



**Kate White**  
**Wine consultant, Winebow**  
**Athens, GA**  
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**Interviewer: Michelle Little**  
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**Project: COVID-19 and Foodways**

**Michelle Little:** So today is June the 8<sup>th</sup> of 2020, and this is Michelle Little interviewing Kate White for the Southern Foodways Alliance COVID-19 Oral History Project, and we're conducting our interview today remotely via Zencast and Zoom in the new remote world of interviewing. And to get us started, Kate, if you'll just introduce yourself, your age, where you're based, and the line of work you're in.

[0:00:36.0]

**Kate White:** Sure. I am forty years old, and I am in Athens, Georgia. I am a certified sommelier by trade and I make my living being a wine consultant for Winebow, a [wholesale] distributor in Georgia.

[0:00:56.5]

**Michelle Little:** And how long have you been with Winebow? And maybe just tell me a little bit about what you did leading up to Winebow.

[0:01:03.1]

**Kate White:** Yeah. So I've been with Winebow nearly three years now, and distribution is something I really wanted to get into because it was a sustainable way—and by sustainable, I mean a steadier salary, a higher pay, and frequently with benefits, compared to a lot of work I've done in the past in food and beverage, which is working for small private restaurants.

[0:01:31.6]

**Michelle Little:** Okay. Can you tell me a little bit about your territory that you cover with Winebow and maybe what a typical day or workweek looked like for you, at least pre-COVID?

[0:01:53.2]

**Kate White:** Sure. So for sales reps, even within my company, much less all other distributors, my territory is unique in some ways. There are a lot of sales reps who have only restaurants to service and, alternately, there are sales reps that have only retail or off-premise to service, but my territory is a mixed bag. I am truly a territory. I am Athens and surrounding areas. There's very little overlap with other sales reps. So really what that means is I will service very small accounts like convenience stores that are very casual, sometimes very rural or that alcohol is almost a second thought to their business, and then on the other end of the spectrum, I frequently service on-premise retail restaurants that are very high-end and wine is very much what they're known for or a huge part of their business. So that's the scope of accounts that I have.

And then what was maybe the second part of that question, pre-COVID—

[0:03:18.1]

**Michelle Little:** Yeah, like, what was a typical day, and I know there's not always a typical day, so maybe a typical week.

[0:03:25.3]

**Kate White:** There are lots of my accounts that have—we have a fixed schedule with each other, so on Monday morning, without fail, I would go see Mark at Five Points Bottle Shop and we would look at the numbers and his depletion rates for the last week and we would start, if not finish, an entire order for the Five Points stores that are here in Athens, Georgia. Then I would have “This is kind of what Monday looks like. These are the people I need to go see on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, so on.”

Then I would fill in the gaps usually with restaurants who had a need, and part of consulting is scoping out what I can do for a restaurant, what I might have to offer, going to find things in my portfolio that might suit them, sampling them, and then circling back around and saying, “Hey, how do you like this? This is the price. Does it work for your menu? Do you like it? Can we put it on your menu?”

I hope I answered your question there.

[0:04:39.6]

**Michelle Little:** Yeah, and did you also—you go into the office—

[interruption; recorder turned off]

[0:04:56.9]

**Michelle Little:** So let me get us rolling. Okay. We’re recording again. So we were talking about the typical workweek for you, and you usually—do you have to go in to your Winebow office at some point?

[0:05:15.7]

**Kate White:** So while I'm in Athens, my office for Winebow is an hour and a half away in Austell, Georgia, just outside of Atlanta, and I try to minimize my commute, but there are, of course, times where I do need to go in. A lot of that is because—and what we're finding out more and more—face-to-face sales and working with people, being in their company can be powerful and important, and there are, of course, a lot of things in wine that will never be able to be done remotely. I can tell you about this Rhone I have down here, and I can tell you all day long, but it really doesn't drive anything home unless you taste it. So a lot of times, employees who are far away, such as myself, do go into the office, if nothing else, so that we can taste our own products without pulling samples of them or have an idea of “Okay, I tasted this. Now I know I definitely want to pull a sample, because I have an account that would absolutely love that and has a need for it on their menu.”

[0:06:25.8]

**Michelle Little:** Gotcha. And what is your favorite thing about the work that you do?

[0:06:33.0]

**Kate White:** Hands down, bar none, the relationships that I have with these businessowners and buyers. It's a small town, and I feel certain one of the reasons I got the job is that I do have—I had preexisting relationships with a lot of these buyers, and that always bodes in my favor. They know me, they trust me, and we like each other. So that's my favorite part, is maintaining relationships that are very positive.

[0:07:08.2]

**Michelle Little:** Yeah. Okay. So moving into the spring, what are your early memories? Like, what do you remember the first time you heard about the coronavirus? Like, what do you remember about February and March and starting to learn about this pandemic?

[0:07:36.4]

**Kate White:** I remember having a lot of questions that couldn't necessarily be answered and knowing very much that no one would be able to predict a lot of outcomes that would be handy to know the answer to, and it unfolded knowing certain answers, will restaurants have to close, will this affect the restaurant industry. Absolutely. But even now, how long will this affect the restaurant industry? Still don't particularly know. The answer is, more than two months. And then how will this permanently change the restaurant industry? So those were questions I've been asking since early spring and continue to ask now.

[0:08:32.8]

**Michelle Little:** So I think you mentioned the other day when we were talking that UGA [University of Georgia] was already on spring break, maybe, when the shutdown orders came through. Is that right?

[0:08:52.4]

**Kate White:** Yes, it is. I'll speak to that a little and give maybe a scenario that other sales reps in college towns are experiencing, and sales reps from alcohol to non-alcohol, for sure. There are so many southern towns that are college-dependent, and Athens is certainly not an exception to that. Clarke County is actually a very poor county, and a lot of people don't see it that way because they see the Land Rovers, the fancy cars frequently driven by students, and that money is often not from around here, whether it be small towns, Carrollton, there's wealth from a lot of places. But let's face the facts. It's primarily Atlanta money, and when those students aren't here, their money is with them, away from us.

So when COVID hit, students were on spring break, and UGA called it fairly early and said school would not resume in the capacity of face-to-face or on campus, for certain. They shut the campus down. And because students were already away, they never came back. It's really easy to look at my sales records year to year and you can find, even without a timeline, you can find the slumps, right, like, "Oh, sales were right about here. This dip must have been spring break, and then this two-and-a-half-month dip was very obviously summer break." So now there's a permanent dip for me where there are no students, they're not going out to restaurants.

And also important, which I don't think I mentioned to you the other day, is how many times do these students bring their parents to town. So at this point, one of the huge moneymakers for Athens, especially restaurants, is graduation dinners, and there's regular undergrad graduation followed by a law school graduation, and restaurants know and have historically had this opportunity to book the restaurants for four days straight,

three turns in the restaurant. They very much depend on that money, and that all evaporated this year.

So I hope I've answered your question with some degree of interesting information there.

[0:11:36.2]

**Michelle Little:** Yeah, absolutely. Now, and I know you were talking about your territory being a true territory and that you have different types of clients, bottle shops, restaurants. So did that help you as opposed to—I mean, were there some of your other coworkers that just sell to restaurants—

[0:11:59.8]

**Kate White:** I love that question because it hits on one of the most emotional issues I've had during COVID, and that is watching perfectly amazing, capable, intelligent sales reps not have any control over their loss of sales. My company gives a little screenshot of the numbers every day. It's what's delivered and on a truck, and there are lots of sales reps that are just very consistent with their sales, and then because they had restaurants only in Metro Atlanta, suddenly their performance looked terrible. Of course, it's absolutely out of their hands.

So, yes, there have been some sales reps, my company and others, that have just not had, in a way, business to do, certainly not as normal. This is maybe where our favorite term, “pivot,” comes in. Companies have had to pivot. If they want to keep these people with a job, they have to assign them some retail stores to make money on

commission or they have to supplement what would be a full-commission job, in our case, with some sort of salary in the interim.

For me, I had—let’s make some rough estimates here. About 40 percent of my sales came from on-premise restaurants and then about 60 in the remainder of technically off-premise, and we could talk about industry numbers and trends all day, but there is a certain amount of obvious where, because restaurants are selling no wine right now, they’re not open for business, people will still want to get their alcohol some way or another. Now, what that alcohol is and where they are going to drink it is, of course, now going to be very different, and that’s expected, but we did see an uptick of retail sales. Now, did it totally compensate for my 40 percent on-premise loss? No, absolutely not. But a lot of that, of course, has to do with students not being back in town, so, reverting back to that circumstance, if not problem, that I would call it, that I have.

[0:14:40.4]

**Michelle Little:** So, I mean, now I’m wondering, like, just out of curiosity, are you seeing different types of liquor sales? I mean, like, are there different things selling now that you wouldn’t have expected?

[0:14:55.4]

**Kate White:** And I will speak for myself, but please recognize that not every territory is the same, although I’m sure I have some overlap with national trends. So here are my favorites and some that have surprised me. A lot of retail stores, because they wouldn’t let customers in, had a new drive-up business. Only one store in this town had an online

store where you could really peruse the inventory of a place. But because of these drive-up situations, if I—no. If you, if you were a consumer and you go into, let's say, J's Bottle Shop, it's a very well-curated retail space, and they have these little writeups, and they're very modern to catch the eye. The wines are selected not only on taste but frequently the label. Interesting labels can sometimes be totally misleading, and then other times, they really do reflect a winemaking style. This is a new, fresh kind of wine versus an old classic. So you can tell a lot from a label, and a lot of times, people will buy something that has a cool label, when, in reality, the juice inside the bottle is not anything that people walk out of the door saying, "You know what? I really feel like an Italian cococciola today. I'm going to go down to the store and find one." But they don't do that. So they shop in the store and find a cococciola, "Oh, this is interesting."

But when you drive up, you're not going to ask for an obscure grape. People go with what they know. You might say, "I'm really feeling a pinot noir or a cabernet, Malbec."

But outside of that, people aren't driving up to these retail stores and asking for, "Hey, I'll take your weirdest, most obscure bottle. I'll take a case of that. Thanks."

So what I do remember being surprised about is getting an order for one of my major retailers one day and, suddenly, what I thought was a boring wine, kind of a sluggish seller, we were selling cases of it, and it was all these basic varietal wines that they're not bad, but they weren't what I got out of bed every morning and put my pants on because I thought, "Yes, I'm going to sell a ton of these. This is super exciting." But they are paying the bills, and I'm not complaining. I'm just saying that this is a huge

difference overnight, *overnight*, on what sells and where you're really going to make your money.

And then another situation where the one retail shop that I said had an online presence. So I had this product in the store. It's called A to Z Pinot Noir, A to Z Products, and I couldn't figure why suddenly this wine—again, mediocre seller, at best, even though it's just fine, very straightforward label. Suddenly, we were selling cases of this wine, and it's because this online retailer had listed all of their products in alphabetical order, so people didn't want to just scroll forever through the entire alphabet of pinot noirs. They would, "Okay. All right. I want a red wine. I want—now we go down to [unclear]. Okay. Yeah, I know pinot noir. Sure, I'll have a pinot noir." And the first five ones, one of them is A to Z Pinot Noir, because it's at the beginning of the alphabet. It has nothing to do with where that item is located in the store, the actual store. It has nothing to do, really, with the label. It's just that people didn't have the patience to scroll through. This one's right here, click, it's in their bag, and suddenly I'm selling significantly more A to Z Products because it starts with an "A."

So, again, these are overnight changes, and something that I started juggling with immediately is how permanent are these things and do I need to adjust my sales to go with this new market? How temporary is it? I don't know. So now these things—a year ago, I never would have thought, "Oh, this will be a good seller because it starts with a 'B,' and my sales for products that start with 'A' through 'H' have a better shot of turning over than my products than my products that started with 'M' through 'Z.'" Anyway, just things that I get to think about now that I didn't have to think about in the past.

[0:20:02.1]

**Michelle Little:** That's hilarious. [laughs]

[0:20:04.7]

**Kate White:** Right. Yeah, yeah, it is. And here's a spot where I feel very lucky. The Winebow portfolio is widely varied, Michelle, and we do have a lot of these very straightforward varietals, crisp pinot grigio, Block Nine pinot noir, Black Station cabernet, and they're at a price point—we could talk about that too. People have changed how they spend their money, very much so, what they tap out at per bottle. So I have these basic products that are now my foundation for sales, and it is just a whole different day when you start selling barberas and higher-end, more obscure—so many varietals out there that, again, nobody's going to go up to the store and say, “Please let me have your weirdest—so I'll take a pecorino.” Once again, nobody's asking for that.

So I hope I completed my thought there.

[0:21:18.8]

**Michelle Little:** Yeah, yeah. So people are going with what they know.

[0:21:22.2]

**Kate White:** Yes, absolutely.

[0:21:24.7]

**Michelle Little:** Yeah, I mean, I get that. We went to an ABC [SELECT SPIRITS] store not long ago, and because you couldn't walk into the store, you could just walk in the door and then you just had to tell them what you wanted, you know, so you have to go off memory. [laughs]

[0:21:41.9]

**Kate White:** Right, yeah, and off memory is another good point to legit sales trends. There are a lot of arguments on do marketing campaigns make a difference, and this is definitely a time where I've seen numbers to back me up. People are definitely brand-oriented. So, let's say Jack Daniels, that's an easy one. People who've been drinking Jack for ages, this is their time to shine. They pull up to the to-go curbside at J's Bottle Shop and they're confident, "Yeah, I'll take a Jack Daniels 750 milliliter bottle and some bitters and a jar of maraschino cherries," and they're on their way.

But the shoppers who did, in fact, like to peruse and kind of find more, dare I say, craft—I'm sure someone from Jack Daniels would not like that I said that, but smaller distilleries that lured people in with a really great point-of-sale writeup under them from a good source, it's a lot of labels like that that have definitely been losing during COVID, for certain.

While we're on liquor, I'll also say that watching the shift of people drink more liquor has been not a surprise, but very powerful. Liquor is selling, for certain. And this is, of course, my interpretation. I think liquor is almost like a sign of the times. I equate it with Depression era. If you're really down and out, you're drinking liquor. So we've certainly seen an uptick in liquor sales.

[0:23:42.1]

**Michelle Little:** And when you say uptick, I mean, how much of an uptick are we talking?

[0:23:48.0]

**Kate White:** For me, the little tests are—let’s say I have a three-case deal of Cimarron tequila that I have placed at J’s, and I can look at my history in the computer and say that they’re buying this three-case deal about once every month and a half. Well, now it’s definitely twice a month. So store to store, depending on the product, it’s a little different, but I don’t want to quantitatively answer you; I want to qualitatively answer you and tell you significant.

[0:24:23.9]

**Michelle Little:** Yeah. I mean, since we’re not going out to bars and getting drinks, we’re all having to purchase it ourselves. Do you think it’s as simple as just like we’ve consolidated all of our purchases into what we’re consuming in our house versus splitting it over our house and a bar?

[0:24:48.7]

**Kate White:** That certainly can be it. I definitely have acquaintances and friends who, when they’re drinking at home, they almost exclusively drink beer and wine, because you open it, you pour it in a glass, and it is *that* easy. And then those same people who

definitely enjoy beer and wine, when they go to—there are, of course, so many great cocktail bars here in Athens—they go to Seabear [Oyster Bar], they wouldn't think about buying wine and beer, even though the wine and beer selection there is wonderful, but the cocktails are so good, it's their opportunity to have a cocktail that they don't have to make, peach basil simple syrup, for their spritz. Instead, Marta Kelleher [bartender at Seabear] does that for you, and they are happy to pay the price, and *that* is how they ingest their liquor. So, yes, have people started consolidating? You bet, and their cocktails at home, I feel certain, are not nearly as good, you know. [laughs]

We have also seen a certain alcohol selling more. Early COVID—I don't know as much about now—we were getting into spring and it's gin and tonic season, which everybody knows that's a warm-weather, very simple cocktail. Conveniently, we were getting warm weather, and you know that you can make it at home even if you—you don't have to be a master craftsman to make a gin and tonic that is perfectly palatable, so gin sales were up. I sold a ton of St. George, multiple-case deals that were earlier on the schedule than they ought to have been, you bet. So gin sales, people were making a lot of Manhattans at home, and then, again, to my tequila, Cimarron tequila, litmus test at J's Bottle Shop, people were definitely making margaritas at home as well. So it's that simple.

[0:26:44.2]

**Michelle Little:** Okay. And if you do not want to answer this, please don't, but just financial impact here, and I guess I've never known—but are you commission-based?

[0:27:02.2]

**Kate White:** Sure, I am, and I will speak for myself. Because this is a small town, a lot of the sales reps know each other. We've worked with each other before in years way past and then we run into each other all the time. We talk, we talk a lot. So I'll speak for me personally first. My company, I feel very lucky. Not only do I like my job—and that's great and a lot of people don't have that—even with my decrease in sales, although not nearly as dramatic as some other sales reps, my company is finding ways to supplement our income. So there was one month where—or what they, I guess, have really settled on is looking at 2019 and your sales for that year, that month, and giving you at least 70 percent of that paycheck based on baseline sales of 2019. So that makes me feel a lot better, and for a little while, that was super month-to-month and we didn't know if it would really pan out. I find it very convenient that I live in a low-cost-of-living town. I've owned my house for a while, so I'm not paying a new inflated rent or mortgage. What they are making sure I make a month is a huge sigh of relief that I will be fine, at least, that is, the short term. So I consider myself lucky.

There are companies, distributors, that have not been as kind. My company did make some cuts of sales reps, which is another place where I feel really lucky, that I wasn't the newest hired on my team, but we very much stopped there. We made one slice of cuts, and then there are other distributors that have laid off their entire on-premise sales staff. There are companies that are not supplementing commissions.

There are companies that are actually doing really well right now because of big-box sales. Grocery stores are up in wine, Sam's Club, people where they can go do all their shopping at once. So there are a lot of sales reps who are actually doing well. And I

think this is a jerk move, personally. Because they're doing so well, they've cut their commission rate. So let's say Bobby Joe from—I want to use a distributor name and I really shouldn't—from XYZ Distributing has been making a 5.8 percent commission on his sales for the last five years. So, suddenly, they roll up to Bobby Joe and say, “Ooh, actually, we're going to drop that to 4.” It's leaving the sales rep in a real bind, because the job market isn't so hot right now. The company knows that they can't go find a job somewhere else, and then they just took a pay cut, even though they're working really hard, and slightly—and by slightly, I mean a more dangerous environment. So, again, I am very thankful for what I have, even if I'm not making my 110 percent budget with bonuses. At this point, that doesn't matter to me at all.

[0:30:43.7]

**Michelle Little:** Wow. Thank goodness. I'm really glad you're with the company you're with. [laughs]

[0:30:49.6]

**Kate White:** Same here. Yeah, and things within the company have changed. They're not all fun and games. A lot of things the company had talked about for a while, trying to make sure we make profits where we can and reducing our costs, we're implementing much harder now because we have to. We want to make it to the other side of COVID. So it's not all fun and games, but, again, I really feel like I'm on the up-and-up compared to where I could be if I were working for someone else.

[0:31:27.2]

**Michelle Little:** Definitely. I mean, especially in the early days of the shutdowns, I mean, how were you actually, like, completing the logistics of your job? I mean, was there a time where you—instead of going to stores, you were doing this type of thing?

[0:31:48.2]

**Kate White:** Yeah, absolutely. It's been fun. I, as a sales rep, and my swath of buyers, this is a lot of different backgrounds that we have, a lot of different relationships with technology that we have, and we just kind of shuffled around. The question was "All right, how are we going to do this?" And the answer for some people was one thing and others was another.

I have one buyer that we had laughed several times that suddenly it doesn't matter what you look like. If somebody's FaceTiming you and you're working from home, you're going to pick up. [laughs] So we did a lot of FaceTime. We found that very enjoyable, because a lot of sales is reading body language, and if I throw out a question, to me, sometimes the best answer isn't the words that come out of your mouth but the look on your face. "Hey, do you want to buy another five-case stacker of Cousino Macul Antiguas Reservas chardonnay?"

And if they go, "Yeah, sure," "Yeah, sure," doesn't matter. I want to know about that hesitance. So there's that.

I've done some FaceTiming. I have just easily transferred a lot of my in-person appointments to over the phone, and it's that easy. Harassing people via email all the time has been a real change for me that hasn't been easy. I've typically been a person, a sales

rep, who enjoys showing up, like, “Hey, Dave, I have this Italian red wine that’s on inventory reduction right now. Let’s try it.” If I tried to sell Dave this wine in an email, that’s not always effective, but if I can say, “Here’s an ounce of this wine. Do you like it? It’s only \$6.17 right now on closeout. We only have five cases. You should order them right now,” that’s a sale. Now that doesn’t really exist.

So I don’t know if that answered your question or not. Yes, things changed, especially for retail. We had to think again, totally renew how we were going to visit meeting and getting business done. Those were relatively easy pivots.

[0:34:23.6]

**Michelle Little:** Okay. And then as the reopening phases have started—and I know Georgia opened fairly early, I guess—

[0:34:39.9]

**Kate White:** Yeah, absolutely.

[0:34:41.1]

**Michelle Little:** —how have you, I guess, continued to pivot? Are most of your restaurant clients back open or how’s the status of that going?

[0:34:54.6]

**Kate White:** Sure. I think the real answer is account to account, it’s very different. Very few people will disagree with you that Athens is a fairly liberal town, and, by and large,

the food and beverage community here, privately-owned restaurant community, so not chains, was very uneasy about [Governor] Brian Kemp reopening the state, and it's put restaurant owners in a really difficult situation. I've definitely been around to hear and see the excruciating turmoil that they have. They want for their employees to make money. They want to make money themselves, but at the same time, they don't feel good about it and they don't want to be responsible for ill public health.

So even when Brian Kemp opened the state, Athens restaurateurs—I could certainly name names here and not feel bad about it—here were 100 percent resistant, and only in the last couple of weeks have they put together to-go menus. So they're not even opening their restaurants. Now they're starting to go. It's like one step behind what the government is allowing them to do. I don't know any restaurant in my territory, any account that I have, that when Brian Kemp opened the state, they said, "Awesome. We are ready to rumble. We've been waiting for this. We feel great about it." Not a single one.

And a lot of the work involved there has been reinventing restaurants. Restaurateurs who have been at this and very successful for decades, suddenly none of us are in a comfortable situation. One of my favorite examples of this is Johnny from the Last Resort [Grill]. This man, in no small terms, he is incredibly successful, and this is the first time he had to say, "All right. We're not going to reopen our restaurant. I have to essentially recreate a wine list and a wine program based solely on to-go."

And, you know, it's odd for me. It's not uncomfortable and unhappy, but it is a new situation to talk with somebody with so much experience like him and say, "Hey, what's your game plan? Where do we want to go from here? Let's explore some

options,” and really talk through what’s working around town. A lot of restaurateurs haven’t realized that they’re competing with retailers now, so if people go pick up their to-go food, but maybe they’ve already bought a case of wine at J’s, why would they bother paying restaurant prices for wine, because they can get essentially the same caliber bottle for a third the price retail? So having to coach restaurateurs through the new challenges they face and how to avert those problems has been a huge part of my job.

[0:38:28.3]

**Michelle Little:** Wow. And so what are you—and, I mean, this is such a difficult question for everyone at this point, but, I mean, what are you expecting as we head into summer? I mean, what do you think? [laughs]

[0:38:46.3]

**Kate White:** Sure. I think a lot of things, and I don’t know if any of the things I have going through my mind are particularly concrete. So Athens has seen a growing number of COVID patients, and suddenly what was very distant to Athens and something that was happening in Jersey or Albany, hilariously, or not hilariously, rather, but Albany, fifth-largest COVID population in the entire United States, is surprising. But we felt, or I felt, and my immediate friends, we’ve discussed that we felt relatively safe in Athens, so long as you’re acting responsibly. We’re not living in fear that we’re going to get COVID. But in the last couple of weeks, we’ve known people in our community that are now being infected, and restaurant owners are very aware of this and retailers are very aware of this. But now they’ve already started letting people in their stores and they’ve

already kind of got this to-go program working, and the idea of reversing, reverting back to lockdown status is not fun or easy.

So even in the next couple of weeks, let's say Bain Mattox at Normal Bar, one of my favorite haunts, he's going to open his patio. He is, as he says, blessed with a large outdoor space where he can have people, but he would feel tremendously guilty if he were an Athens epicenter of spreading COVID. It's just a super gentle wade into the water, and so gentle that he's watching what he invests in his alcohol inventory. In case in one week, he has to shut it all down because his bartenders aren't comfortable with it, he's not comfortable with it, it'll all have to stop.

So maybe the best answer to your question, how are we going into summer, is trepidatious and ready—I wouldn't say we're ready for anything, but it might get worse from here. Certainly don't want it to be that way or certainly hoping it isn't, but a lack of students and a pandemic are not a good combination for my friends and family in food and beverage to really be doing well.

[0:41:31.1]

**Michelle Little:** Yeah. And how do you feel personally about—I mean, do you feel or do you see yourself feeling comfortable to go eat at a restaurant or drink outdoors at a bar?

[0:41:47.7]

**Kate White:** I've been kind of surprised with myself and sometimes disappointed with myself. So I do take this pandemic seriously. I do not think I'm immune. I don't think I'm better than COVID-19, and I know that my job, which, hilariously, I was considered

an essential worker—whatever. We can potentially discuss that later. So at first, I was extremely cautious about going out, even though I could, and anything that could be done by phone or Zoom, I would do that. Now I am branching out a little as accounts allow sales reps back in. I'm there and I do wear a mask. I do wash my hands to the point that they're dry and cracking.

And because I've been out doing those things, I have found that I am probably more comfortable than my immediate friends about being out as a customer and consumer in those environments, and therein lies the disappointment. From somebody who understands stay-at-home to be a very safe and responsible thing, I find myself flying in the face of it at times. So I have been out to eat at a couple restaurants already, and it's, of course, this very odd situation where, suddenly, there's Plexiglas between you and another table and the next table is actually two tables away.

It's also very interesting getting an order from a server who's wearing a mask. Personally, it's just weird. I want to go out and enjoy it, and I just haven't acclimated to this new environment yet, and I don't know if I should. Turns out I'm a decent cook. Why don't I just go home? This beans and rice ought to cost me fifty-six cents and I'm going to pay five dollars for this side of beans and rice at the local Mexicali restaurant. What am I doing? Side of beans and rice, "Side of COVID, please. Thanks." Take my order. [unclear]salt. I don't know.

Again, I hope I answered your question. Personally, it's just conflicted, and there we go.

[0:44:30.7]

**Michelle Little:** Yeah, I can't imagine, I mean, particularly in your industry, how to wrestle with what you know about the pandemic, what you know about the disease, what we should be doing versus what your community's going through. I mean, I don't know. It's such a tough situation, I think.

[0:44:54.0]

**Kate White:** It absolutely is, and even in one friend group that generally thinks alike, we're divided on what we're willing to do. I have maybe enjoyed a little finger wag from various friends of, "Kate, you don't need to do that."

"You know what? You're right. I don't. I don't need to do that. Thank you. I'll not." It's politicized. I don't know. It's friends caring about friends, about reminding them to be cautious. Yeah, it's very awkward.

[0:45:40.9]

**Michelle Little:** For sure. Well, is there anything that I have not asked or that we haven't covered that you think people should know about what you or what other people in your industry have been going through this spring?

[0:46:00.9]

**Kate White:** Sure. I think something really painful for me that is a theme, whether I want it to be or not, every day is watching my friends who are small businessowners really struggle. I believe at the beginning of the interview you asked me what my favorite part of my job was, and it's maintaining those relationships. And when you see people that

you really care about and you really respect having to reinvent themselves and not know if they're going to be around in the capacity that they want to be around a year from now, is heart-wrenching. Then you're kind of reminded that you have a business relationship, and my job is to find ways to work with them, for them.

I think that there is an emotional toll that people don't think about with sales reps and distributors, and that is it's not always just business, that you are really working for your friends, you're working for your community as a whole to keep what you knew of a happy existence. Maybe that's what I want people to know, is that, okay, it's a twenty-two-state distributor, it is, but when it comes right down to it, we're really in it for communities and the love of wine and culture and bar culture, and that's been rough.

[0:47:56.8]

**Michelle Little:** Yeah. Well, that's a beautiful way to put it. That's a good way to end. So I'm going to go ahead and stop our recording.

[End of interview]