascinating thing in the world. And  
43 around when I finished high school, I was, you know everybody goes through that figuring out  
44 what they want to do, and I thought about that, and was like, that might be for me.

45  
46 Lawson McGrain: So describe a little more the impact that George Lucas had on your creative  
47 life and your creative endeavors.  
48

49 Alex Schmelter: I mean, I think what I found. So interesting with the original Star Wars movies  
50 in particular was like, and George Lucas, was he was very much like an underdog when it came  
51 to it. Like those movies were very much like set out, the first one was set up to fail in so many  
52 ways, and it was really inspiring seeing him make this whole other universe—that now everybody  
53 knows—with comparatively a very small budget at the time and very they didn't have like  
54 computer generated stuff. So like it was all done by hand or with like, you know, tricks with the  
55 camera, and things like that. So I think it was that impact of someone with, you know, so much  
56 going against him sort of standing above that, and making one of the biggest media franchises of  
57 all time now—yeah.

58

59 Lawson McGrain: So moving forward to your high school career what extracurriculars were you  
60 involved in? What did you like to do?

61

62 Alex Schmelter: Um, I did a lot in high school. It mainly started with the first thing I did was  
63 marching band. Because I did, I did band in elementary and middle school. So it was sort of just  
64 continuing that, and so I did that all four years and did some leadership stuff with that like being  
65 a section leader. There was—I think I did National Honor Society for a little bit there as well. I'm  
66 trying to remember the only other big thing I remember was doing theatre. Mainly I'd say the last  
67 like two and a half years of high school. It took me a little while to get into it, but once I did, I  
68 was pretty much doing every show there.

69

70 Lawson McGrain: What opportunities stemmed from doing shows—

71

72 Alex Schmelter: Um, oh I'm sorry, What do you mean by opportunities.

73

74 Lawson McGrain: Well, um, You know you've spoken about like, being able to workshop with a  
75 Broadway actor—

76

77 Alex Schmelter: Oh yeah (laughs) okay I got, I got you. Um, so yeah, one of the—going off of  
78 that—one of the really exciting things was my senior year, the last show I did there was *Into the*  
79 *Woods* and I was cast as one of the princes in it and we had the opportunity—like normally there  
80 was a festival, the group went to every year and we weren't able to go that year—so to make up  
81 for it, they got one of the Broadway actors who played my part to come and workshop with all of  
82 us and like literally workshop the scenes I was doing with me, which was crazy, and like, really  
83 just amazing. Like a once in a lifetime thing which I'll always sort of remember. And then other  
84 opportunities—I can't think of a lot of like specific things like that, but I think it was like, I made  
85 most of my high school friends in theater, or they were already people I was friends with and that  
86 friendship just became stronger. So it was just a bigger, the biggest sense of community I think I  
87 felt in high school.

88

89     Lawson McGrain: What would you say your most cherished memory from high school is?

90

91     Alex Schmelter: Oh, that's another hard one. There's a lot. But I, I would probably say doing that  
92     *Into the Woods* show because that was very—like doing musicals, and stuff like that was not in  
93     my itinerary for a long time. And then the first one I did was actually my junior year and not my  
94     senior, but it was going out on a limb and just auditioning and then being surprised [to] actually  
95     get a part, and then my senior year, getting a fairly substantial part and then just sort of putting  
96     myself out there because I'm usually not that extroverted. So it was, yeah, it was a very cool  
97     experience. I would say that was probably one of the most memorable moments.

98

99     Lawson McGrain: So why did you choose Columbia for college?

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101     Alex Schmelter: Um, Columbia was one of several picks. To be honest, a lot of it came down  
102     to—um—I wanted to go for film initially and that's where I was applying for, for everything, and  
103     many of the schools—I applied a lot in California because that's sort of the big hub, excuse me,  
104     for movie-making stuff obviously, but a lot of them required fairly extensive portfolios to begin  
105     with. And I didn't have the time or resources, really, to invest in that to begin with. Like, the  
106     most I had done was making a short film specifically for my portfolio—just to have a portfolio at  
107     all because it's really expensive if you don't have, like a cam—a good camera and things like  
108     that. So, but Columbia was very much more of, I guess, an open place for that kind of thing.  
109     They were very much more like, we understand you might not have a ton of experience in these  
110     places, so it felt a lot more welcoming a little bit less—I'm trying to think of the word—I guess  
111     exclusive because again, a lot of those California schools felt very like, you had to have a lot of  
112     money and a lot of experience already going in and Columbia was much more like, we want to  
113     support you, you know. And also, a lot of good scholarships went a long way in the decision.  
114     Yeah.

115

116     Lawson McGrain: What were your plans or what plans did you have post-graduation before  
117     starting at Columbia, I guess, for your future?

118

119     Alex Schmelter: It was mainly just just going to college. My family's very much—you know,

120 we've been fortunate enough to be able to—all my immediate family is college educated, so it  
121 was—and it wasn't something that was pushed on me. It was my decision as well. But it was  
122 always going to college, hopefully still, the plan is going to graduate school. Being well educated  
123 before—and having a good college experience too. I think that it's something that's valued pretty  
124 well, and there's nothing wrong with not doing that. It's just that was sort of always my plan  
125 going forward.

126

127 Lawson McGrain: What were your initial feelings. Once you got to Columbia, your first year.  
128 You know, those—that first semester. How did it start to live up to your expectations?

129

130 Alex Schmelter: Um, it was definitely, you know, stereotypical. It was scary to begin with  
131 because I knew no one at the school or maybe I knew like one person who I wasn't really like  
132 close friends with in high school or anything, so—but it was It was overwhelming at first  
133 because again, when you go into stuff like film—again, I was very inexperienced, and you've  
134 got—no matter where you go, there's a very wide range of experience. So I was dealing with a  
135 lot of very—snobby, to be frank, people. People who were very—knew exactly what they  
136 wanted to do in film and had—the schooling was just like a formality for them and as for me, it  
137 was more like, I don't know exactly what I want to do, so I need to take the time to figure this  
138 out. That's what the school is about: learning how to do it. So it was overwhelming, and then,  
139 getting that like—being on a real set, things like that was, again, it was overwhelming to begin  
140 with. And then, I sort of made my way through that, got used to the experience, realized I wasn't  
141 that fond of filmmaking actually, I was more interested in the history of film. So it was a good  
142 learning experience. I'm glad I realized kind of earlier that maybe it was more the historical  
143 aspect or the more like the writing side of film that I was interested in, and less-so being on set  
144 and doing that sort of stuff. So yeah, it was, I guess, eye-opening

145

146 Lawson McGrain: Can you elaborate a little more on how that inspired the switch in majors to  
147 literature?

148

149 Alex Schmelter: Sure. Um, I mean, I've always had that passion for literature as well. But I also  
150 think I've always had sort of a drive to teach as well. I think the big change with film, again, was

151 like going on those sets and dealing with a lot of very, very narcissistic people—and not that  
152 everybody was like that, to be sure—but you just get that one or two bad experiences and there's  
153 always going to be people like that, no matter what you do, but realizing I was going to have  
154 trouble dealing with that, and realizing being on the sets, I just wasn't enjoying myself very  
155 much. And then, [the] next two semesters. I was like, well, I really like writing scripts, so maybe  
156 that'll be more my focus, and so, I spent like the next two [semesters] dabbling with that, which I  
157 did enjoy a lot more, but then I think I was sort of starting to realize I'm more interested—I think  
158 I wanted to do something where I felt more secure in my job. You know, if you're a screenwriter,  
159 that's also a very difficult job to be consistent with it—to make consistent income with. So that  
160 was—and I wanted something more steady, and English was—like I always enjoyed my English  
161 classes in high school and things like that, so I think I leaned more towards—maybe that's more  
162 what I want to do, and now that I've started investing more into it, I think I'm a little more clear,  
163 and that's where I'm hoping to be.

164

165 Lawson McGrain: How did going to college change your relationship with your parents?

166

167 Alex Schmelter: Um, it taught me to be a lot more independent. I'll say that.

168 Which, you know, every kid goes through that, but that was really—I've always had a fairly  
169 close relationship with my parents, so it was—it went from—like the longest I would go without  
170 seeing my parents was maybe two weeks. I think that's probably the most I ever did—to—I still  
171 live close by them, but I was spending more and more time there [on campus]. It was getting  
172 used to being on my own, independent, which was, you know, frightening at first, but then I  
173 realized, you know, it's okay. So like I still maintained a pretty close relationship with them.  
174 We're still very, you know, we communicate very openly, but it taught me that living on my own  
175 is a good thing too.

176

177 Lawson McGrain: Where were you when you first heard about COVID-19?

178

179 Alex Schmelter: You know, um, I don't know if I remember the exact moment because I think a  
180 lot of us had—it was one of those things. It was like a very small story in the news for about,  
181 like, it might have been as early as January because that's when people were actually talking

182 about it a little bit more. But again, it was still very—it felt like not a big deal and didn't feel like  
183 it was going to explode the way it did. And so, I probably just read it in the news in my  
184 apartment or something like that, um, because then it gradually started to be—like people were  
185 talking about in my classes a little bit more and then by, like, late February or March or so, that's  
186 when it hit like, oh, this is a big deal. This is going to affect the school, and things like that.

187

188 Lawson McGrain: What specifically made you realize the severity of it at that time?

189

190 Alex Schmelter: I think it was finding out all the other schools were closing because Columbia  
191 actually felt, in our area at least, kind of a little late to the game with that one. One of my  
192 friends—one of my best friends, he goes to Loyola, and they had a group from Italy come back,  
193 which, that was like the main hotspot to begin with, so that was frightening. And then, the cases  
194 were spreading a lot around there. So—or at least like—they were being more cautious about it.  
195 So they were shutting down—or at least like—they were talking about it much earlier. And then  
196 it was sort of like a domino effect of school after school around us. Like, it became clear it  
197 was—it's just a matter of time till it happens to Columbia, honestly.

198

199 Lawson McGrain: So what were your thoughts when you first heard about the integration of  
200 online learning: Columbia's response?

201

202 Alex Schmelter: Um, I was definitely nervous, I guess. I thought it would be fine, but I also was  
203 like, I don't know if all my teachers are going to adapt to this super well because every semester,  
204 I always have a mix of people who are like really tech-savvy teachers who already—like their  
205 classes are very easy to translate to an online space. But then, you had some where you weren't  
206 sure, and they didn't really have a plan. That's kind of what made me nervous—when we were  
207 talking about shutting down, and like in our classes, it was literally just asking, like, “What are  
208 your plans if this happens?” because it was at that point, it was just an inevitability. And some of  
209 them were, you know, very clear. [They] had an outline and then some were like, we'll figure it  
210 out, and didn't really lay out any sort of plan, which was concerning, but I was pleasantly  
211 surprised that when we made the move that, like, for the most part they adapted pretty well and a  
212 lot of the work hasn't been too different really, for me at least. But, I know a lot of my friends



213 who do acting or still do filmmaking and they're on set a lot of the time normally, that severely  
214 changed what their coursework was like.

215

216

217 Lawson McGrain: So, speaking on that change. How, I mean, are you noticing—What changes  
218 are you noticing in the way your major. Like the way work handles within your major in online  
219 learning?

220

221 Alex Schmelter: I mean, I'm in sort of [a] good place being an English major, where a lot of it  
222 was already just writing on my own. So a lot of that has just kind of—really the only difference  
223 is they'll post their lecture or—my teachers will post their lectures instead, or they'll just have the  
224 Zoom meeting be the equivalent, and to me, it's not really that different than being in a  
225 classroom, it's different, but it's not like earth shattering or anything, and a lot—it's only  
226 changed, like most of the assignments are just posted online, and we don't talk about it in class.  
227 So, not really, not much. Again, it's, it's mostly writing, so not too drastic of a change.

228

229 Lawson McGrain: Going back to kind of the earlier announcements about the state of the  
230 pandemic in our school. What was your experience having to vacate Student Housing and return  
231 home?

232

233 Alex Schmelter: Um, that was—initially, it wasn't too rough because I only live like an hour or  
234 so from Chicago, so it was very easy, like, I'd already sort of had a plan in my head of what—  
235 and my parents knew so they were kind of just like, just come home as soon as they say, or  
236 whatever. So pretty much, once I got the email, I went home, pretty much that day because there  
237 was no reason to stay. Everybody else was either gone or on lockdown, so it's not like I had  
238 anybody to even visit or anything, so it wasn't too bad. At first, I just brought you know what I  
239 could fit in a backpack—a couple of backpacks—and went home. And then, it got a little  
240 annoying because I didn't have a lot of my things. Not a lot of essential things, like, I just  
241 wanted, like, my books or stuff like that, and I couldn't get that for a while because the dorms  
242 were completely on lockdown. So, it took a good month or so, I want to say, to get my stuff,  
243 which again, wasn't obviously not like life or death things. More of an annoyance, really. I know

244 a lot of other people had much worse circumstances where they lived, you know, much further  
245 away, or they were international students, and that must have been awful. I can't imagine.

246

247 Lawson McGrain: So describe what your daily life at home is like for you now.

248

249 Alex Schmelter: It's very repetitive, I'll say that. It's a lot of just waking up, going to class, trying  
250 and do as much homework as I can—pretty much, like, I feel bad I don't have more to say about  
251 it, but to be honest, I feel like we're all kind of in that boat: just very repetitive, and every once in  
252 a while I'll go to the grocery store to get stuff for my family, and things like that. The day to day  
253 has been kind of boring. Honestly, the only fun things are trying to catch up with movies I  
254 haven't seen, or shows, or something like that. That's about as interesting as it gets, though.

255

256 Lawson McGrain: When you take trips out to like the grocery store or to any other businesses  
257 that you depend on, what precautions do you take to reduce the effect of the virus to you or  
258 others?

259

260 Alex Schmelter: I wear a glove—a pair of gloves and a mask every time I go. I'd rather just  
261 (unintelligible) you know, who knows how much it's helping, I know it is helping, but I try to  
262 keep as safe as I can. I try not to go out if I don't have to. I mainly just go If we're missing  
263 something important, otherwise, I try and keep it to a minimum because I'd rather not. bring  
264 something home with my parent —like, I'd rather not increase the risk there already is. So, I try  
265 to just keep it to a minimum, keep my face and my hands covered, and everything. That sort of  
266 thing.

267

268 Lawson McGrain: Um, who do you talk to about, you know, stress or concerns about the  
269 pandemic or otherwise in quarantine?

270

271 Alex Schmelter: A lot is with my parents. I kind of have to interact with them in some way,  
272 pretty much every day, so I'll talk with them about it, every once in a while. And then, a lot of it,  
273 I try to Skype as much as I can with my friends because that's the closest I can do to just going  
274 out with them, like I normally would. So, mainly I talk with them. They're a little bit more in the

275 same boat as me. So, they've got sort of the same concerns. They sort of understand where I'm  
276 coming from. Yeah, that's pretty much it.

277

278 Lawson McGrain: So, how would you say that, kind of, forced interaction with your parents has  
279 changed a relationship?

280

281 Alex Schmelter: It's definitely made it (laughs) there's some more conflict, sometimes. There's  
282 definitely a lot more, like, arguments and things like that, but not in necessarily a bad way. Like,  
283 I don't want to argue, but, it's—it's not like unhealthy amounts or anything like that—yeah, it's  
284 just a lot of—trying to think um—it's just weird mainly, like, it's weird being back in that high  
285 school setting, being in the same house and doing work in the same place because my mom is  
286 working from home during this. So, trying to coordinate, like, I have to be on class now, so I  
287 need quiet or she's on a call, so we need to be quiet. Coordinating that is a little bit weird, but it  
288 hasn't changed too much.

289

290 Lawson McGrain: What, what other similarities. Do you see In your home life to what it was like  
291 during high school?

292

293 Alex Schmelter: It's basically the same, although I'd actually say, it's more—because my last two  
294 years of high school, I was doing the theater and band stuff, so I was pretty much gone all the  
295 time. Usually Sunday would pretty much be the only time I was home consistently. Otherwise, I  
296 was, oftentimes, at school until ten o'clock, or so, on some of the longer days but—so honestly,  
297 now it's weirder because I'm pretty much home twenty-four seven unless I'm doing like a grocery  
298 run or something like that. So, it's similar because I'm, you know, sleeping in the same house and  
299 stuff like that but—It is like being in high school again (laughs). It's kind of—it is bizarre minus  
300 the actually going to school, though.

301

302 Lawson McGrain: So how would you say quarantine has affected your current academic  
303 practices?

304

305 Alex Schmelter: Um, in some ways, it's made it easier only in that I think I'm better sometimes

306 about getting my work done because I think I'd be—some of my teachers have just made their  
307 classes straight-up optional to attend the zoom classes, or some of them just aren't holding the  
308 zoom classes, so I think it's been less time actually in class, and having more opportunities to  
309 actually work on homework. Plus, I don't even have the opportunity to go out with people  
310 anymore, so it's kind of, it's turned it into, like, well, I have nothing else to do, so I might as well  
311 get some work done. So in that way, it's actually made me, maybe, a little more studious. But at  
312 the same time, it's also hard to find motivation sometimes because it's—I also forget to do work a  
313 lot because normally, when I would actually be physically going to class, it would be that sort of  
314 physical reminder to me of like, okay, I gotta get this stuff done before then, now it's like the  
315 days kind of mesh together, so I forget what's due when, [or] if I even have anything due for this  
316 class, so it's a little confusing at the same time.

317

318 Lawson McGrain: So how do you stay motivated?

319

320 Alex Schmelter: I'm, um, We're getting towards the end of the semester anyways, so it's kind of  
321 like, the more I get done now, the less I'll have to do towards the end, and it's kind of that  
322 working towards the finish line sort of deal right now. It's also trying to feel productive, not that  
323 this is a time where everybody needs to be as productive as humanly possible or anything, but  
324 trying to get myself on some sort of schedule and getting something accomplished every day.  
325 That's my main goal for every day, even if I don't have homework is get something productive  
326 done, then you can feel good, and do whatever else.

327

328 Lawson McGrain: How do you feel that productivity is assessed by your instructors in online  
329 learning?

330

331 Alex Schmelter: Um, I think they're definitely—they're definitely more lenient now, I would say,  
332 just because there's less of that in-class interaction. So I think—that was always like a part of the  
333 coursework was like, whatever you were doing in class. Now, that's almost removed. So, it's  
334 more as long as you get the assignments done, you're fine. A lot of my classes have kind of come  
335 down to that, just like, I'll post the assignment as long as you get it done by the due date, you're  
336 fine. That's all there is to it. So I guess productivity is not even much of an aspect to it anymore.

337 It's just—it's either you do it or you don't.

338

339 Lawson McGrain: So describe how, I guess, that approach affects the level of communication  
340 you have with your instructors.

341

342 Alex Schmelter: Um, I've had some professors who are more communicative through this than  
343 others. I think it's definitely cut down on the interactions a lot, obviously, and—I'm trying to  
344 think—this might be going off topic, but one of my classes is on English authors and my  
345 professor is very—she's very funny, and as you know, our class is pretty engaging, especially  
346 when you're there in person, but the zoom meeting equivalent is like, not nearly the same, so you  
347 kind of lose something when you're going to the all-online stuff and which it's not necessarily  
348 like we're doing less work or anything, it's just like, that class experience is totally different,  
349 and—I think some of my professors are just more attuned to talking to people in person, which I  
350 totally understand. I think their communication has gone down a little bit because they're not as  
351 comfortable with it, and it's not the same.

352

353 Lawson McGrain: What are your thoughts on the way Columbia handled grades during this  
354 transition and for the rest of this semester.

355

356 Alex Schmelter: I feel they've been pretty fair about it. Only because we've got pass/fail options,  
357 more readily available to the point like, I think [with] your core classes, you can do that, and still  
358 get the credit as long as you pass, which I think is a good middle ground with it because from  
359 what I've been reading, some schools will go—just don't care about whatever the new living  
360 situation is, and it's basically like, no we're just going to keep the grading system exactly the  
361 same. That's just how it's going to work, and then others have been more like, as long as you pass  
362 you're fine, which I don't know if I entirely agree with, but I mean, It's very hard to gauge  
363 because everybody's living situation is entirely different. There's some people who are in much  
364 more stressful situations right now. So I think it—I think it was a good middle ground for them  
365 to make it. If you need this option then go ahead and take it, but we can still keep a traditional  
366 letter grade system in place if you want to go for that.

367

368 Lawson McGrain: If Columbia continues to use online learning for the fall of 2020 semester,  
369 even through Spring of 2021, how would that affect your plans at Columbia?

370

371 Alex Schmelter: It would be different. I'd be definitely bummed out if we are still stuck in the  
372 online space. I mean, I think this is just to add—I don't think my plans would change so much as  
373 it would be my attitude towards things because I, you know, I enjoy Columbia. I enjoy most of  
374 my classes and engaging with people, you know, face to face, and again, I'd still go through  
375 everything to get my degree. I don't think anything will change with that. But it would certainly  
376 sour the whole college experience of it, you know, because it would be almost a whole year  
377 where it didn't really feel like I was at school, even right now, it doesn't really feel like I'm at  
378 school because I'm just at home all the time. Because I know some people that makes—like one  
379 of my friends, he said, he's just going to take a gap year if that happens because he can, and he  
380 doesn't feel like wasting the tuition if there's not going to be that real life college experience—  
381 and using the campus and everything like that. I don't know if I'd quite go that far, but it would  
382 certainly change my view of things.

383

384 Lawson McGrain: So moving back to kind of how you're doing at home, how do you and your  
385 family kind of stay updated on what's going on around?

386

387 Alex Schmelter: Um, I've got my phone set so that pretty much—I don't know exactly how it  
388 works. It's just the service provider I have, but uh—every time I open Chrome, it gives me a  
389 news update or just a general like rundown of headlines. Um, so a lot of the time, I'll do that. Uh,  
390 I think that's honestly how a lot of our news comes in because a lot of computers have that option  
391 now to have like, as soon as you open like the web browser, it'll give you sort of the headlines of  
392 the day, and I think, even inevitably, you find out the important stuff because it's not just like one  
393 story if it's like really important it will be—go—go through multiple different articles throughout  
394 the news cycle. So we generally like to keep up to date on the really important stuff through that  
395 sort of thing.

396

397 Lawson McGrain: What changes are you noticing in Lake Villa's response to the stay at home  
398 order?

399

400 Alex Schmelter: Um, I think they've mostly just been going with what Governor Pritzker has  
401 been doing. I think a good chunk of Illinois has mostly been like that. I think we're definitely one  
402 of the more cautious states when it's coming to the lockdown. But it all depends on people, you  
403 know, because I think for the most part, we've been good about, like, the non essential places are  
404 still closed and as far as I can tell, they will be until the end of May. And I think, generally,  
405 people are taking it more seriously here. It's definitely not as far as you know, like a bunch of  
406 protests over the lockdown or anything like that. I think people are taking it really seriously. I see  
407 a good amount of masks and things like that when I go. I think in Chicago, it's required now that  
408 you wear a mask when you're outdoors, and a lot of stores are just adopting like, if you don't  
409 wear a mask you can't come in. So I think it's, it's good to see that people are generally taking it  
410 seriously. Around me, it's not quite like that there's less requirements, but I think people are just  
411 naturally adopting that response. It's a mixed bag because sometimes I'll go to the store and it's  
412 like everybody's wearing a mask and gloves, or something like that. And then, sometimes I'll see  
413 like a good half of the people not wearing anything, which is concerning, but you're always  
414 going to have people like that. And I think, generally, we've had a good response to things. I  
415 think people are keeping up with the lock down pretty well. Now, we're all not super happy  
416 about it, like, we don't want to be stuck inside, but we also realize, you know, it's important.  
417 There's a reason for it.

418

419 Lawson McGrain: How would you describe your employment situation right now.

420

421 Alex Schmelter: Um, I am currently not working. I usually don't while I'm in school. I usually  
422 just take summer jobs. That's probably going to change next year, assuming we're not in the  
423 online classes and I'm going to try and be working while I'm at school then. But it's changing  
424 employment opportunities for the summer, too because I was, you know, I was hoping to get a  
425 job and earn some extra money then, but who knows if that's going to be even possible unless it's  
426 in like a more dangerous situation. Because, like last summer, I worked for Amazon and initially,  
427 I was kind of like, well, maybe I'll go there for the summer, even if you know, it is during the  
428 whole pandemic, but then I've been hearing how—how poor their safety conditions are which is  
429 more like, if we don't financially need me to be going out and making money, then there's no

430 reason to. I'd probably just look for online employment if that's possible, things like that.

431

432

433

434 Lawson McGrain: So what personal advantages to social distancing and isolation. Are you  
435 noticing or disadvantages?

436

437 Alex Schmelter: Advantages? I guess the only advantage would really be just keeping people  
438 safe. Like, I know I'm mostly just worried about my parents health and things like that. I'm—I'm  
439 in an age group where I'd probably be fine if I got the virus. It's not so much worried about my  
440 own health, so much as theirs. So, I guess, that would be an advantage that hopefully they're less  
441 at risk now because of it—because of the lockdown and everything. Disadvantages is just pretty  
442 much everything. I mean, I usually would go out with people two or three times a week.  
443 Usually—I'd usually be going somewhere like—usually going out and doing something almost  
444 every day, and now, it's like—it's just indoor—like the most I go outside now is either to go for a  
445 walk or let out my dogs or something like that—like that's about as much as it gets for even  
446 leaving the house or just going to the store or something like that, so there's a lot of  
447 disadvantages. It's,—and you know, I try to keep, like, you know, calling people on Skype or  
448 texting people and things like that, but it's not the same for me, it's not the same as actually  
449 physically being there with them, but that's how it is now.

450

451 Lawson McGrain: So I guess going off that, how do you maintain, you know, fulfilling  
452 relationships with people that aren't you know in the house with you?

453

454 Alex Schmelter: I'm not as big on texting people as much because I just don't feel like it as, for  
455 me at least, it's just not as fulfilling as talking to them in person. So as much as possible, I try and  
456 call people. Like as a family, we usually talk to my sister, her husband every week or so, or twice  
457 a week if we can. And the same goes with a lot of my friend group. Just trying to call people  
458 once a week or do something like play a game online with them or something, but it's—it's a  
459 challenge. I think it is for everybody but—

460



461 Lawson McGrain: What activities do you and your family take part in to kind of get out of the  
462 rut of quarantine?

463  
464 Alex Schmelter: A lot of the time we just do our own thing, to be honest. But every once in a  
465 while, we try and watch a movie together, play a board game or something like that if  
466 everybody's free and not working. Yeah, that's pretty much it. Which again, is like going out was  
467 in high school because we'd sort of try and do that on the weekends when everybody was  
468 hopefully not so busy (unintelligible) doing something together, but, you know, becomes a  
469 struggle. I think we're getting more used to sort of doing our own things. So, even then, it's  
470 becoming more of a struggle to actually interact as much as bad as that sounds.

471  
472 Lawson McGrain: So what—what aspects of life are you noticing that you kind of took for  
473 granted before the virus that you're missing a little more now.

474  
475 Alex Schmelter: I'm pretty much everything. I mean, being in class wasn't always my favorite  
476 thing, but there's definitely a difference with not being able to have that face to face interaction,  
477 and that's true with just everybody. Not seeing my friends, you know, every week, like with my  
478 main friend group, we sort of had a tradition of doing something on the weekends usually even  
479 twice in a weekend. We'd always go out and do something or do something in someone's  
480 apartment or something like that. Now, that's just gone and I seriously took that for granted. Just  
481 being able to go out at all and go to a store that you like other than just the grocery store and just  
482 getting essentials. That's totally gone. That sucks. Living in Chicago—not—going from living in  
483 Chicago to being in Lakeville is totally different, because Chicago was just like, I could just go  
484 for a walk and be entertained for like an hour. Now, there's—I mean, I can go for a walk, but  
485 there's nothing to do. Like, there's nothing to see really around here, so, lots of things like that.  
486 Just—yeah, it's mainly being able to see people. You don't realize how much that face to face  
487 time means until you don't have it.

488  
489 Lawson McGrain: What's been the toughest life adjustment during these times?

490  
491 Alex Schmelter: Life adjustment—Goodness, I need to think about that one. Um, I sound like a

492 broken record, but I do really think it's that social interaction. Going from being able to see  
493 different people every day. Like, you go to different classes and see like a totally different set of  
494 people and that sort of thing, you just see strangers on the street, like, that's a weird thing, but  
495 having that gone is—is just bizarre, and I think it's going from, you know, I always had a routine  
496 when I was in Chicago in terms of classes and things like that, but it was very—there's flexibility  
497 to it. Now, the routine is just being at home and only doing things that are at home. That's—that's  
498 a difficult life adjustment. Just not having that sort of freedom to go out explore the city, you  
499 know, go to a museum or something like that. That was always my favorite thing to do is—if I  
500 really had nothing to do, there was some free museums. So, it's like, go to something like that, or  
501 go to an interesting restaurant, a little ways away, that's not an option anymore so—

502

503 Lawson McGrain: How long do you think these circumstances will last, or what—I guess, what  
504 hope do you look for in coming times?

505

506 Alex Schmelter: I mean how long I think it'll last—I think it's less so, but it's always been kind of  
507 up in the air. I'm not really an expert on the subject, so I can definitely not say for sure. I would  
508 speculate that by the summer most things will be open, but I definitely think like how we regard  
509 certain things are going to change. Like I know, being sort of interested in film, movie theaters  
510 are the biggest thing of—they might be open by the summer probably, but people aren't, at least  
511 a lot of people, aren't going to want to go, or aren't want to be going to want to be close to one  
512 another in a space like that for something that's not essential. I think my biggest hope is just—I  
513 think we're all realizing what we took for granted in terms of social interaction, but I also hope—  
514 I hope people start to take things more seriously with this virus because there's been a lot of  
515 spreading of misinformation not regarding this as seriously, or being aware that there are deaths  
516 over this, and just kind of saying, well, whatever, you know, it's not me, or it's not someone I  
517 know. There's been so much more of that now and I just hope to god people realize that that's  
518 important. Just because you don't know the people that are dying, it's still serious, and—I guess,  
519 the other hope would be that we're prepared more so for something like this in the future—that  
520 we have more protocols for this sort of thing—early anyways, and that we sort of change to  
521 adapt possible to the real possibility of that now.

522

523 Lawson McGrain: Speaking on kind of the—the noise and misinformation you just talked about  
524 how have you been able to kind of filter that out?

525

526 Alex Schmelter: I mean, No one—the problem is, no one's ever going to agree with all the  
527 sources where you get things from. People are always going to be like, oh, well, the  
528 scientists are bought out by these people, and the studies are misleading and things like that. And  
529 to a certain extent, that's true. There's always going to be some sort of bias with the data or things  
530 like that, but I think I take it as like no matter what the numbers are, if we are keeping people  
531 alive in the lockdown. Like some people are complaining, oh, well, the numbers of deaths aren't  
532 as high as we predicted. That's because we're in lockdown. Like, if anything, we should be happy  
533 that there are lower than we projected. So, it's hard to filter it, but I think it's more just listening  
534 to the experts and yes, there may be a chance, you know, they've got some incentive to make this  
535 more extreme than it is. I would rather listen to them than someone who spent 20 minutes on  
536 Facebook articles about it. Like, that's—I'm always going to trust them more.

537

538 Lawson McGrain: What are your, what are your personal aspirations after quarantine is lifted.

539

540 Alex Schmelter: Um, Aspirations—going out more. Well, once it's safe that is. Mainly, I would  
541 like to just go on a road-trip after this, or something. Just to have something where I'm out of the  
542 house for a long stretch of time, hopefully. Seeing people more, trying to go out with people  
543 more again, all of this when it's safe not when it's still sort of up in the air, but yeah, just trying to  
544 make the most of those things we took for granted, I think.

545

546 Lawson McGrain: And how do you think you'll look back on this time, and its impact on your  
547 life?

548

549 Alex Schmelter: It is definitely a life changing thing. I mean—or at least like a major—trying to  
550 think of a way to phrase it—I mean, I don't think I ever expected something—none of us did  
551 but—I really did not expect something on this level to happen because I can't think of anything  
552 in my lifetime as severe—in terms of like affecting the world, I guess, in the same way because I  
553 was alive when 9/11 happened, but I feel like even that as much as things changed, it wasn't like

554 a, everybody has to stay in their homes even—even—I don't think we've ever had something on  
555 this scale. So it's definitely going to be a story for you know, kids, things like that (laughs). It's  
556 definitely going to be—it's memorable I'll say that—not in a good way, but—

557

558 Lawson McGrain: What do you, what do you hope those future generations take away from  
559 learning about this time in our history?

560

561 Alex Schmelter: Um, I hope it teaches something about misinformation. How I think our leaders  
562 need to step up a lot more, and I think they need to be—held responsible for their actions  
563 because I think that's been sort of a big conflict going on right now. I think, hopefully, it'll teach  
564 us to be more prepared for this sort of thing because I think part of the problem is we never  
565 imagined anything like this would happen especially not on this scale, and now it's not a  
566 possibility, it's a, you know, it's a very real reality. So hopefully, future generations will be more  
567 aware of, like, this is a possibility—we need to keep this in mind, so I'd like to believe there will  
568 be change on that front, but who knows.

569

570 Lawson McGrain: Okay, I think. This concludes our interview.

571 Alex Schmelter: Okay, great.

572 Lawson McGrain: Thank you.