

Interview with LaCole Purley
Interviewed by Caitlyn Gee

Caitlyn Gee: Hi, my name is Caitlyn Gee. I am doing this project for Capturing Quarantine in November 2020. The date is November 23rd, and the time is 6:03 [pm]. I'm currently sitting in my bedroom of my apartment in the South Loop of Chicago. I'm here with LaCole Purley, also known as Purlz, who's also, who is in St. Louis, Missouri with her grandmother. She was born September 2001, and is a freshman, majoring in radio with a concentration in voiceover major. Purlz? I guess we'll go ahead and get started with the interview. What are your pronouns?

LaCole Purley: She, her and hers.

CG: How do you self-identify?

LP: Female.

CG: I guess, kind of going into your time going to a creative school. Were your parents artistic? Or was that something that you learned?

LP: I believe I learned that on my own. My parents were more--my father was more math based. He scored really well on math exams and was recognized to be in the top 10% on, like, AP exams in the state of Missouri. My mom, she was more reading based. So, when it came to music, my mom was the one who told me, Hey, you got to be more artistic and creative. When you go into school, take band or take choir, and I ended up learning clarinet since fourth grade.

CG: What's your fondest childhood memory?

LP: My fondest childhood memory must be playing the GameCube and the Wii, playing different Mario games with my Grammie Monica. Because she'd come home from work at times and tell me to set the game ready. We'd play different Mario Party games. So--

CG: How do you feel like your childhood has impacted you?

LP: Well, I look back on my childhood. I think of myself as wasting a bunch of valuable time. Because I didn't start taking or really putting efforts into my future until I got into high school and was preparing for college, preparing for a career. And I believe if I would have focused more on bettering my craft when I was little, before high school, instead of always focusing on playing video games or watching TV, keeping to myself. I could already made progress in my career by now.

CG: How is this shaped your values and also how you approached high school?

LP: It taught me to be a go getter, to work hard, ask questions. not stop until I have the right answer or not stop forming a plan that I can execute. And it's what made me so outgoing as I am now.

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44 CG: Well, tell me a little bit about your high school experience.

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46 LP: High School is crazy. Not even gonna fake it. That's when I started getting close to people.
47 That's when I felt like I actually had friends. And now not even being close to anyone I went to
48 high school with for real. This showed me to focus more on myself because I was always the
49 type of person to put someone else's values above my own, or not put their values above my
50 own. Well, like taking care of them before taking care of myself. Now always, I'm such a caring
51 person. I try helping people as much as I can, but I was too selfless. And now I've learned that it's
52 okay to be a little selfish with my time and energy.

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54 CG: Tell me about what activities you were involved in in high school. What were you going
55 towards?

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57 LP: Girl. I was part of everything in high school. I'm not playing. I did acting, I was in marching
58 band as well as regular band. I was also a tutor. I was in the main office of student aid, helping
59 staff members and teachers. I was part of an organization called Transformative Leaders with my
60 honors biology teacher, Mr. Gregory. It was basically a group of students throughout schools in
61 Missouri, or more or less St. Louis, they came together and spoke about racism spoke about
62 social issues. And I was also part of an organization called Best Buddies. So, we got to partner
63 up with one of the special needs kids, to make them enjoy their high school lives more. And I
64 thought that was very important to not judge someone based on something that they had that they
65 can't control. And, yeah, I do a lot

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67 CG: Did you also have any jobs? I know you did so much in high school. Do you have any jobs
68 outside of high school?

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70 LP: Whew! Right now, I'm an assistant manager at Smoothie King, in Limburg. We're ranked
71 the third store in the country, when it comes to our net sales. And I just got a promotion. So, I'm
72 training to be the general manager in a few months. It's tiring.

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74 CG: How is being a manager shaped your thoughts on leadership?

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76 LP: Being a manager taught me to be patient, because what they don't tell you about
77 management is you're basically being paid to babysit a bunch of other people. And the fact that
78 most of the employees, they're around the same age as me or a little younger, they're all in high
79 school, for the most part, a couple in college. So, I had to learn to--be more sympathetic to other
80 people's needs. Because I have to know about people's personal lives, there's always a situation
81 that comes on, I learned something new about someone every single week. I have to spend one
82 on one time with all my employees. Training them, getting know how they are as a person,
83 helping them grow more as an employee. Customer service is very tiring.

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85 CG: I know you were talking a little bit about how you are caring in your childhood. Do you feel
86 like your caring nature helped you become a better leader or manager?
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LP: Oh, most definitely. I'm, look, I'm known at Smoothie King as the Smoothie King momma. Because I treat everyone, including the general managers, if they're my kids, and talking to them about through some of their issues, helping them like sit down, breathe, talk it out coming up with different perspectives and better ways to handle some of their problems and get them through their day.

CG: Were you in high school when COVID-19 hit?

LP: Yes, I was. COVID hit in middle of my senior year high school.

CG: How did your transition to remote learning go?

LP: Terrible. I--I barely made the grades that I wanted in order to be valedictorian. Which, luckily, I achieved. But it was much harder than I thought it would be. Especially since going to school was more a salvation for me. Because some personal issues I had going on at home. I always looked forward to going to school, getting away from it, going to pursue my activities. I spent, all the activities I told you about, I was also part of chess club, and did tournaments and I won a couple chess competitions, or chess battles. And I was looking forward to my Senior Nights for these organizations in these groups I participated in all four years. I was finally going to get that recognition. Because, ever since my freshman year, every year, there's a Senior Night and you recognize that class. So being there in the process of classed '17, '18, '19, then it's time for 2020 dub dub. And COVID said, Oh, no, you thought you was gonna have your senior night, hate to break it to you it's not going to happen. Then prom, missed out on prom, which I was still kind of nervous about because, eh, thought it was like senior year, might as well go once I've made the resolution, once I made resolve, had the resolve to go through with going to senior prom. Oh, looks like I did all that for nothing because we aren't having it. Then graduation. When it was, we were told that we were going to have an online graduation, or it was going to be pushed back into July or August. I got really scared, not just for me. But for some of my classmates because I knew quite a bit of people who are going into the military and was planning on 90 minutes. They were getting dispatched in June. So, in the end, I made sure I made a note to my principal, the head principal, and told them "Hey, we're having, We're not going to have all the students there because we have a good amount of people." I knew at least 20 or 30 some students who are going on, it's a different, who were going to be dispatched within June, July, so they wouldn't have been able to attend. Luckily, we ended up having a graduation on May 31st. So, most of our classmates were there. And we were able to do it in person. And we actually had a stage to go across. Of course, we had to social distance. And I felt so grateful that we at least had a graduation, because I knew there plenty of people across the world, and across our country that just had their diplomas mailed to them and couldn't even see their friends for the last time. And that's what it felt like, I still wasn't able to see a lot of people that I wanted to. Because we had to social distance, and everyone was in different locations. I was grateful, that I was able to see at least a couple dozen of my friends. But most people I wanted to see, including my teachers, I missed my teachers more than I missed the students actually. I had a closer connection with lots of the staff members, because they knew a lot about what I was going through in my personal life, and I could confide in them about things and ask them for advice. Couldn't really do that with people my own age because of the lack of maturity I felt within other people in my class. And yeah,

CG: Can I ask, what was happening in your home life that made schools feel like such a safe place?

LP: At the end of my senior year, I found out about a couple of things that was going on with my mom. My mom's health is really bad. It's been bad for the past several years because she had an accident at work before. Caused her to have blood clots that traveled into her lungs that she almost died from because her body was only able to absorb 10% of the oxygen that she was breathing in. So, it just ended up causing more and more issues along the line. Not only with the blood clots, she ended up going on blood thinners. And then she was also overweight, got diabetes. But she has fifteen hernias. And she's been losing too much blood during her cycles or her periods. So, she's going to have to get surgery to get her uterus removed. And then she also has to have another high risk surgery to get rid of the hernias. So, because of how bad her health was, she almost died from a procedure that happened a couple years ago during my sophomore year. That ended up with her getting kidney failure and having to go through dialysis, and she still hasn't fully recovered from that. So, it was most likely that by the end of my senior year, because she was scheduled to have those surgeries in between March and April. But because of COVID, she hasn't had those surgeries yet. But when, I found out after the first day of school, my senior year, so I spent all my senior year looking for a place for my little sister to go in case my mom did passed away. Since I was 18 at the time, the government basically say, oh, you 18 you take yourself and I already had a job. And I had a family member that said they would take me in. But for my sister that was a different story, especially if I wanted to keep her in the same school district, because that's where she'd been at her whole life. And I know how it's like to move and lose all contact with your friends and having to start over. She's not as outgoing as I am, in a sense, so it would have been much harder on her. And we already lost her dad before. So, I spent most of my senior year basically preparing to be an orphan and looking for a place for my 13 year old sister to go. But luckily, I, there's a good thing that came out of COVID, I still have my mama.

CG: With COVID, how's that like with your mom's health? Has that changed how you have been taking precautions with COVID? How are you dealing with that?

LP: COVID made being cautious about people very difficult. I ended up taking a month and a half away from work. And because of bills constantly coming in and me still having to pay for stuff. Basically, all my savings just went out the door, that I was building up for since the beginning of my senior year, to help with the house take care of my mom, other family, and doing things to prepare for college. But--I start, I went back to work over the summer. Once Smoothie King ensured that all employees have masks and we had gloves. It was very scary, though, because there's still a chance that I would have gotten it. And during my junior and senior year, I didn't have a bedroom. So, which was another reason why I always looked forward to going to school because it's not like I had privacy at home anyways, had family full of people. I had to give my Aunt Kim my room because of the fact that she got sick. So she ended up moving to my mom's house. Another family member that needs people to take care of her. So, anytime I did homework, or needed to go somewhere in the house, all I could do is go to the kitchen table, or sit in the living room, which is always occupied by either my baby cousins or parents, someone's always in there. And I always slept on the couch. Unless my parents let me

180 stay in their room because they work over, or my stepdad works overnight, or my mom would be
181 too sore to lay down because she can't stretch her stomach out so much. So, she'd be more
182 comfortable sitting in the rocking chair in the living room anyway. But I had no sense of privacy.
183 And with the precautions and having to stay at home, not being able to at least enjoy going to
184 school or going to work as an escape. It was scary. Because either way it goes, it felt like I was
185 suffering somehow staying at home. My mental state was pretty bad. But leaving the house just
186 meant that I could possibly catch COVID and make my family sick and with how bad my mom's
187 health is. Then will my aunt who is staying with us as well. COVID made me wonder what can I
188 do? What am I supposed to do right now? What's the right decision to make. Either way it goes
189 I'm going to be suffering regardless. Which was scary because I had to be the person who goes
190 to the store and pick up groceries because, of course we still need to eat with a house full of
191 people. You'd have to make runs every week or two or every other week. Because people would
192 just go through the food. So, it was, it was scary.

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194 CG: How did you handle that stress of having to go and get groceries for your family and not
195 really having any alone time? How did you manage?

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197 LP: Listening to music. Music's always been a huge part of my life. So, I would talk to, so, my
198 business partners with this Super App concept that I'm part of. And they're so positive that I just
199 talked to them about things. I wasn't able to be honest with them about some of the stuff I went
200 through until the end of summer. That's when I told them about what was, what's been going on
201 because I met them in April, after COVID first hit, and everyone went under lockdown. But it, I
202 guess I didn't properly cope with that I just let it build up. And that's one of the reasons why I
203 was suffering so much. Because I didn't, there wasn't a clear answer of what I should be doing.

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205 CG: I'm going back to the end of high school. What were some of your ambitions when you
206 graduated from high school?

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208 LP: Get out of my mama's house. Start a career on stage. Originally, my plan was to major in
209 musical theater because I love music. I wanted to learn how to dance. I love singing. I love being
210 a performer. Gotta be on stage, girl! Have such an outgoing personality being on stage is
211 literally, as soon as people found out I wanted to do musical theater, they said, "Oh yeah, we
212 know you're gonna be there." But then after COVID hit, I was thinking, whoa, what am I
213 supposed to be doing now? Theaters are closed down. Is musical theater really the best option for
214 me during these circumstances? Because people were assuming that we were going to, COVID
215 was just going to pass by in a few months. I was thinking, "No, it's not." This is too serious.
216 Global pandemic, not no slight little flu that's passing around and no. So, I was already planning
217 on minoring in radio. So that's why I decided to switch my major over to radio and do a
218 concentration in voiceover. So, that way I could still do things in the acting field. Still be
219 somewhere in the gray area of Performing Arts. But doing something that's, I can do my work by
220 myself, and do more things virtually than acting. Because trying to do the one acts that we had
221 during COVID hit was, it was terrible. Couldn't even do it because of how ridiculous my
222 schedule was. And, with things constantly popping up with my family, I said, "No, LaCole, all
223 you can't do acting virtually, it's not going to happen." But so far with radio, I've been finding
224 more ways, and I think this is the right decision that I made with it.

CG: What made you decide to begin your college career now?

LP: Nothing was going to change my mind of going to college. If I didn't go to college, all I would have done was be a workaholic and be at Smoothie King working 24/7, I might as well start setting the motions in for my career now. And with the scholarships I had, there was no guarantee. But just how America is, I don't want to get too much involved with that subject, but with just how America is, there was no guarantee that I was going to get my scholarships. If I took a gap year or waited until things settled down. So instead of me only having maybe a couple grand of debt. Now, with the scholarships I have and not having to worry about housing and room and board costs. I'd come back after COVID hit and then, boom, I'm in 40 something, 50 something thousand dollars worth of debt at Columbia. I didn't want to take the risk. So, I said yeah, we got, we have to do college now. My family was against me. Worried about college during this pandemic. They said that I should just focus on being at home, being with my family. Focus on saving up money for college. But I said I'll be saving more money in the long run from it now, and have to pay less money, then building up a small fortune, maybe 10, 15 grand just to end up with over twice that amount of debt. It wouldn't make any sense in the long run.

CG: What made you choose Columbia?

LP: I was, I hate liberal arts. English, math, science, history, all the stuff I learned or had to be forced to learn in high school, or school all my life, didn't have a point to me. Especially when teachers would say "Oh, well you need this class in order to do this, or you need that class in order to do that." I say I would never use this information outside of the classroom again. I wanted to do Performing Arts, I wanted to do Media Arts. So, radio, acting, dancing, all that stuff. Most colleges and schools in Missouri, that would have given me a full ride with me having a 4.4 GPA and great attendance, although all these other accolades that they talked about. None of those schools interested me, because they were liberal arts schools. Or they would say, "Oh, we've got this little music program on the side", but they don't have no big community. They don't have the marking or the resources that I knew I would need in order to start my career before I graduate from college. Columbia did. And I was told about Columbia from an aunt of mine, named Kayla, Kayla Dewan. She graduated from Columbia about 25 years ago. And she's a singer. She has tracks out, she's a vocalist, she's also a songwriter, and a producer. So, I listened to some of her music and heard her sing live. And I was so amazed. She told me, hey, if music is what you want to do, if you want to act, if you want to perform, check out Colombia. So, I immediately looked up Colombia on Columbia's website, and just went through the majors and programs that was offered. And I said, "Yeah, that's my top school. That's my top pick." Because no other school offered what Colombia offers. And then because of the fact that it's in the heart of Chicago. The top three places I wanted to go to school were New York. That wasn't the top one. But that was one of them. California was the top pick. And then Chicago was actually my second pick. Reason why I wanted to go to Chicago is because it's second Broadway to only New York. Why wouldn't you want to go to Chicago, and then I looked in the area where Columbia is. And I said, "Man, look at all of these professionals in their fields here. Imagine getting connected to some people, getting internships with some people who been successful, at what I'm trying to do, those are the people I want to learn from." So, it only made sense for me pick this school. Any other school, most of them only go there for the parties or only go there for

the main, majors common in the United States. Education, law, nursing, engineering. I was not interested in any of it (laughs) at all. So yeah, that's why I picked Columbia.

CG: How has your college experience lived up to your expectations so far?

LP: Oh, I made the right decision. I've already had interviews or conversations virtually with so many people, so many staff members at Columbia. Got connected to other students, got connected to other people in their fields, who were guest speakers and in some of my classes I was interested in learning about. Made some new connections. It's awesome. The marketing at Columbia, if you take advantage of it, you can, you're unstoppable, you can do anything you want to. And I encourage every student, I was encouraging people before I came to Columbia, to come with me to Columbia. And I got one of my friends named Kennedy to come. She's also an incoming--She's also a freshman. And she still majored in musical theater. I kind of feel bad because we were both supposed to be roommates and have the same major. And, I felt bad. I still kind of feel bad to this day, because of the fact, I gave her my reason. And I explained why I changed my mind, I explained the same thing to her. But, just months of planning, and convincing her to apply to the school, helping her research scholarships for it. Just for her to go to Chicago while I'm still in St. Louis, just for her to do musical theater while I changed my major? It feels like I just slapped her in the face with "Hey, this one we're going to do? And then oh, last minute. Oh, wait, Kennedy, I can't do that. Sorry. You just have to go by yourself. Oh, that major. Yeah, I'm not doing it with you. I'm doing this now." It felt so, I feel so bad. I'm sorry.

CG: What challenges have you faced this semester in college with remote learning?

LP: Just the fact that it's remote learning and not in person. Because I know I make an impact wherever I go. But I don't feel as if it's as much impactful as it would be if I was in person. Especially with a couple of my teachers. I don't think they could hide away from me if I showed up and came up to their face, came up to their desk, or came into their office during their office hours, if I was there in person. But because we have this, I'm not even in Chicago. And I'm all the way out here in St. Louis. I gotta be scheduling Zoom meetings and try doing all this. I don't think I'm as intimidating to them when I'm through a computer screen. But if I was in person, you feel every ounce of energy, every ounce of power that I have my little body and my voice. You feel it. Some people say they can feel it now, but they weren't feeling as much. Trust me. It'd be on a whole other level if I was with you guys in person. Y'all wouldn't be able to take me.

CG: Kind of on that note, how are you in your professors communicating?

LP: I get along just fine with most of my professors. It's just one. Just one professor that I have that kind of irks my soul? Yes. And it's okay. Because my grades for the most part in almost every class are where I want them to be. They don't have problems meeting me in person or answering my question. I mean, I not in person but over Zoom, or answering my questions. I have great conversations with them during class. And I enjoy almost all of my classes, except that one.

316 CG: I know that this happened when you were in high school, but when did you first become
317 aware of the Coronavirus?
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319 LP: I first became aware of Corona, I would have to say, exactly a year ago. It was either
320 October or November of 2019 when I first heard of it, and I heard that it was happening in Asian
321 countries countries it was either in China or South Korea when I first heard about it. How people
322 walk around with masks or the virus was spreading and having to be safe. And I thought to
323 myself, I said man, imagine if the hit America. Who really going to follow these rules in
324 America? Just for it to hit a few months later. I was so scared. I was praying. I was hoping that it
325 wouldn't hit until after my graduation. I was praying, asking for Jesus to not let it hit us until
326 after my class graduated, but it's okay. Good things still came out of it.
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328 CG: Do you remember what news place you heard it from back in February or? No. Sorry, like
329 about a year ago?
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331 LP: Google. Every time I want to learn something or find out something random. When I go on
332 Google, I scroll through different web searches, and Coronavirus hit. It with a headline of big
333 virus spreading something like that. So, I looked into it and found out about Coronavirus. And I
334 believe it hit like Europe or UK next, or something like. I don't remember exactly where it hit
335 next. And that's when I knew. I knew in January that it was going to hit United States. My
336 teachers were talking about it.
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338 CG: When you knew in January did you start preparing for it? Or do you just keep going about
339 your life kind of normally?
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341 LP: I wouldn't say I was preparing myself, I tried mentally preparing myself for it. I was
342 thinking, "Man, imagine we go into a lockdown." I have to be stuck in my house, I was trying to
343 get my mental state prepared for it. And still going about my day. Just because it didn't happen
344 yet. So, it's like it's no use worrying about something that hasn't hit you yet. You already know
345 what's going to be expected, you already know you're gonna have to go to masks, it's going to be
346 a lockdown. I knew that mentally. So, I didn't think that there was anything else I could do to
347 prepare besides wait for it to happen and wait for stuff to start.
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349 CG: Do you still use Google as one of your primary new sources? Or do you have other ones that
350 you look at as well?
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352 LP: Now just Google.
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354 CG: How would you describe your mental health before the pandemic?
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356 LP: Still jacked up. My mental state hasn't been the best. During Corona, before Corona.
357 Because all I did was just give myself work to do. I didn't like focusing on problems, especially
358 if I didn't have a solution to them. Because what would be the point of constantly complaining
359 about something that's happening to you? If you're not gonna do anything about it, you can't do
360 anything about it, you know, it's happening, it's not going to change. So instead of trying to focus
361 on problems I had, I was like, Okay, well, what can I do right now? I can't move out of my

mom's house. So what can I do? Be out the house most possible. How? Working. work as many hours as possible. Having as many activities as possible, having as many performances as possible. That's all I was doing was everything. (laughs)

CG: What happened when you received news that schools will be shutting down?

LP: I cried? Yeah, I cried. And I was thinking, Man, how am I supposed to do music theory virtually, if I don't understand what's going on in my class when I have my students next to me talking about it. Imagine doing math virtually. That's what I asked myself. I said, imagine you doing pre calc online. I said, Man, I'm gonna fail. I'm gonna fail. I didn't understand what was going on in my class. I ain't going to understand what's going on when I'm out the classroom. Especially because we didn't even have Zoom or online meetings for my classes. Anyway, it was just online. Who says, Hey, we're gonna post the assignments up on Google Classroom. There'll be these set of office hours, but it usually be at times where I had work. And, it was hard for me to work around that, especially since I had to work with my stepdads schedule for some things or my family's plans for some stuff. And last minute things that pop up amongst my family members because in my household, it's not just my household. I have to worry about or my parent's household, I should say. But my Grandma Monica's house and then my aunties. So it's my mom and my stepdad. There's me, my little sister. My two stepsisters, my baby cousin my other baby cousin, Lacey and Dante, and then my Grandma Monica. Then her husband, Larry, then my Aunt Aleah. Then there's my Aunt Penny, then my Aunt Kim. The sick aunt that came in I told you about who's health is really bad. Just another sick person take care of. That's too many people to worry about. So was my schedule going to be set? Not at all, especially if I'm one of the main people whose job is doing this stuff? Not at all. So, when we went to virtual learning, it basically told me LaCole, you're screwed. How are you going to manage this? How are you going to do this when you got all this stuff on your plate? And then, how are you supposed to do a band concert online? How does that work? How do you do that? How are you supposed to do a theater performance online? Sounds pretty dumb. So, I lost hope. I did. I lost motivation. I wasn't writing music like I was in my music theory class. It was terrible.

CG: I know you've said a little bit about this, but, can you describe your current living situation?

LP: Oh, I've never been in as much peace in my life as I am now. Caity, when I tell you that when I moved out of my mom's house, I felt bad. Of course, I felt that but at the same time, a huge weight was visibly lifted off my shoulders, not just my shoulders, but my spirit. Oh, I come home every single day and I have a bed to sleep in. My grandma was living by herself. And she got three bedroom house. My room, we're in the basement right now. Have my own room right here. Have some furniture and big old TV right here, couches, relaxing area. If I wanted to invite people over, have a nice place to chill at and don't have to worry about kids running around here. Don't have to worry about someone hitting me up saying "hey, can you take me to the store right now? Hey, can you go pick this up for me?" I don't have to worry about any of that. I don't have to worry about car expenses. Because the car that I was paying, for the most part, since I first got a job, since I moved out my parents house was taken away from me. So even though it sucked, I was able to work around that. Because when I moved out, I already made my schedule set. So that way, it wouldn't collide with my grandmother's schedule. So, she allows me to use her car when she's at home because all she wants to do is stay cooped up in her bed and watch TV.

Which is perfectly fine for me, since I'm the one who wants be out and about doing stuff. All I do is go to work. I go to work and I come home. So, I can't say I'm out and about doing stuff. I go to work. Oh, and I also go to the gym, but I already prepared myself for peace. And now that I got peace, I could look around and go oh, it's peaceful. Oh, I don't have to hear no screaming, no hootin and hollerin. I can watch TV when I want to. I can sit down and play on my keyboard, play around with some different chords. I can write some song lyrics, awesome experience I got. I've never had privacy. Now I have all the privacy in the world. It's not like I do anything. I'm an open book. So, it's great.

CG: Do you feel like having more privacy has had an impact on your mental health?

LP: Most definitely. And then with the lack of stress from having to worry about what everyone else is doing. I just focus on me, myself in my Grammy. It's cool. So, it's great. Stress, I already have enough stress with my job with Smoothie King. And then some of the stress I get for some of my classes, which after midterms, I'm not as stressed out anymore, because my grades for the most part are where I want them to be. And I'm doing pretty well in my classes. And then not only that, but I feel like I built such good friendships in some of my classes. That is so much easier doing the course because I'm not doing the work by myself anymore. I can do collaborations with people, I can set up Zoom calls and call someone up and be like, "hey, you want to go over and have a nice little quick study session of what we just learned?" They'd be like, sure. I don't. It's great. My mental state is so much better now. So much better.

CG: With the more interpersonal connections that you've been able to focus on, how have you been able to impact the people around you positively?

LP: I'm gonna start off with this girl named Madison, who's in my music business class. I call her Maddie. So, she gets very anxious. She's very smart. She's very intelligent. She's a very diligent student. But she gets so anxious and gets so lost up in her head that we often work together and I'll be like, Hey, calm down. You're doing great. You're so smart. I'm lucky to have you as my partner. Because that means that all the information I'm lacking, which is a lot of information you will supply me with and I would take that information and phrase it in the best ways for us to put it on paper or put in our assignments. So, it's a great partnership. And she was telling me, she'd be like man, you're was so positive. You make my life so much easier and here's the thing. I feel like I'm hijacking off her success. Because she knows what she is doing. She just doesn't have the confidence in herself. All I got to do is be basically be her cheerleader and be like, Hey, you got this girl! We got this in the bag! It's okay! And we both come out with good grades. It's like, oh! And then with some people in oral history, for example, I feel like I made some actual friends. Hit people up sometimes be like, Hey, can you help me on a Zoom call, hey, you're free to talk, man, let me tell you what's going on right now. Just some random story. Just something to stay connected with you guys. And you Caity, you're so sweet, so calming. I'm always energetic, and all the way out there, and you just be calming my soul, appreciate it. But I really, I'm grateful for the fact that all my classes, I set up group chats on Instagram, or ask people for their contact information. And I can reach out to people in all different fields. I'm setting myself up to have future business partners and future relationships. And that's the whole reason why I appreciate Colombia and all you guys.

CG: Has this helped in your adjustment to life during the pandemic?

LP: Most definitely. Because since I can't just ask you, "Hey, can you come over?" Or, "hey, can we meet up somewhere in person?" I just go, "Hey, you wanna hop on Zoom call?" I just put on one t-shirt, I don't have to dress fancy, I don't have to worry about the weather outside. So, all I have to do is just turn the heat up, and then I just be chilling in my house. I don't have to worry about doing extra stuff to try and impress you guys or worry about splitting the bill at a restaurant or possibly paying for your food or fighting with somebody on them trying to pay for my food. I don't have to worry about all that. Because I'm four hours away from you. And we just sitting here on this Zoom call. That's great.

CG: Kind of with being in school and being able to connect with all these people. How have you been able to stay motivated? Or have you been motivated at all?

LP: My ambitions, or my motivation. Me knowing that I'm going to be famous. Me telling myself "Hey, this is what you got to do to get to the point where you want to be." Ever since I was five years old, I've wanted to be an actress, watching Disney Channel. And watching Cartoon Network or Nickelodeon, all different shows that I watched growing up, I wanted to be part of that I wanted to do those type of things. Because of how involved with music I am listening, watching live performances from people that I love and respect. And thinking man, I would love to meet them someday. I don't have to be a famous actress or a famous singer on stage to meet them. I could be a famous podcaster or I'd be on famous radio station and invite them on my show to interview them. It's like wow, there's so many, I have options. And that's what keeps me motivated is keeping my dreams alive. If I didn't have any ambition or didn't have any motivation, I would just stay depressed and walking around aimlessly and just have no hope for the future. With situations that I've been in and had to deal with growing up that's what kept me alive.

CG: Kind of were jumping into precautions for COVID. How have your practices for avoiding COVID evolved or changed in the span of leaving high school all the way to now?

LP: Buying some disinfectant spray and a bunch of bottles of hand sanitizer. I was already a clean freak. I come from family clean freaks so it wasn't too much. It just seemed like we got worse, like our level clean is just (makes speed sound). It just leveled up since COVID hit. Because I invite someone over and I will literally, as soon as they walk out the door, grab my disinfectant spray. Spray the doorknob, spray the handle, spray places I know they weren't even in, just because. Let it circulate in the air. Be like a human Typhoon. Trying to spread all the disinfectant spray everywhere else. I spray couches, spray pillows, throw things away even if they weren't nearby or touching it. So just keeping up with that anxious ooh, I don't want COVID. That's basically it.

CG: Since a lot of this stuff happened during the summer, how have your summer plans changed during the pandemic?

LP: It's crazy that you mentioned that. My summer plans have not changed that much. I was planning on being a workaholic and then transferring to Columbia when the semester started.

That was it. Being a workaholic, transferring at the semester's start, possibly meeting some people in person, I still ended up meeting a couple people in person, but it wasn't like I was talking to anyone that much anyway. So yeah, it really helped out that I moved out of my mom's house over the summer. I wasn't planning on that happening just yet. I was looking forward to moving to Chicago. So, I was like, Oh, I just need to hold out for a few more months, few more months. But then once I decided I wasn't going to go to Chicago because of the pandemic, because my family was worried and was telling me stay home, save up money. Keep your job. And that's when I got promoted up to assistant manager, my job from all the extra work I was doing over the summer. It just made sense for me to stay. So, I did. And I'm in a much better household.

CG: So, kind of talking about summer, when did you or how did you learn about the murder of George Floyd?

LP: Instagram. And hearing it from co-workers. At my job, I usually don't find out about people's deaths until I look up something or something will pop up on Google about it. Or someone will post on their story on Instagram about it, then you'd see a whole bunch of videos. My Grammy Monica's big on seeing everything that involves with Black Lives Matter movement, political stuff, she's always posting things on her Facebook and sending me videos through Messenger. So yeah, Instagram and friends and family are the people who told me about it.

CG: What was your response?

LP: Thinking, Man, another one? Wasn't the first. It wasn't the first, not the last. I'm not gonna say I'm immune to it, but it's not surprising. And then how some people act like this the first time something like this happened. It's crazy because I could think of some other people and think of different situations or think of different videos that I've seen that showed messed up stuff. None of this is new. And for people who think that that was the beginning of something or became this huge beginning of civil war that's most likely going to happen. It's kind of sad, because it makes you think, man, people literally been living under a rock this whole time or people just are that ignorant, that they're just now finding out that this is a serious thing. Oh, no.

CG: When you say kind of a civil war, what do you mean by that?

LP: Between black people and white people, between citizens and police officers. It's getting to the point where all the riots and stuff started happening over the summer. There was talk about another Civil War happening, like through Instagram through Twitter, since the end of 2019. So, when all this stuff started happening, it really does seem like hey, all these attacks are happening. People are forming up different organizations, different groups to commence attacks, or destroy different properties and stuff like that. It seems like the Civil War is happening.

CG: When did you start hearing about the protest? And also, I guess, subsequently, the riots?

LP: Started hearing about the protests? Well, I've always heard about protests here and there, or seeing clips and videos about like this person's family gathered up to bring this police officer down for the killing of this family member and whatnot. Or, this black man deserves to get out of

jail because this white person was able to get away with it without trial. for killing so-and-so such-and-such, you see those stories happen all the time, that it just, you start getting, I guess immune or just used to it happening. So, I noticed that that was happening on a bigger scale or more frequently, in May and June. Because then it started happening like down the street from where I was living at. You see protests happening and all these people standing around. And then you think wow, they're really doing that when all this stuff with this pandemic's happening. And I was nervous about that because cases still increasing and people not being safe. There's so much going on at one time. Summertime was crazy. I was glad I just focused on work.

CG: How do you feel social media impacted the Black Lives Matter movement?

LP: Social media tells you everything. Especially since everyone's all up in each other's business, they post videos, about what's happening to them, what they're seeing from different sources, things blow up in a day, you see multiple people multiple accounts showing the same story getting it out there. Social media is literally, I wouldn't say, I guess the best way of saying social media embraces both sides or embraces how many people know about it or increases the amount of people that know about it. That's the best way I can describe it.

CG: Why do you feel like the social justice movements are happening now? And do you think some of it's been exacerbated by COVID?

LP: Most definitely, I believe, because of people's mental states from Corona and having to be locked down. It made them focus more on the problems that was happening to them and the things they felt were unfair with our justice system. So, Corona just, I have to say Corona. Made people pinpoint certain—Hmm, aspects of their misery. I think that's the best way to describe. I think COVID caused people to be isolated with their own thoughts, and emotions and feelings. And it just made everyone's frustration, feel 10 times more powerful, because that's all they were able to think about. Anytime you're in your own, you're moody, or you're isolated. People tend to focus more on the negatives in their life than the positives. And I believe that the social movement proved that. During isolation, people needed a way out. And they reach past their breaking point in their mental states and had no choice but to let it out. The best way they could.

CG: Also leaning into some more political things, there is a presidential election this year. And did you follow it at all?

LP: I'm going to be honest with you, I wasn't too much of a fan of politicians, and all that crap anyway. I just knew that Joe Biden was going to be the person I voted for. Because, of course, America only focuses on Democrats and Republicans. And obviously, I didn't want Trump to stay in office, every single time you watch a video of him giving a speech or some debate, you can't help but either push pause, exit video, take a breath and just laugh out of frustration in what he says. Because it makes no sense. Especially when you see in a video where he's standing up with his microphone, and then the camera will show his team. And some of his teammates will look like, I don't know what he's saying. We need to stop him now. But he still won't listen. Makes me lose faith in America and faith in humanity, period. Because common sense is not very common now. It's not. And it makes me feel frustrated people I deal with on a regular basis, because they'd be doing some of the same habits, like not answering questions clearly, or

wanting to skip over, move on and talk about something that's completely irrelevant to the topic at hand. So, I wasn't watching the debate. I just knew vote for Biden, get Trump on office. That was all I cared about. Because every single time you listen to some debate, listen to some lecture. There's faults on both sides. You're just thinking, Man, this America, this is where we live. I was on the phone with a friend of mine last night. And this, these were his exact words. It makes you feel like an ant in a jungle. And all you want to do is just go back to your home, because you're too small to change something that's so fast and bigger than you are. And I thought about that for a while. And I said, Man, that's so true. You hear about all of our political leaders or people in power, just the education system or all sorts of things that we have no choice but to live through. And it's like, Man, this sucks. How can we actually change it? And then you're thinking, man, you can't, because you're just doing it. And this is the jungle.

CG: Well, if you had the power to change any of these things like what? What kind of changes would you want to see?

LP: Oh, if I had the power to change the school, just the education system, I believe that's the biggest reason why we have so many problems in America, is because America makes us focus on things that are so insignificant. That people have to grow up and find information out on their own. And by the time they find out useful information, it's already too late. Or it wasn't that impactful. Then because the situation already happened. So it's like, well, now that I know this, what can I change. Like the law, a lot of people don't know reasons or how to go about, what do I say, lots of legal issues involved, or some people don't even know how to set up bank accounts. How credit works. Best ways of getting a good credit score, best ways of how to be an interview, or market yourself, be an entrepreneur. None of these things are things that schools focus on teaching you, or by the time they want to teach you it. It's at an age where you should already have basic knowledge or proficient knowledge on these things. They want to tell you, know the history of America, even though we're not going to give you the full history, or even though we're just gonna focus on, I shouldn't say this, focus on writing facade, whatnot. But yeah, I want to change the education system tell people to focus more on business, more on creations, the creative side of things like music. I would love for all Americans to be at least bilingual. Know a different culture or know a different language besides English, especially since no one knows proper English for real anyways. Try speaking to an English teacher, you don't know how the words come out their mouth. Why? Because we all don't know.

CG: Going back to the election, how did you cast your vote?

LP: Oh, Mom picked me up. We went down to this elementary school that was collecting votes and whatnot. So, we were social distance. I got a sticker. Gave my information. took me to, or I went to a booth sat down, was out of that place in 10 minutes, had my "I voted" sticker, took the picture. There we go.

CG: How do you feel about the outcome of the election?

LP: So many thoughts running through my mind. Hilarious. And then finding out information from a couple of Trump supporters that I know and they were talking about. We found out that Michigan cheated because they didn't know how to count votes. Or they counted people who

weren't even registered to vote, which was unfair. Hearing all these different things, and then people being confused on whether or not Trump is still president or Trump's in office or Biden won. I said Biden won. Regardless, he won. That's all I had to say about it. That's all I was thinking. Now, I ignored all these people who kept on trying to change the results like, look, what's done is done. We're going to move on.

CG: So how had the election affected your relationships with family or friends?

LP: It hasn't, because all I had to do was just tell myself, even if I didn't agree with them, or they said something, that in my mind, I'm thinking, Man, you're so dumb, man, you're so stupid. I just had to squish that voice that was in my head telling me that and tell myself look. We're not in politics. They're not a politician. So, I don't have to pay much attention what they got to say, involved with politics. And then I'd say let's just talk about some random. Let's just talk about something else. And boom, that's all we had to do. I just had to put whatever they said in my do not think about box and keep moving.

CG: Moving on to our reflection portion. What aspects of life did you take for granted before the virus?

LP: Seeing people in person. I didn't think I took that for granted, because I really appreciated being in someone's presence. Being able to hug. Oh, hug. Yes. Hugs, the impact of a hug, I give the best hugs to people. And I was grateful that I'm at least able to hug my employees. Since I see them every day. See them on a regular basis, if we're gonna catch Corona we're going to catch Corona, both of us. But and handshakes, being able to shake someone's hand when you introduce yourself. So now, I love that. And now Oh no, the most you can do maybe elbow. Some people say oh no, six feet or six feet apart is like, Oh, I feel so touch starved and it's pretty bad.

CG: How do you feel about the future?

LP: If I could feel this peaceful now. And I'm making connections and being connected. So many people make an impression on people in just a few months time, I know that I will achieve my goals. And that's all I gotta tell myself. It's all got to do is just keep it moving, keep pushing, you'll be successful, no matter what you do. Just stay at it. Corona may be a roadblock. But I'm still in college. I still made it. It's still working out just fine. Got my schedule set for next semester. All I got to do is do the same thing while I'm doing now. Next semester. Keep it moving.

CG: Is there anything you feel like Colombia could be doing differently?

LP: I think Colombia is doing a pretty good job. We didn't have to shut down. Hybrid classes are still going on. So obviously y'all are doing something right. I wasn't too worried about Colombia in the first place because of the fact that it's a relatively small school, which I appreciate. And it's divided up in different buildings and whatnot. There's different buildings for dorms, and trying to encourage people to social distance as much as possible. Y'all doing great. Keep it up.

CG: How do you feel like you've changed as a person since the beginning of quarantine up until now?

LP: Like I said earlier, being more selfish and not so selfless. Of course, I still care about people, I'm still interested in find out what's going on with you. I want to know more about you as a person. I hope that you listen to me and want to learn more about me as a person. But I'm still goofy. I'm still very energetic, very passionate. I guess in some cases, I've mellowed out a little bit. I was always like, yeah, and loud and whatnot. Now I got an indoor voice. I still get loud sometimes. But I have an indoor voice now. So got a little bit more mellow since quarantine happened. Me being by my lonesome and always surrounded by loud people and only being able to get heard if you have a little screaming match with your Auntie's or other members of the family. So I think I've gotten more wise. Because being a manager, I had to not focus on myself so much focus more on other people get to know their personal stories, I was able to connect with people on an emotional and mental level. And all I can do is just take what I've learned, and hope that I can positively impact someone else's life. And hope more people are willing to listen to what I got to say and have a conversation with me. Hit me up randomly one day and just be like, Hey, what's going on with you instead of me always being the person to reach out to someone hope that some people would bother reaching out to me. And it still hasn't happened much yet. But I'm just going to keep doing what I'm doing and hope that it happens.

CG: What do you think would happen in your life with the Coronavirus last well into next year?

LP: I'd still be doing what I'm doing. Still being in peace, kind of being patient to go to Chicago, because I really want to go down there. But the main reason why I was so eager is just so antsy about going right away. Get out of mom's house. I'm out my mom's house now. So, there's no rush. And even if I don't end up going to Chicago until like my, into my sophomore year, my junior year. I'd still be making connections. Because we found out ways to work around the hole not seeing each other in person thing. And just hope that other people value my friendships or value friendships with me as much as I value my friendships with you guys. And just Stay connected, hopefully.

CG: what are your thoughts on online communication?

LP: I think it's fun. Especially when people, oh, let me tell you this, I hate absolutely cannot stand doing group work with people who refuse to turn their cameras on, you're looking at what, I'm staring at a blank screen. And I'm like, dang. And then sometimes you don't even hear from them. So, you know, they're not even in the classroom. When teachers put you in breakout rooms to work on in class assignment, my dislike for group work just grew even more. I always hated having to work in groups on projects. And so especially if I can't even pick my own partners, it sucks. Because then my grades not only dependent on my work, but other people's work and then sides are the cut, I have to make up for their slack and end up getting them a good grade. Because I went above and beyond to make sure I get a good grade. I care about my grades, I really do. And man, online learning is cool and all I love not having to worry about man, I put pants on let me get my socks and shoes, no I can still being my flip flops and put on a shirt. Sometimes I angle the camera up so that way it's only at my neck, my face, because I feel putting on nothing besides my nightgown. Not having to worry about all the extra preparation

steps to take and having to go outside. And sometimes I don't want to deal with people. I know I'm a very outgoing people person. But, after not having privacy for over two years. And finally gain privacy I'm taking it, Taking advantage my alone time so much as possible. But with online learning it's great when the people you're working with or people you meet are on the same wavelength as you are. I'm not saying you got to be as energetic and outgoing and always got something to say. But just having the whole Hey, we're in the classroom, let's have a conversation, let's discuss what's going on and fuel my classes. It's been really nice. It's really nice. Being able to have just talks about different opinions, different perspectives, and what we learn in our classes. My music business class, I found out a lot about the music industry. I don't think I could take another business of music class again. Because of all the knowledge that's in this class. Has been a struggle, had cleanup headaches, I'm pretty sure I'm gonna have plenty more by the end of semester. But my intro radio class has some really good conversation in there too. Especially, even with the professor. I'm telling you, almost all of my classes, just one class. But all my classes, I'll be having some good conversations with my teachers. And we just be talking about all different stuff, all different industries, different people, different perspectives on things. Online learning is pretty fun, because you get to find out about how it's like in different locations, like some of the people in our oral history class, I got to find out from few of our classmates, by how it's like in the places they lived in and where they travel to and seeing pictures of their experiences, see the projects and stuff they working on. So, it's cool that I still get to connect with you guys through a computer screen because I was so worried that that wasn't possible or that wasn't going to happen. And you proved me wrong. Keep proving me wrong. About negative stuff not positive stuff because I like being right. But,

CG: As a minority, did you feel like the pandemic affected you in any way? In that sense or not at all? How did it affect that?

LP: Like I said, I still got to be ambitious and know that I'm going to succeed as a black, Hispanic, female. I completely understand how it's like as a minority, especially in a country where men are in power. White men in power. White supremacy is a huge thing. Most of the people in power and leadership positions or to have the money are white, and male and just hearing or having to deal with so much sexism and making me be like feminists! Feminism is key. Woman empowerment. I got this. I will defeat you. Weird, but yeah, I just have to keep moving, keep it pushing, no matter what someone says about me, or says that I can't do, I just got to prove them wrong, just tell them. He wants their own stuff. Just watch it. Just watch me. You will see my name on stadiums. You gonna see my name on something good. Not on the news, hopefully not news unless it's something great because I made an award or did something like that. But I grew up having to listen to people telling me I can't do it. Or there's been plenty of people who told me that as a woman. I'm too independent, or I'm doing too much, or no dude is going to be interested in me because of how? Uh, I am. I know I'm a lot. I know, it's a lot to deal with if you're not used to direct blunt, extra energy. I get it. But I'm not going to change myself for anyone else. Or try to lower myself to some of those expectations or standards, especially like in a relationship. Every relationship I've been in, I've only been in four, I didn't start dating till high school, and I haven't had a boyfriend since the end of my senior year. But every relationship I've been in, the dude was basically leeching off of me, and wanted me to accommodate for things that they wanted that they were too lazy to do themselves. Like, I've never once been with someone who had a job and tried having a partnership. That's all I look for in relationship is

partnership. I want a life partner, a companion to go through all the difficulties in life together. And just dealing with immature people, immature mindsets. It doesn't seem like I can really connect to someone my own age, I just turned 19. So it's like, what can I really expect out of people who either rely on their parents so much take care of them or rely on--just too dependent. I've aimed for independence. Since I was little, since I was younger. I've seen how bad decisions can impact someone for the rest of our lives based on watching my family. And I didn't want to do that. And seeing so many people my own age and in this time period doing dumb stuff. I don't know what's wrong with my generation. Our generation is terrible. When I say common sense is not common, common sense is not common. Everyone want to go on do dumb stuff. All because, and then when you hear people say I'm here for a good time, not a long time. I can't help but look at them like they're dumb. And let me tell you something else. So, it's a common theme in my family for the female to get pregnant and have a baby a 16. Having my mom, my auntie, both of my Grammys on my dad's side and my mom's. So, my mom had me when she was 16. And I watched her, since I was born, struggle because she made a bad decision. And then when she had my little sister, she was like 23, 24. And just seeing her health now. And seeing how much work she has to do taking care of other people instead of worrying about taking care of herself and her two kids. I don't want to end up like that. I'm 19 years old. I'm still a virgin. I'm so proud. Because my family, my mom, one of the reasons I had so many issues going on with her high school is because just because I had a friend, she thinks I'm going to be out and about or think that I was going to do all the stupid stuff she did. And I was the exact opposite. Like when I say I did everything in school, I did everything in school. I wasn't out the house to go have fun, to be rebellious to my parents. I was about making my money. Building up accolades to look good for college, building up accolades to look good for a job moving up in my job and just being successful, because most of my family is not successful. They struggling. I'm watching a lot of people my own age doing stupid stuff that see I my family do and they've seen people do it too, and yet they're doing it themselves because some people out here think that in order for them to experience something or know that something isn't right, they have to experienced it themselves? No, dude, you can what, you see what happens to be when they do the same stuff you don't right now? Do you see a good outcome? No. Do you think that you should be out here trying to pop babies when you're still a kid? No, you can't even take care of yourself. Why you trying to take care of another person? Not just a baby, but just putting other people's lives in your hands. If you don't even have your own life in your hands, what are you doing? I'm doing everything I can to make sure that I can put my life in my hands and I will be successful. So if I ever want kids, or if I ever actually found someone who's on the same mentality and same wavelength as me, if I ever managed to find that, I don't want something like, Oh, we messed up, or we did this. And now we have kids, like, I don't want anything dumb, that I know I shouldn't do stop me from having the life I've always wanted. Being successful, being on stage, accepting awards, being able to give out speeches that's heard across the country, across the world, having other people listen to my voice, having other people interested in what I have to say about different topics. I grew up saying I wanted to be a motivational speaker. I wanted to be able to reach the hearts of so many people. And I'm going to do that.

CG: Talking about changing the hearts of people, what are your values and have they changed over the time of the pandemic?

821 LP: None of my values changed over the time of the pandemic besides the value of the hug. I've
822 always been such an affectionate person, I love giving hugs, I love. Some people find it
823 uncomfortable, but when I'm in the process of talking with people, like talking with you, for
824 example, if you're sad and everything like that, I find it comforting, if I like pet your head or
825 massage your scalp or over here, I put my hand like on your back rub and I can tell you it's
826 gonna be okay or I squeeze you in for a huge hug. And being genuine. I think that's my biggest
827 highlight is I'm such an open book. I don't have any ulterior motives, no suspicious activity,
828 nothing about me that's like, let me act a certain way this person see how they react, like how
829 most people are? I'm straight up. I'm honest. I'm blunt and direct. If you ask me a question, I'm
830 going to answer the question. If I'm uncomfortable with answering the question, or if I'm
831 uncomfortable going into specific detail, I'll just give you the gist of it. But I'm not going to leave
832 you hanging, I'm not going to purposely lie to you or be manipulative and try taking from you
833 what I want and whatnot. So biggest value, my opinion, is just being genuine. No one can go
834 against what, nobody has a chance or no one has a choice, but to accept whatever I say at face
835 value. Because they, what do I have to hide?

836
837 CG: I know you said your mental health has improved immensely over this time. But, is there
838 anyone that you talk to about your concerns or what's going on with you?

839
840 LP: I guess I talk to my Bestie about things, but for the most part I just, like I said I keep moving
841 focus on solutions to problem instead of just focusing on the fact that there's problem going on.
842 And I talk to anyone who's willing to listen, talk to my manager at my job. I talk to you guys and
843 classes, talk to teachers who asked me to elaborate on experiences, I'd hop on Zoom calls in the
844 Career Center to get connected with people and give some advice, offer people my perspective
845 on things because they'd ask me questions. And yes, I talk to everybody. But I talk to anybody.
846 And then in times where I don't feel like I have anyone to talk to then I just confide in music.

847
848 CG: What do you think people will look back on the most as part of this pandemic?

849
850 LP: Isolation. There's some people who, I'm lucky enough to have pretty good and pretty decent
851 communication skills because I worked at it. And there's some people who just too afraid of
852 opening up somebody or being able to just say what's on their mind or being able to put their
853 thoughts into words. So this pandemic really, I guess, made people focus on the fact that man, I
854 really too need to work on this or man, I really am bad at communicating. Who can I talk to?
855 How can I talk to somebody about this? I think those are some of the most common thoughts that
856 go through someone's head is, how can I confide in someone, if it's hard for me to even open up.
857 And being an isolation, I guess it really makes people crave some form of attention, some form
858 of love, some form of affection. There's a lot of people I know who grew up with their families,
859 basically, some people around St. Louis, call it the thug style, or the thug life, where people,
860 especially dudes who grow up with the mentality of, you'd be a sissy if you cry, or you'd be
861 called bad words and stuff if you open up somebody, or let someone know what's going on
862 inside your head. But I don't think that at all. It's best to be open, it's best to confide in people, it's
863 best to be honest with yourself and be honest with the people around you. Otherwise, the
864 problems just going to stay a problem and you won't find a solution. Bettering communication
865 skills is one of my goals. I plan on starting a podcast soon. And that's going to be one of the

866 highlights to it is bettering people's communication skills by talking about different stories with
867 different life experiences that people usually don't talk about.

868

869 CG: As we're wrapping up, is there anything you'd like to add to whatever we've covered in the
870 interview?

871

872 LP: As many negative things, that you can think about in Corona, and can think about what
873 happened in your own lives, for anyone who's listening to this. Try to focus on the positives.
874 Like I said, if it wasn't for this pandemic, I'd most likely be an orphan right now, because the
875 surgeries my mom was supposed to have. Thanks to the pandemic, I still have my momma. I can
876 still see her, I can still talk to her. Despite wanting to be out of her house so bad, I was able to
877 move out. I'm now in a more peaceful state of mind than I ever was in my whole life. So, there's
878 a lot of negative things happening in the world right now with this pandemic, with social
879 movements, et cetera, et cetera. But, please try to remember the people that you care about and
880 care about you. Don't take people for granted. If you haven't already learned, this pandemic and
881 isolating yourselves from them. It's okay to say, hey, I missed you. Or, hey, is it okay if we talk?
882 I'm in a bad state of mind right now. Just doing something simple as that can change your whole
883 life and change your mood for the rest of the day. So,

884

885 CG: Alright, well, thank you so much.