

# Anita Oubre, Hotel Human Resources Manager & Entertainer

Interview for COVID-19 American History Project  
New Orleans-Area Service & Hospitality Workers

Date: Wednesday, November 15, 2023

Time: 6 PM

Location: Lower Garden District Field Office, New Orleans, LA

Primary Interviewer: Elise Chatelain

Secondary Interviewer: Justin Micaroni

Transcription and Fieldnotes: Elise Chatelain

Photographer/Videographer: Justin Micaroni

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## Fieldnotes

### *Pre-Interview and Background*

Anita was another contact made because of Elise's sister, through their involvement in what Anita refers to as the city's "adult dance troupes." Anita responded to the call for participants via email, and mentioned that she was a gig worker who lost that income source during COVID shutdowns. Elise shared the interview questions through email beforehand, and otherwise the two didn't have much contact before the scheduled interview.

When Anita arrived at the field office for her interview, we were warmed by her friendly and energetic presence. We learned that her “day job” is actually at a major hotel brand with a location in downtown New Orleans, and that she heads the HR department there. Combined with being an entertainer, we knew her story would make for a very interesting perspective. We felt lucky to have connected, especially to hear her take on hotel/hospitality staffing issues that had become a common theme in our fieldwork.

A bit of background on the Baby Dolls and adult dance troupes: The Baby Doll tradition is claimed to be rooted in a combination of segregation, prostitution, and social aid and pleasure clubs, rising to become a part of the city’s Carnival tradition some time between the early to mid 20th century. Over time, the original Baby Dolls and other groups have to an extent influenced a multitude of adult dance troupes, and to this date there are several (including the one to which Elise’s sister belongs) that are either explicitly or implicitly indebted to this historical tradition. Many of these groups were formed after Hurricane Katrina, as marching and parade krewes have expanded into the 21st century, and as the city revived itself in the storm’s aftermath. To an extent, the tradition has been co-opted outside of African American communities, although popular understanding for the most part recognizes these roots. If you see Baby Dolls out at a second line or Carnival parade, they are dressed in elaborate costumes with ruffles, feathers and bold jewelry and makeup. They bring an energetic, fun and sassy energy to any celebration.

### *Interview*

Anita’s vibrant, shining entertainer personality came through in the interview, including her love for New Orleans and her passion for working in the city’s entertainment and hospitality industry. Her interview had many tears and laughter, and was an emotional experience for all of us. Key themes were the sadness of living in isolation for a person so accustomed to a very full social and work life, and current staffing struggles in the hotel industry shaped by COVID.

### *Post-Interview*

After we turned off the cameras, we chatted a bit more and Anita seemed to relax even further. We took pictures outside, and the night was cool and fresh. Anita appeared energized and thanked us for making her feel comfortable during the interview, which we were happy to hear. We said our goodbyes, and she drove away.

## Transcript

**[00:01] Elise Chatelain:** All right, sound recording on. So this is Elise Chatelain, interviewer. We're here in our Garden District field office in New Orleans. It is Wednesday, November 15, 2023. And we have Justin Micaroni, our photographer, with us, and then we're gonna be talking with Anita Oubre about her experiences, both as a hospitality, I guess, professional in New Orleans during COVID, as well as an entertainer. So kind of—we're gonna hear more about her life, and how that kind of—how it was shaped by COVID in New Orleans as a hospitality worker. So we'll begin by just—just asking you to talk about yourself and tell us who you are, and where you're from and what you do in the hospitality and entertainment industry.

**Anita Oubre:** Sure! My name is Anita Oubre. I'm born and raised here in New Orleans. I've lived here my whole life. And I'm what you call naturally New Orleans, is what they say about me. I'm kind of an ambassador of the city. I love promoting my city: its culture, its food, its music, um, everything wonderful about our city, I love to just promote us. And you know, you can find me walking down the streets in the French Quarter. And if I see folks who look like they're lost, or, you know, inquisitive or whatnot, I'm that girl that's gonna stop and say, "Hey, I'm Anita, what can I do to help you?" Not trying to rob you; I'm not trying to get over on you [laughs]. I'm just trying to help you. And I think that's pretty cool.

**EC:** Yeah, I know, it is something that—a theme that has come up a lot where people are so proud of New Orleans, you know, especially when you grew up here. So is that kind of spirit, is that what got you interested in working in service and hospitality? Or can you talk about getting into that industry?

**AO:** I went to college and studied journalism. And every year I would go to The Times Picayune and apply, and I just never did get a job. [Both laugh.]

**EC:** I know the feeling!

**AO:** But I worked. I worked in a hotel. And so I just never left the hotel. I worked my way through college behind the bar at the hotel, and I just worked my way up, and I never left. It's like 30 years later, and I'm still working in a hotel. And that's okay.

**EC:** Yeah. Oh, that's great. So you worked your way up from, kind of the floor, you know, and then how did you get involved in human resources and kind of the administrative side?

**AO:** Yeah, I started as a cocktail waitress back in the day, and then I bartended for a really long time. And then I just kind of found my way around the hotel, which is great. You know, you can work in different departments, see what you like, what you don't like. I worked in housekeeping. I worked the front office. I worked food and beverage. And then I kind of went into HR. And I really like the Monday through Friday gig, nine to five, because for years, I worked every holiday, every weekend. And I found my niche in human resources, I was able to use some of my writing, etc. And then being off on the weekend, I was able to tap into the entertainment side of things that I enjoy so much. So you know, after hours, and on weekends, you can find me dancing all over the city.

**EC:** Yeah, so tell us about that. So you—I guess just tell me what you do, who you dance with, and—

**[03:55] AO:** So yeah, I'm involved in a handful of what they call the adult dance troupes. I'm also a New Orleans Baby Doll, which the Baby Dolls are said to have been around since 1912. These were women of color who were in the Black Storyville part of New Orleans. They were the first women to integrate Mardi Gras. They wore short little skirts and smoked cigars, and they had razor blades in their bra. And they came out and said, "Hey, we're gonna do Mardi

Gras regardless of what the norms of the time are.” And so I've been Baby Dolling for about eight years now. And I get a lot of professional gigs through Baby Dolling. We show up at birthday parties, weddings, funerals, festivals, we make appearances at all kinds of things. That has opened a door for me to also be a Grand Marshal. And so I do entertainment a couple of nights a week and I *love* it.

**EC:** That's great. So—a Grand Marshal, is it for a particular parade or crew that you—

**AO:** I do Grand Marshalling pretty much for events. Convention events, convention groups that come into town, they hire bands and entertainers and you know, they have like all of these after-hour parties and whatnot. So I work for the New Orleans Music Company. And he hires me out a lot of times as a Grand Marshal to lead the band through the convention hall, or as a Baby Doll, and we dance. I bring some of the other girls, depending on how many they need. And it's a very lucrative, *fun* gig.

**EC:** Yeah, oh, my gosh, you must—I'm thinking back to 2019. And 2020. And all the years leading up to where things were just getting busier and busier with tourism—yeah, you must have been exhausted.

**AO:** It was. It was great. And, you know, it's something that brings me so much joy and happiness, when I put on my little dress, and I have my umbrella. And, you know, my inner spirit comes out, and I just am so happy. I mean, I could do that job, like, every single night. And for a while, we were doing four and five gigs a night. I'd do my regular job, and then I get off and I'd do that. But it's not like work for me. It's fun. It's—it brings out a good spirit about me, and I just *love* it. And then, you know, all of a sudden, it was all gone. [Pauses and laughs]

**EC:** Oh gosh....[chuckles along with Anita]

**[06:55] AO:** There were no more parties, there were no more gigs, no more conventions. No more dancing in the street, no more *joy*. It all just dried up. And we really didn't know if we would ever be able to do it again. [Chokes through tears.] And, you know, it was—it was hard. To be home alone, just my husband and I and you know, try to find that joy, try to recreate that joy with just two people in a big empty house, empty streets. And just like hanging out in my backyard and putting on WWOZ and just trying to like dance around and make myself happy. It was—it was really difficult.

**EC:** And so did...did y'all, I guess, find ways to cope, or ways to combat that loneliness and lack of party over time. Or, I guess how long did that last?

**AO:** I mean, I, you know, looking back, I can remember the radio station, the “festing in place,” you know, and my husband and I sitting out on the patio, and, you know, trying to, you know, have like some little snacks, and some beers and, you know, bring my pretty umbrellas out on the patio, and, you know, just, you know, try to recreate some form of joy and happiness. It was difficult, it was sad, and things weren't the same. We weren't able to, you know, be with our

friends. A big part of the Baby Dolls, and you know, doing gigs is gathering the other women and we do these things together. And we feed off of one another's energy. And, you know, people weren't able to do that anymore. And that was really painful. That was really sad. And you know, you couldn't dance in the street and you couldn't do gigs. And you didn't have any of that. And it was really difficult. It was a hard time. Yeah.

**EC:** [To Justin] I didn't know if you had a question...I heard you.

**Justin Micaroni:** Oh no, no.

**EC:** [To Anita] Okay, because I was thinking, that on one side that, you know, it was like your—was—all that was just like, completely cut off. We go up to Mardi Gras 2020, and then it's cut off, all of those activities and all that social energy. Yeah, and then were you still working at the hotel too, or what happened there?

**[09:49] AO:** So we were working at the hotel, and you know, then the news came about this virus and whatnot. And so my particular part of that job was to get that information out to everybody. You know, I didn't think much of it, you know, okay, you know, so I had all the flyers, you know, the wash your hand flyers, and, you know, these are the proper steps and then videos came showing people to sing the happy birthday and all of that stuff with a hand washing, the hot water and the soap and all of those things. And then, you know, we're doing that, and getting that information out, and then slowly but surely, like more information was coming in, and we had to start cutting jobs. And it was really, really difficult. We all had to sit down and, you know, decide which positions, you know, needed to be cut. And so there were a lot of furloughs and just so much paperwork. And the hard part was like sitting down and telling people, you know, that, you know, your job is going to be...not eliminated, but eliminated for the time being, which we all thought, you know, people would be able to come back. And so then before, you know it, like, time just kept going on and on and on, and the jobs weren't coming back. The people weren't coming back to New Orleans, and people who weren't traveling anywhere. And we lost so much, um...business, we lost our livelihoods, we lost who we were, we lost our tourism, we lost our jobs, we lost our friends, our families. [Pauses, sniffs through tears.] To this day, a lot of those positions have not come back. We're still working with, you know, skeleton crews. We're still doing the jobs of multiple people, to this day, you know, even though things have, you know, returned to a sense of normalcy. But through that whole time, you know, I was working still I was, you know, we had a handful of people working. And my job was to get the resources to all of the people who were furloughed, you know: "This is where you can go get some groceries, this is where you can go get vaccination, this is where...." You know, just like all of the things, the churches, the drive-throughs, the water, the cleaning products, the counseling, you know, all of those things. And so, I would get together a little newsletter every week. And my job was to sit in my house and find resources and put it all on a pretty little, you know, newsletter. And I can remember feeling so bad because imagine you're getting an email from me, or you're getting a text from me. And you're thinking, "Oh, it's Miss Anita! She's calling me back to work!" And week, after week, after week, after week, after week, I did not call people back to work. And that really felt terrible.

**EC:** Oh gosh...so, okay—I'll jump ahead, and then we'll jump back. So even today, you're working with—you're working with these skeleton crews. Is that because positions were actually—was that part of the process of having to lay all these people off or furlough them—were things actually cut, or they're just, is there a lack of people?

**AO:** A little bit of both, you know. Like, at some point, we would call people back and say, “Hey, your job isn't available, but we do have XYZ jobs.” And people are like, “Oh, no, no, no, no, I'm gonna wait for my job to come back.” And to today, your job has never come back. You know, other people started doing multiple jobs, myself included. And so that's just how it is. And then you know, the hotel did close down for a while. And that was pretty scary for the people who—which was just the general manager and the chief engineer, they had to like physically go in, you know, to secure the building and to make sure you know, it didn't blow up or something like that, with the boilers and all of these big machines and whatnot. And that was really scary for them. I would go in like once a week to get out of my house number one, but to also, like, check the mail and, like, pay bills. I started doing finance work on top of HR work, and do things like that. I remember the streets being very deserted. Even when we went back into the hotel to work, it was a scary feeling. The streets were empty, like ghost towns, you know, we no longer had tourists, we no longer had workers. It just was very, very eerie. You know, even to like, just like, if you thought you were gonna go get some lunch or something, I felt like I was putting my life on the line to go out into the streets, because, you know, people were desperate. People didn't have jobs anymore, and people didn't have any money. And people were desperate and it was a very scary time. And I was scared to death to, like, walk around in the French Quarter. Yeah.

**EC:** Yeah. And that was, I guess that was all through spring and summer 2020, right? And then is that how long—I guess, when did the hotel reopen and when did y'all start going back, was it around then?

**[16:30] AO:** I would say, you know, we went through the summer, we were closed. [Pauses] Yeah, we were closed for quite a while. Then when the restrictions started loosening up, and people started getting out and about again, then it was, like, really different, too, because you had all of these people who had been secluded for so long, and everybody was just like, “Aaaaaahhh!!” Like this gung ho; and everybody just wanted to like, drink and cut up even more so than they would normally do, coming to the French Quarter. And then you had people like checking in with like, their backpack. Like it wasn't like normal, like tourists with luggage and families and things like that. It was just like, “Who are these new guests? Where are they coming from? And why do they only have a backpack?” So it was a lot of, like, I think people like partying and just—it was just so different.

**EC:** Interesting. Yeah, it was a very strange energy, especially that first fall. I think, 2020, Halloween happened, and then do you remember any of those moments, like the holidays, and maybe when tourists really were coming into town?

**AO:** It was—it was scary for everybody. You know, I think a lot of the staff, you know, because we had to wear masks and a lot of people wore gloves. And it was like...the human interaction, the hospitality part of it, kind of took a back seat, I feel. You know, where we were normally, “Welcome!” You know, that friendly, authentic New Orleans took a backseat. It really did. Because people were afraid to connect, people were afraid to touch, people were afraid to, for me to like take your credit card and swipe it because it might have the virus on it. It was like all of those things. And then, like, we had to teach people how to smile behind the mask. There was like a whole series of smiling with your eyes and with your voice because people could not see your, your face. So there was a lot of that, and people came back, but a lot of people didn't come back. A lot of people were afraid to come back into the workforce. They were afraid of the virus. They were afraid to be around other people. There was a lot of fear. I can remember being fearful, myself. I...was afraid I would make my husband sick. [Pauses.] Excuse me. [Pauses again.]

**EC:** Would you like to pause?

**AO:** He's older than me. And I felt like, “I hope I don't kill my husband!” [Laughs through tears.] “[just] because I'm going to work!” You know, I can remember, like, taking my clothes and my shoes off before I would enter my home. And I even did not want to sleep in the bed with him because I didn't know if I had caught something during the course of the day.

**EC:** Right, and he was staying home or did he go to work, too?

**AO:** Yeah, he was staying home. So yeah, because his business [crosses hands in “no” signal]. You know, he's a welder and ornamental iron and burglar bars and whatnot. People didn't have money for food, much less some fancy bars to put on their home. So he stopped working.

**EC:** Oh wow. Yeah. No, it's like—if you think of him cocooned in the house and safe all day. [Both laugh.] And you're going out, all these people from all over the country, and eventually the world....

**AO:** Yeah, we had to put like signs all over the hotel, you know, like...six feet apart signs, and the signs in the elevators, and I can remember, we had to, like, laminate all the signs, because, you know, we had to wipe the signs down each day, that kind of stuff. And we had to take all of the furniture out of the break room, because that would promote people sitting together, and we didn't want people to, you know, be close while they were eating and whatnot. So we had to make up all these new rules on how many people could be in the break room at a time. There was a lot of, you know, sanitizing of the microwave and the water cooler and, like even trainings. I could only train like a handful of people at a time because, you know, we couldn't all be in that room. So it was—it was really...different, a different way of going about everything.

**EC:** Oh, my gosh, let's see, has that—one question that came to mind was, has that changed now? Like, are you—do you feel like things are back to normal? Are there still things that y'all instituted then that are still in place? At the hotel.

**AO:** For the most part, things are back to normal. I mean, we still, you know, really—promote good hygiene, you know, we promote good health. Nowadays, since the pandemic, it's all about your good *mental* health. That wasn't really talked about before. And so the Employee Assistance Program is huge. And it's okay to get counseling, it's okay to talk about your problems and how you're feeling. That was kind of, like, all swept under the rug, I feel before the pandemic. And so that brought, like, some normalcy that, you know, we can talk about what's bothering us.

**EC:** That's great. The other question that came to mind, you're talking about going back to the hotel, and there's a lot of anxiety, there's a lot of change. Um, do you remember the first time you went back to an entertainment gig and what that was like?

**[22:30] AO:** I do remember at one point, there was, gosh, what was it called? It was...it was this big promotion, is what it was supposed to be. And so they called up a bunch of us: Baby Dolls, dancers, entertainers, the stilt walkers, the jugglers, the, the waiters, like, it was a bunch of us. And we all had to meet on the Riverfront. And so we all had up, in costume with our mask on. And it was like, like, the gig to nowhere, or something like that. So we weren't really entertaining. But they were filming us. And so it was like this promotion, like, you know, come back to New Orleans, you know, we need you. And so, like, we had posters, and signs and whatnot. And that was like, the first time that I saw a lot of people that I danced with. And that was really cool. And it was hard not to like, hug and embrace. And you know...but that was the first time seeing people, even though we were just, you know, we weren't dancing. And then that became a thing where we were dancing on camera [laughs hard].

**EC:** So different, right? [Laughs.]

**AO:** We had this gig where we entertained for the Canadian Jazz Festival. And so we went to this guy's studio, and the band is over there playing and we're all in front of the camera. [Mimes dancing.] And that was our first gig, but there was no audience, it was all—so that was weird. It was different. We were happy, though, to dance and happy to have some money in our pocket. But it wasn't the same as having that interaction with another human being. You know the applause and the camaraderie, you know, I'm entertaining you and I'm feeding off your energy, you're feeding off of mine; and we're all just in this happy place. It was really different.

**EC:** Oh my gosh, are y'all still doing anything like that? Like, did that kind of set up a path to more recorded or virtual events like that?

**AO:** Not—not lately. Everything is back in person. And it's wonderful. It is such a joy to have that back, that part of my life. It's—it's incredible. [Laughs joyfully.]

**EC:** And that makes me think about Mardi Gras 2021, which was really upsetting for me because we're still deep in that COVID mentality and staying home and things kind of partially



shut down. But you know, Mardi Gras was canceled that year. So did you do anything in particular, to celebrate?

**AO:** We did, um... The Floats in the Oaks. So City Park had a bunch of the floats come. And so it was a drive-thru parade. So people would come and drive through City Park and see the floats. And then they had dance teams set up throughout. And so the car would pass and we had our little speaker box, and our music and we would [pauses, mimes dancing with her hands and a sassy head bounce] dance for the passing cars. [Both laugh.] So there's a group called the Krewe of Krampus. And they're still doing the drive-thru parades, that became a thing. So twice a year, they do one called Swampus. And people come and drive through and all the different crews perform in the drive-thru. So that became a thing. Yeah.

**EC:** Do you still do it whenever they do the—?

**AO:** I do. Yeah, I do. Yeah.

**EC:** That's—yeah, I forgot about that as a new tradition. But yeah. Oh, my gosh. So you did Mardi Gras 2022, then. And so it was the first Mardi Gras back. What was that like?

**AO:** Well, the year before I also, since we didn't have you know, the traditional Mardi Gras. I thought it would be cool to have Mardi Gras at my house. So I hired the band. And they came, you know, we're still doing this distance thing. And they set up in the street. And then the Baby Dolls, we came out of my house one by one and kind of spread out. And it was a big deal. Like the media was there, the news, and newspaper. So we didn't want to look like we were, you know, we wanted to—we didn't want to have bad publicity. [Laughs.] So we all spread out. And we had—we had Mardi Gras right there in the front yard. And the neighbors like were coming out of their houses and people were like, opening their windows, like “What is...?” It's Mardi Gras, whatcha think it is? [Laughs hard.]

**EC:** Yeah, I think that happened—we've heard a few stories about neighborhood parades. And does that still happen? Or did it kind of go away after that?

**AO:** I think there's a lot of that still happening. I mean, that was the origins of the Baby Dolls. For many, many years in the 1930s and 40s, these women brought Mardi Gras into the neighborhoods. It was, you know, a family type event. And they would promenade up and down the block with their children and their husbands and “Uncle Joe” on the washboard and just, you know, a basket with, you know, all of the wares for the day. And so the tradition of the Baby Doll is to bring that back into the neighborhoods. So that's pretty cool, yeah.

**EC:** Yeah, returning to your roots, right? That's great. Well, speaking of traditions, one thing that we've been really excited to hear from people is—I don't know if it's traditions, but things that you began doing in that spring, during that lockdown period and nobody was working. Is there anything that you...that you can remember that you did to keep yourself occupied? You know,

you mentioned the backyard parties, with your husband. Any new skills or creative projects that kept you busy?

**[29:45] AO:** Well, I did a whole lot of reading. That was like—two of the very terrible things that I remember that affected me big, big, big time was when my library shut down and when my church shut down. I felt like that was truly the end of the world. I was devastated when my library shut down because I'm an avid reader. But when the church closed down, I really thought, [teary] this is the end of the world. You know, that was really, really, really hard. So then they started doing the mass on Facebook, and they started doing the mass on television. So, you know, sometimes we'll watch mass on Facebook. But we're back in our church, which is fantastic and beautiful thing. But like, if you're under the weather, it's on Facebook. So there's that. And there's a lot of shut-in people in the community who have not returned to the church. So that is there for them now, that's really cool. I can remember, you would order the book online once the libraries reopened, and they would package it up and put it on the porch. And that was like such a happy, happy, like, "I'm going to pick up my books!" And my husband was like, that's not a good idea. And he would have me like, wipe the books off with Lysol and have them sit out in the sun, like all of that drama. [Laughs.] So I'm still like, like, I'm still reading, but I read a lot during that time. I'm also a writer. So once the magazine that I write for, they stopped doing the hard copies that you hand out in coffee shops, and that went online. And so I was still able to do that kind of work by phone, I was able to do all my interviews by phone. And the magazine is not back in a hard copy. She sees where it's successful just as an online magazine. So we're still online, and...[whispers] I'm still doing my interviews on the phone.

**EC:** [Both laugh.] So efficient, right?

**AO:** Every once in a while, someone will say, "I'd really rather do it in person, I want to see your face and I want you to—I want to see, you know, how you react to what I'm saying." I'm like, "Okay." But for the most part, I can do them over the phone, like in an hour. [Snaps fingers.] And that's really cool.

**EC:** That's great. Well, that's—you actually did get to be a writer eventually! You know, nobody has any hope with The Times Picayune anymore. So yeah, do you have any specific questions, Justin?

**Justin Micaroni:** I'm curious who you write for?

**AO:** Breakthrough Media Magazine.

**JM:** Okay. I did—I just was curious if you could speak on, if you think—obviously, the hotel has changed a little—a lot, right. Just the industry in general, and, and like what HR is like now as compared to pre pandemic, do you think like, anything seismic or different about it?

**[33:01] AO:** Yeah, once upon a time, I would post a job. And I would have hundreds of applicants, especially for like a front desk agent. Everybody thinks that's so glamorous, you

know. Front Desk Agent, Sales Coordinator, Reservations Agent, Supervisor...pages and pages of applicants. And now I'm lucky if I have a handful of applicants, even for those top-type jobs. It's really hard to find people. I don't know what happened to all the people. I mean, I know we lost a lot of folks, a lot of folks perished. A lot of folks, I guess, went into different industries. What industries they went to [shrugs]? New Orleans...we—tourism is what you got. I don't know what people are doing. I don't know why people aren't applying for these jobs. Makes my job really difficult because my management team is looking at me, like, "Really, that position is still open? You haven't found anybody yet?" And it's, you know, I mean, I put it out on social media, I buy ads, I go to the job fairs, I go to the schools. Today, I spent three hours at one of the high schools promoting, you know, hospitality, and, you know, "Your job can be your career!" You know. I don't know. It's rough to find people to work. So that's what's way different. Before I had, you know, a lot of people to choose from.

**JM:** It was a different problem. [All laugh.] That's great.

**EC:** So...I feel like this is kind of the same question but maybe beyond just work. It's been over three years, since, you know, we first had that shutdown and things really changed. Um...can you talk about anything else that's changed for you, whether it's work, or maybe it's in your personal life, that really stands out.

**[35:35] AO:** Relationships, you know. I remained pretty active for a long time. And—like, I would go to the jazz museum on a Tuesday. Because, you know, they were having live music. And the bands were up on the second floor, and they had this big field and people would spread out, we'd bring our chairs and stuff. So I was like, still doing things. And I got a lot of...ugly. I got a lot of flack—is that how we would say that?—from very close friends and people that I love. And you know, I was told, you know, "You're—you're not only endangering yourself, but you're endangering, you know, your family and you're, you know, me as your friend, you're endangering me, so I don't want to be around you." And that was really hard for me because I felt like I was taking precautions, I felt like I was being as safe as I could be. So I had, you know, rifts; I had words, you know, with a person who was, you know, one of my closest and dearest people in my life. And things kind of, there was a lot of tension there a lot, a lot of tension. I can remember being in the grocery, and seeing someone—I was like, really happy to see this person and she was like, "You're out there, you're all over the place. Like, get back!" You know, and...you know, I felt like enough time had passed, and I had like, educated myself, and, you know, the vaccines and this and that, but... You know, but I mean, I get it, people were afraid. I get it. I mean, I was afraid. But I still felt like I needed to live my life. I was afraid. But being a social person, that's—that's part of who I am. It's part of my makeup. I'm very, very social. Just like my father. My father was always like, at a different party every weekend when we were growing up. So I'm just like him. That's—that's what makes me happy, being around people and being festive and being happy and just having a good time. That's, you know, work hard and I play hard...then play harder! So, yeah, that—that was difficult to be faced with those criticisms. And...yeah....

**EC:** Yeah, and then [indiscernible]...turn it back into yourself. Because it's like, but then—that's—you know, the huge—a huge issue was all that isolation that everybody experienced. And so it was hard to—it was a hard balance, I think.

**AO:** There was this monthly roundtable luncheon that I go to, and the woman, she's been doing these roundtables for 30 some-odd years, you know, and I've become part of this group and it's a good time, you know? She brings people in, and guest speakers and whatnot. And you know, and she was still doing these luncheons. And there were some brave souls who would go to these luncheons; sometimes, you know, there'd be 20 of us, sometimes 10. But the roundtable luncheons went on for a long time. We even had like Dr. Griggs and Dr. Mark Alen come and speak on, you know, everything and yeah... [laughs.]

**EC:** Yeah, so it didn't stop completely, right? Because yeah, I think—I think it really, like you said, people like you, or people who really just can't—it was tough to handle that total isolation experience.

**AO:** And I am one of the younger members of the roundtable, so that—those are a lot of, you know, elderly and older people who, you know, you know, they were saying, you know, that was really dangerous for them. But like you said, that—that isolation, for them to take the chance to be with other people and have that camaraderie and you know that that was more important to them.

**EC:** Yeah. Makes sense. Well, as a final question, I think. I've been asking people to...if you could think of anything that you don't want people to forget about this whole period of COVID the last three years, or even maybe things that people are already starting to forget that if you're talking to someone in the future, and telling them what life was like, is there something that stands out to you?

**[40:47] AO:** I feel like you know, don't don't lose your spirit. You know, I...I didn't lose my spirit. I was close to losing my spirit, you know, a good couple of handfuls of times, you know, but I kept on to, to who I am and to my spirit, and I was true to myself. You know, I didn't fall into what everybody thought I should do or, you know. I stayed true to myself and I lived. It was hard, but I lived. I lived as much as I could. Even if it was just me in my backyard, with my radio. I lived.

**EC:** That's beautiful. Well, you have any questions, Justin? [To Anita] Do you have any final words? That's a beautiful final thought. Okay, well, thank you so much, Anita. Thank you. Really wonderful. Thank you for sharing your story.