



Alison Green
Bywater American Bistro - New Orleans, Louisiana

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[*START INTERVIEW*]

[00:00:05.18]

Rien Fertel: All right. This is Rien Fertel with the Southern Foodways Alliance. It is November the 10th, 2020, just before 2:30 in the afternoon. I'm in New Orleans in my office at home. This is the fourth COVID-19 Bywater American Bistro oral history project interview that we are doing. I'm going to have my guest introduce herself, please.

[00:00:34.05]

Alison Green: Hi, I'm Alison Green. I am currently—it's 3:30 where I am; I'm in Louisville, Kentucky. I was born on Christmas Day of 1980, so I'm pushing forty, that's very exciting.

[00:00:55.18]

Rien Fertel: Yeah.

[00:00:57.12]

Alison Green: So, yeah.

[00:00:59.21]

Rien Fertel: Tell us, where are you from? Where were you born and maybe where are you now, if you're in your hometown? I think you are.

[00:01:08.29]

Alison Green: I am. I was born and raised in Louisville, Kentucky, which is where I am right now. I'm actually at my mother's house in Louisville, so it's kind of been an interesting time being back here. I've recently moved back here because of the COVID-19 pandemic, so it's definitely a transitional place. And it's been a transitional time here with everything going on with Breonna Taylor and politically, it's been an interesting time to kind of return to my hometown.

[00:01:42.17]

Rien Fertel: I want to start by asking, how are you doing right now? How are you feeling? How does it feel to be back in your hometown? You've mentioned Breonna Taylor; how does it be to be in that flashpoint city, one of the flashpoint American cities over the past seven, eight months for Black Lives Matter? How are you doing? You can answer that however you want.

[00:02:16.05]

Alison Green: It's a complicated answer, I guess, or a complicated question to a very simple thing, is that it really is—everything is very simple in a lot of ways. It's pared down. My feelings about my personal needs and wants has been pared down to a very simple place, which makes it complicated, because those simple things are always the most difficult to kind of land. So, to answer your question about—or to talk about Breonna Taylor, it feels very important to be here right now. It's an awful thing that's happened, and it's something

that, to know sort of the history of this city, the history of a lot of the neighborhoods that are affected. I know a lot of the activists or people involved with activism here. A lot of my friends from high school have kind of returned to Louisville, so it feels like a time capsule, which also feels very alienating. I feel like, when you kind of go back to your hometown, you return to the weight of what you carried. Even, you can go off and do a million other things, but you always return to those, I think, insecurities in a lot of ways. You kind of return to those roles that you had within the city. Right now, personally, I guess I've been back six months and it feels very stagnant, personally. I think a lot of that is with the election; I think that's going to change with things kind of moving in that direction. There really hasn't been many developments with Breonna Taylor in regards to the police officers that were involved, even though there's so much more information that's coming out. [Dog barks.] My little dog would like to comment as well. [Laughter.] But, yeah, so, I'm struggling right now. I'm 100% struggling. That being said, to kind of grow up—I don't know, everybody—it makes you tough. But yeah, I think I'm definitely struggling with that. Kind of being back in a place that has so many triggers for me. So, yeah. [Laughter.]

[00:04:50.06]

Rien Fertel: Yeah. Thank you for answering that so honestly, openly. Before we talk about COVID, how did you get from Louisville, from Kentucky, to New Orleans? You can tell that story, that trajectory in any way, long or short. Basically, how did you get to Bywater American Bistro and New Orleans?

[00:05:12.10]

Alison Green: Yeah, absolutely. I'd love to tell that story. Like I said, I grew up in Louisville.

My dad was sort of this—he was, actually, kind of a Renaissance man. He was an All-State insurance agent by trade, but he also was a volunteer ski patroller at a hill you literally drove to the top of and then skied down it. It was basically almost like a landfill that was just covered with ice in Indiana. But the other thing that he did, he also was a baker, and he would do brunch. He was a brunch cook at a place called 211 Clover Lane, I think it was 211, this really great restaurant in Louisville. He was obsessed with food and just kind of this vagabond soul. New Orleans really called to him. He was going down to New Orleans several times a year throughout my entire childhood. I think the first time that I went down there was for Jazz Fest in, it would have been 1995, and it was the year—if anybody remembers that Jazz Fest—where it rained the entire time. And it was cold. That was also the year that somebody broke into our van and stole all of our stuff.

[00:06:32.09]

Rien Fertel: Wow.

[00:06:33.24]

Alison Green: So, I was in New Orleans. I had nothing. I had no clothes. My dad is, we're—it's just raining the whole time, it's cold. We're staying at one of his friend's houses. He would just let me roam around the French Quarter by myself. I'm fourteen years old at that time

—no, thirteen—or, no, fourteen. I was fourteen. But it was so funny, because I fell in love with that city. Every possible bad thing that could have possibly happened, happened, and I just loved it. So, that was kind of the beginning of my journeys down there. In regards to the mechanics of how I ended up there, when I was eighteen, I moved to Cincinnati, Ohio. I'd been working kind of at a dessert-only spot in Louisville. My first real job was at Boston Market, which then segued into this place called Sweet Surrender, which was this wild bakery in Louisville that was in this old jailhouse, right next to the train tracks, and it was completely haunted. I would be in there and the doors would open. It was wild. At any rate, that was where I started my culinary journey. I ended up in Cincinnati; got a job at a sports bar. [Dog barks.] A Steelers bar in Cincinnati, in Bengals territory; it was a trip.

[00:08:15.13]

Rien Fertel: Rough.

[00:08:13.07]

Alison Green: [Laughter.] Yeah, it was rough. Then I started working at Uno's, which kind of started planting the seed for me to move to Chicago. So, I started doing photography there; decided that it was time for me to go to college. So, I decided to go to Columbia College in Chicago, which—so, I moved to Chicago in the winter. It was December in 2002. Very smart, in the middle of winter, move to Chicago. I got mugged the first weekend that I was there, and I thought it was super pleasant, because the guy—I think

he said, "Thank you." I was like, "Cool, yeah. Here, take my sixty bucks." So, I was going to school; I took a break from the restaurant business. When I went and got back into it, first place I worked was a place called Carnivale, which is where they had the wrap party for the Dark Knight with Heath Ledger. That was a little bit before my time, but it was this huge place; we could seat eight-hundred people at once. It was just mad. So, I got my serving chops there; I really learned everything, in how to manage that space. I didn't do it well for— it was very, very difficult for, like, six months. Then I ended up going to a place called Province which was a Randy Zweiban restaurant, and then I moved over to a place called Sunda, which was kind of this new Asian spot that was a very see-and-be-seen spot, which was fine. Throughout that kind of process, you continue to meet people in the industry. There was a job opening up at Girl and the Goat, and so, I ended up moving over there and it was the first restaurant that I've ever worked at where it was truly like I could breathe.

[00:10:13.19]

Rien Fertel: Why do you think that was?

[00:10:14.16]

Alison Green: I think it was the culture. We were really empowered to give incredible service outside of the box and be exactly who we are. And there were really interesting people. I worked with a guy whose mother was a professional clown, I think his father was a minister of some sort. His name's Aaron Jewell, but we call him Jazzy, because when he

first started, he didn't really have a lot of experience. He would just drop plates and freak out. [Laughter.] But he's gone on to do, like—he was a janitor in Antarctica. I have a Sonic Youth cd that he stole from the library in Antarctica, which is absurd. [Laughter.] That he gave me as a parting gift. But I was at Girl and the Goat for many years. And my dad, in that time period, got really sick, so I was coming back and forth from Louisville quite a bit. In that year that he ended up dying, he died in October, but in that January, my best friend from Kentucky—from Louisville—she was like, "Let's rent a house for a couple of weeks in New Orleans in the winter and just go and do art." I was like, "That sounds great." I was able to get the time off of work. It was the first time I'd been back to New Orleans, this was 2014, since before Katrina, so a long time.

[00:11:57.18]

Rien Fertel: Yeah.

[00:11:59.00]

Alison Green: And it really felt good to be back there. I met a few people, I knew a couple of people and I met a few people. Then, when my dad finally passed away on October 7th, I decided I was going to come down to New Orleans for Halloween. Which, then, turned into, "I'm going to move to New Orleans in January for four months." Which then, "I'm going to live in New Orleans for six years." Classic New Orleans progression.

[00:12:34.06]

Rien Fertel: Right. Happens to everyone.

[00:12:37.16]

Alison Green: Yeah. So, that's how I ended up in New Orleans. It was that kind of Hail Mary, life's too short. I really felt the presence of what my Dad loved about the city, when I was there in October, like, really intense. I remember it was Day of the Dead and these parents were like, "Don't roll down the hill, kids!" And I was like, "No, kids, we're rolling down the hill." [Laughter.] It was insane. I was the bad influence and their kids were probably covered with dog poop. [Laughter.] Sorry. Sorry parents. But yeah, it was really intense. It was amazing. So, I decided I was going to take a year off of service. I left my job at Girl and the Goat and I remember Stephanie [Izard]'s like, "Cool. When you come back in four months, you'll just help open Duck Duck Goat." I'm like, "Yeah, great, perfect." So, I—it was nice. This year, this COVID year, has been interesting in the comparisons of me taking that time off of work. Because I had worked pretty much nonstop, in various degrees, since I was fifteen years old. So, taking the year off in New Orleans and just being in this mindset of saying yes to everything and to everyone and just being really open was such a cool—it was such a cool way to really experience the city, because I hadn't done that. I hadn't really been present for a long time. I'd saved a lot of money; I mean, we made stripper money at Girl and the Goat. It was insane the kind of money you can make in Chicago in the industry. And then the rent's cheap; my rent was half of what the rent is in New Orleans, and I'm making four times as much money.

[00:14:36.17]

Rien Fertel: Wow.

[00:14:34.23]

Alison Green: Yeah. So, when I did return to the service industry, I was working at Herbsaint, was the first restaurant—and at Mariza, actually. So, I actually worked at Mariza and Herbsaint at the same time, and then ended up kind of staying at Herbsaint. And then eventually opened Elysian bar. I had met Rosie Jean [Adams], who's the manager at Bywater. I had met her at Herbsaint. We were kind of ships passing in the night. She and my friend Emma, who was also a manager at the time at Bywater, that was kind of my segue into Bywater.

[00:15:19.08]

Rien Fertel: So, when did you start there?

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Alison Green: It was right after Mardi Gras in 20—okay, 2018?

[00:15:31.10]

Rien Fertel: Okay.

[00:15:30.25]

Alison Green: 2019.

[00:15:33.08]

Rien Fertel: 2019, okay.

[00:15:35.18]

Alison Green: 2019, yeah.

[00:15:38.21]

Rien Fertel: They opened March of 2018, so it was a year after they opened.

[00:15:42.09]

Alison Green: It was, yes. And it was so cool, because I remember when they were opening and just being really excited because of Nina. I had been really—I had kind of had my eye on that job from even before they opened, because Nina's reputation was such. I like working with straight shooters. I like working with people who really take a lot, a lot of pride in what they do, and are meticulous. It's something that I struggled with in New Orleans, and, granted, I only worked at a few places. And not to throw any place I worked—I loved Mariza, and Herbsaint had its challenges, and I think I was there in a very toxic era of that restaurant. So, I can't really speak for the restaurant as a whole. But

I don't know. It was something that—I was ready to find my restaurant home in New Orleans.

[00:16:53.03]

Rien Fertel: Yeah. You speak highly of working for Nina in that you heard that she was wonderful to work for, and then you also said the same thing about working for Stephanie. What's Stephanie's last name in Chicago?

[00:16:59.20]

Alison Green: Izard.

[00:16:59.20]

Rien Fertel: Izard. So, Stephanie Izard. These are two of the higher-profile women in the restaurant industry. They're chefs and restaurant owners. Do you think women—and I'm sure many of the other restaurants you worked at were owned and cheffed by men, just because that's the numbers in the industry—did it ever feel different to work for a woman owner/chef? Chef/owner?

[00:17:34.18]

Alison Green: Absolutely. One of the things—because Nina had the two restaurants, she wasn't there all of the time. I wish that she had been there more, because when she was there—and people will argue with me, I'm getting myself into trouble by even saying this—I

really loved when she was there, because I think that she really had her eye on the right things. I think that that sort of went off the rails at times when she wasn't there, just without going into crazy detail about the former chef. With Stephanie, when I was at Girl and the Goat, it was before any of her other restaurants were going. She was on the line every night. She was tough, but so kind. I absolutely, 100%, she was absolutely my favorite, my favorite person I've ever worked for. I can't speak highly—I mean, I would drag these poor—it was such an insanely high-profile restaurant, but it was also very approachable. You could wear jeans and a t-shirt in there. But you'd see, and there were all these fans from *Top Chef* that would come in and thinking they're gonna go see Stephanie, and she's on the line. I would go over to the table. I could always tell, because they'd just be, like, gripping the sides of the table. Reading the menu, realizing that they didn't know anything; they didn't recognize any of the ingredients. They were always my favorite people to wait on, because it was just like, "Oh, see that idiot who just ordered that \$200 bottle of wine who doesn't know shit about wine? You're gonna be more of a pro than they are. And then we're also gonna go to talk to Stephanie here in a minute." I was dragging people up to the line all the time. She was so gracious. But the other thing, too, and I think this is just the base of the success of the restaurant, is that we were really able to—we used to call, "Making friends." If people were cool, I could send things, and really be empowered to do so, which I think was very specific to that particular restaurant experience.

[00:20:04.12]

Rien Fertel: Yeah.

[00:20:05.21]

Alison Green: That being said, Nina, when she was there, she was great about doing that, too.

[00:20:13.15]

Rien Fertel: So, COVID hit. The restaurants shut down a year into—you were working a year or so into Bywater American Bistro. Can you bring us back to that week, that day, like what you remember?

[00:20:28.01]

Alison Green: Yeah. So, that was right after—it was the week—so, basically, I had decided, I had started doing photography work again, because I shoot live music and horseback riding events. So, I had kind of planned on taking a break right after Mardi Gras. I ended up getting extremely sick—I think I went to Krewe du Kanaval and danced my ass off with every human being in that building. Literally, in my hand, I had a maraca at one point. My hand hurt the next day, and I was like, "It's that stupid maraca." Because I just didn't stop. So much fun. I'm pretty sure that I got COVID, because I got a flu that was just, like, it shut me out. I had a weird experience, because there was no—I didn't get to finish strong. I kind of got sick, was out for a week and a half, and then COVID shut down everything. So, it felt very surreal to me.

[00:21:41.17]

Rien Fertel: Right. You weren't working shifts; you were still, like, sick leave.

[00:21:46.19]

Alison Green: Yeah.

[00:21:48.02]

Rien Fertel: Wow. Do you remember the call, or were you able—? Was there a meeting? I know there was a crawfish boil that Sunday night, to celebrate Sunday the 15th. Were you there?

[00:22:02.19]

Alison Green: No, I was not. Because I was still not feeling well. That was the week, too, right before the shutdown, because I had had to go up to Chicago to get some gear fixed, because I was booked for South by Southwest, which was supposed to be the end of March. So, I had to come up and turn some gear around for that. So I wasn't in town. Chicago started to shut down, so that started to feel like it was real. And by the time I got back to New Orleans, it was—I think I got back the day that they shut everything down in New Orleans.

[00:22:43.20]

Rien Fertel: Yeah.

[00:22:45.10]

Alison Green: But, yeah. It was definitely a wild—it all felt very surreal. I definitely feel like they made the right choice to shut down. There was no other choice. I remember when the cases started to spike, and my neighbor contracted it and has had all sorts of complications from it, because he was diabetic and was in dialysis. So, I just found out he was in a coma for two months. The disease felt very real.

[00:23:23.22]

Rien Fertel: Yeah. Let me ask you this. Of all the people I've talked to for this project, you have —yeah, you have lived and worked in the most big cities, and you gravitated to New Orleans at this point in your life, you lived here for six years and you talked about the aura this place had for you since you were a kid. Can you describe, in that you were here, how long before you left New Orleans, were you here?

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Alison Green: I was there for six years.

[00:23:56.08]

Rien Fertel: Oh, between Coronavirus and when you decided to move.

[00:24:00.16]

Alison Green: Oh. So, that was kind of—I guess it was two months.

[00:24:08.25]

Rien Fertel: Okay. So, before, in those two months, did New Orleans feel different or was there something New Orleans-y? I think about this often, like, was there some New Orleans-y about how we did Coronavirus versus Louisville, versus Chicago, because you've been going to these places over the past half-year?

[00:24:29.17]

Alison Green: Oh, yeah. Absolutely. One of the things, one aspect of New Orleans, specifically, as we're gonna see, I think, coming into it—Mama, hush. [Dog barks.] My little dog, sorry. One of the things that I think we're gonna see, especially in the winter, Chicago didn't feel all that—it feels different. I think people there take it seriously in a way that I don't see people in Louisville taking it as seriously. That being said, we have an incredible—right now, Andy Basheer, who's our governor, he's kind of become this COVID celebrity because he's handled it so well. But in regards, I think we're gonna see a big shift in the next couple of months, because Chicago's going to be shutting down. The winter, them doing outdoor dining is a joke. Whereas, really, in New Orleans, you can do outdoor dining all year. I think that we're gonna see that play out. But yeah, you can be outdoors so much that, in New Orleans, it didn't feel like there was a void. I didn't feel like I was missing out on anything. In fact, I appreciated not having this pressure to go to bars all the time.

[00:26:01.01]

Rien Fertel: Yeah.

[00:25:59.25]

Alison Green: I don't think I'm ever gonna go back to a bar. Like, I'm fine giving that up, which is crazy. But I don't know. There are a couple, B.J.'s, which is in the Bywater, of course, if you're not familiar with New Orleans. I used to joke that, if there is a pearly gate somewhere, that it'll be the doors of B.J.'s. I'll just walk through it and all my buddies will be there, just like old men. I'm super into just talking with people who know way more than I do.

[00:26:43.02]

Rien Fertel: It doesn't look like heaven. It's very dark, it's old. [Laughter.]

[00:26:50.18]

Alison Green: It has a good yard.

[00:26:53.16]

Rien Fertel: Okay, yeah.

[00:26:55.12]

Alison Green: Yeah. There's no light unless the door's open. It's a total dive.

[00:27:02.13]

Rien Fertel: So, tell me, how did you decide and what did it feel like to leave the city that—to hear you speak so lovingly with it before? Love affair you had with the city for so long. How did you come to that decision?

[00:27:16.24]

Alison Green: It was horrible. It was awful. I had—so, I had been kind of living beyond my means. When I got my apartment, I was thinking I was going to be able to go back into the service industry, make my Chicago money, so 1,100 dollars a month would be totally manageable. It was, but then you just couldn't do anything else. By the time COVID had hit, I had been living at the edge of my means already. So, I was kind of felt like I was looking down the barrel of a gun. Especially going into hurricane season. I saw a place, financially, where I would run through my savings and not be able to leave, and I would actually be financially stuck in New Orleans. And it feels like if I left my dog on the side of the road. I have that loss. I feel like I'm mourning a death right now, in a way, this year, and it just feels totally surreal. Especially right now, because a lot of my work as a photographer is in the summer. I was used to being gone for most of the summer working.

[00:28:46.09]

Rien Fertel: For music festivals, I'm guessing?

[00:28:45.10]

Alison Green: Yep, music festivals, which kind of start in—it starts in March and goes through September, late September, usually. Or October, really. So, this is the time of year where I'm like, "Oh, I'm not going home." My apartment is still open, and my landlord is lowering the rent, and she can't rent it. There's a part of me that fantasizes all the time about moving home, moving back into my apartment, which is also kind of a crazy thing to think about. Like I said, I'm almost forty, and to feel kind of suspended and feel like I'm not—I don't know where I'm going. I don't have anything figured out.

[00:29:38.22]

Rien Fertel: Yeah. Do you want to come back to New Orleans or be here, and do you have a timeline in your head about what that looks like?

[00:29:47.15]

Alison Green: I mean, I would love to come back. I would need to make sure that the finances are there. Because one thing that people—it's one thing if you're moving from New York, working remotely, making your New York salary. New Orleans is very affordable. People come down, they're like, "Oh, my god. Everything is so cheap." But especially working and living in Chicago, like I said, I made rent in three days. Not even. Sometimes, I would make rent in one day.

[00:30:23.20]

Rien Fertel: Wow.

[00:30:25.21]

Alison Green: It was crazy. So, it's a different dynamic and something that I, personally, just need to be better with finances. I think that you can definitely do it, but I like having a life. I miss the simplicity of living in New Orleans. [Dog barks.] I miss City Park. I miss so much of my day-to-day routine, so I definitely do miss that. And the timeline to come back, I feel like I could just move back tomorrow and it would just feel like a relief. I also feel like the thing that would be smarter to do is to move to Chicago, where I could make —there's just more opportunity there, and it's cheaper. Or at least the same, once you've paid all your parking tickets. I remember having to budget in parking tickets, because you were inevitably going to get one or two a month.

[00:31:27.08]

Rien Fertel: Yeah. So. And you are working now? Before we started recording, you said you were heading off to North Carolina. What does that work look like now?

[00:31:42.24]

Alison Green: It is sporadic right now. [Dog barks.] Stop. Sorry. Everybody inside, come on.

[00:31:47.04]

Rien Fertel: [Laughter.]

[00:31:59.12]

Alison Green: It's like a herd. There's four dogs. So, I am working. I am kind of sporadic with jobs, and it's mostly horseback riding, because that hasn't really been hit in a huge or in a devastating way, because it's an outdoor sport.

[00:32:21.24]

Rien Fertel: And this is shooting horseback riding?

[00:32:20.04]

Alison Green: Um-hmm, photographing.

[00:32:25.07]

Rien Fertel: Photographing.

[00:32:23.18]

Alison Green: So, I photograph a sport called Three-Day Eventing, which is basically triathlon for horses.

[00:32:35.05]

Rien Fertel: Wow.

[00:32:36.15]

Alison Green: It's derived in the military, so it's an interesting sort of history. It's the only sport, I think—well, equestrian's the only sport in the Olympics where men and women compete against each other on an equal ground.

[00:32:51.28]

Rien Fertel: I didn't know that.

[00:32:55.14]

Alison Green: Yeah. So, that's a little bit here, a little bit there, but it's not enough to bank on. I'm not buying a house right now. And I'm so thankful that I've paid my car off, like two years ago. And I don't know what the restaurant scene in New Orleans looks like right now. I feel like I'm going through a breakup with hospitality right now.

[00:33:23.23]

Rien Fertel: That was my next question. Do you think you would work, if you moved back here, would you work in the hospitality industry?

[00:33:33.16]

Alison Green: [Sighs.] I don't know. I would love to take the skills that I've developed and move them into a place where it feels like you're making more of a difference in the world. And I think you can take all of those skills. When you work in the service industry as long as I have, you can talk to anybody. I can as easily have a conversation with Cindy Crawford, who's amazing, by the way. [Laughter.] Like, I love her. As I can with the family from Alabama who's just horrified that they don't know what pig face is. I love both of those aspects of the industry. I feel let down by it right now. I feel expendable. I definitely—. [Dog barks.] Stop. Sorry. I definitely have mixed feelings about it. I'm trying to think of an analogy that would be—it feels like a breakup. Especially servers. We're expendable. Everybody wants a piece of us. Like, they want to be a part of—it's like going to a show without paying for admission. Everybody wants to get backstage, and they want to be on the list, but they don't actually care about you. We're seeing that in the music industry right now; we're seeing that in the restaurant industry right now. I think that there are these star bartenders that are going to be saved. I don't think the servers—we're just the prostitutes of the game. I think that's really sad.

[00:35:41.09]

Rien Fertel: Is that both, is that being treated that way, is from both the restaurant owners and customers?

[00:35:55.00]

Alison Green: I don't know. See, these are all hypotheticals, because I haven't gone back. I haven't returned. I feel like maybe, if I were working in the industry right now, that love affair that I have with it would be re-ignited. Because I do love it. I love my job.

[00:36:14.19]

Rien Fertel: Yeah. What do you miss about it, if you do miss anything, about the service industry?

[00:36:24.14]

Alison Green: Oh. I love the fact that you go into work and you have no idea what it—you don't know who you're gonna talk to. Is it Clive Davis? Who does—oh, this is so funny. I remember, one night I was at Bywater American Bistro, and he was talking. I was like, "This guy is a somebody." Because I could just read him. But he was also just really weird. He was with this woman who was amazing. So, she and I kind of hit it off. By the end of it, he and I hit it off. It was just such a funny thing. And I remember leaving work that day and being like, "That was so fucking weird and cool." It was not in a star-struck way, it was more just like, you don't get star-struck when you're in the industry this long. You become this incredibly curious observer. Because you can see people operate with their guard down in a lot of ways. Like families. Loners are really interesting. Every socioeconomic group. Every race. I mean, it's just—it's a really cool thing to have a front-row seat to so much diversity. And I miss that. That is the love affair that I have

with the industry. And then the people that stick around and are in it are usually some of the most interesting people. I mentioned Jazzy earlier. My friend, Brennan, who was another Goat, he's this flamboyant gay man who grew up in rural Missouri. His undergraduate was in Canadian politics, and his graduate degree was in Russian studies. He was wildly interesting, extremely eccentric. How many people can work with the Brennans and the Jazzys of the world? Those were like my coworkers, every day. There was nothing off limits. You become a family when you're in the trenches. It feels like being in the military, or what I imagine the military to be, in regards to that camaraderie. To come back to what you're saying, I don't know how the industry feels right now. I feel let down by it, but again, I'm not engaged with it right now. I don't really know what to do with that. It's one of the first times of my life where I haven't been involved, in a capacity, in a restaurant.

[00:39:26.27]

Rien Fertel: Yeah.

[00:39:28.07]

Alison Green: You know?

[00:39:31.00]

Rien Fertel: Does that feel freeing, or does it feel the opposite?

[00:39:33.26]

Alison Green: I think it would feel freeing if I had fuck-you money and I could just say yes to whatever I wanted to and no to whatever I wanted to. Right now, it feels anxiety-ridden. Right now, it feels like, "Did I just waste, like, twenty-five years of my life in something that has no future? Am I going to be homeless? Am I going to have to kill myself because I'm not going to be able to—because I'm not going to be able to afford to fight cancer? Or I don't have money for retirement?" It's weird when suicide almost becomes a freeing thought. That is an option that I am like, "Well, if it gets so bad, I can just have control over that." Because right now, everything feels out of control.

[00:40:29.14]

Rien Fertel: Yeah, yeah.

[00:40:27.22]

Alison Green: Not to talk flippantly about suicide. I'm not saying I'm suicidal.

[00:40:35.05]

Rien Fertel: No, it's sobering. It's very sobering. Let's end on this. I wanted to ask about this. We've talked a lot about your feelings and love for the city. I know you've been back at least once. I know you're gonna come back to the city, you said. So, you visit.

[00:40:52.00]

Alison Green: Yeah.

[00:40:53.11]

Rien Fertel: What do you do when you come back? What do you miss the most? What are the first things you kind of make sure to hit?

[00:41:01.08]

Alison Green: Okay. So, I always—the End of the World, the Industrial Canal, the tail end of the Upper Ninth Ward, is absolutely one of my places. I fall into these routines. Usually, I'll go up to the End of the World. If I don't do the End of the World, I'll do the loops at City Park. I start my mornings that way; it puts me in a really clear headspace. When I was living there, and I haven't done—.

[00:41:37.22]

Rien Fertel: Are you walking or biking?

[00:41:39.14]

Alison Green: I'm walking.

[00:41:41.29]

Rien Fertel: Okay, all right.

[00:41:44.18]

Alison Green: I would drive to City Park, but I would walk to the End of the World. I love the metaphors. I mean, that's the other thing about New Orleans; the alley that lies between Piety and Desire. I'm going to go to the End of the World. There's so many things like that in that city that I just love. Those are kind of my go-tos. [Dog barks.] I don't really—the French Quarter has become something that I can do it, I can not do it; I always enjoy it when I do it, but I'm not drawn there. B.J.'s, of course, is my bar. I guess Marky's, too, because I was so close and they have outdoor seating, I guess, if there was a bar. But like I said, I haven't really been doing bars. So, just a lot of hanging out at my girlfriends' houses or in the alley. It's definitely a thing that I find myself being really at peace and quiet with my own thoughts in New Orleans. It is a place where I truly feel completely comfortable in my own skin, in a way that I don't anywhere else. So, I guess that's probably everyone; that's the clause. When people talk about, "Oh, you'll be back." That's the clause. I might be homeless in New Orleans, but I think I'll be back. [Laughter.]

[00:43:13.20]

Rien Fertel: I think that's a beautiful place to end. I just want to say, I saw videos and pictures. There was a giant end of life celebration, a funeral, at the End of the World just last week. It's still being used like it should be. I went there two weeks ago for a walk. It's full of the vibrancy that the city is known for.

[00:43:42.29]

Alison Green: Oh, it's incredible. If you ever go back there, too, you can walk underneath the
naval, like when the water's low enough. Have you seen the sailboat back there?

[00:43:53.27]

Rien Fertel: No.

[00:43:56.01]

Alison Green: I guess it's been there since the storm, since the troubles. But it's called the
Mystery Ship. It's just been completely obliterated.

[00:44:03.26]

Rien Fertel: Wow, I haven't seen that. You'll have to take me.

[00:44:04.26]

Alison Green: A little treasure. Yeah.

[00:44:07.22]

Rien Fertel: Well, thank you. Thank you for sitting down. Is there anything you want to add,
something I didn't ask? Anything?

[00:44:14.16]

Alison Green: Gosh, no. I feel like I just talked your ear off.

[00:44:19.23]

Rien Fertel: We covered a lot, yeah. All right.

[00:44:24.15]

Alison Green: Yeah. No, I think you did—I think that's good. If I think of anything, I'll shout it your way. Maybe you'll hear it down the river.

[00:44:34.05]

Rien Fertel: Yeah. We hope to check in, like in six months to a year, about how you're doing and how things look. Kind of do the same thing, maybe a shorter conversation. So, thank you. Hope to see you soon. The city misses you. All your friends miss you.

[00:44:54.05]

Alison Green: Oh, I miss all my friends. You included.

[00:44:54.01]

Rien Fertel: All right. I'm gonna stop recording. Hold on, because we have to—it has to do some downloading.

[00:45:03.17]

Alison Green: Okay.

[End of interview]