

Interview with April Kuramoto

Interviewee: April Kuramoto

Interviewer: Leah Vanderweide

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Location: Zoom

LV: To start, if you wouldn't mind with a verbal consent that you are comfortable with this interview, and obviously it can be rescinded at any time. We can just stop, delete the recording, it's all good. And then also your name, and we'll do a more formal introduction after.

AK: I'm totally fine with you recording it, and my name is April Kuramoto.

LV: I'd like to officially start the recording off with land acknowledgements. I recognize that due to the pandemic we can't really meet face to face, which is a little bit of a let down. But that's just life right now. I still think it's important that we recognize the territories that we are on. I think it's important to do land acknowledgements due to both our combination of our academic backgrounds, the nature of our conversation, and the general importance of acknowledging the positions that we each have on this land. So if you wouldn't mind starting, I know that you are familiar with land acknowledgements.

AK: I'm grateful to be chatting with you today from the unceded traditional territory of the Snuneymuxw First Nation. I'm in the place currently known as Nanaimo.

LV: [1:50] I'm coming from the traditional territory of the Stz'uminus [First Nation] people which is... also known as Ladysmith. It's a privilege to be able to live, laugh and love here. All right, our conversation, as I mentioned before, is primarily on youth and activism. As we are both aware, 2020 was a year that was frequently difficult to have a handle on. There were so many pivotal events that occurred. And I think it will have a severe impact on the world to come. But I'm mostly interested in your perspective on activism and youth. My first question would be how do you define activism?

AK: Ah, that's such a good question. To me, activism starts inside. So it really could just be something like the process of decolonizing one's self and changing our thoughts and our world views. I don't think activism has to be really visible or blatant external activities, but I do believe that from that internal growth it often—Our own personal activism do often begin to externalise and call us to participate in communities, whether it be online, signing petitions, forums, or even just speaking out against racists comments on social media. I think that people can grow their activism in virtual ways, particularly, there could be a lot of reasons for that, as well as participating in person in communities where possible, which has been interesting this year with [COVID-19] and everything. [4:14] But there was still a lot of protests and marches and actions still happening here in Nanaimo where I am.

Defining activism I think is bringing—sorry, I should have thought of this.

I think defining activism is our personal and political beliefs, and how we attempt to make [an] impact based off of that.

LV: That's so beautiful. The rambling got you there, but also I don't think I would have been able to put it that well. And do you have a journey that brought you to activism?

AK: Yeah, I would say I have written a great deal on how my mom was an activist in her own ways. I always need to credit her as the first teacher or influence in that way. In participating in the world, the best of my ability or in a good way. I saw her be visible with her personal and political beliefs and take small and large actions based off of that. I think having an activist mother set the course for me inevitably to follow, and it was really the birth of my daughter that really motivated me to start participating.

[5:54] Prior to having Luna I was mostly caught up in work and my own business of my own personal life. And becoming a mother really had me thinking deeply and intensely on what kind of world she would be growing up in, and her inheritance. I think it was—She wasn't even a year old before I was at my first rally with her, baby wearing her, and I remember that was outside NRGH for getting more midwives here in Nanaimo. Which did. I'm sure that wasn't the only influence, but that did happen thereafter. More midwives got licensed after at NRGH to practice here because the demand was so surpassing what was available that families weren't able to have access to the healthcare of their choice. So the first thing I went to in a community way was very linked to where I was at in that moment. But that has really been the beginning of participation for me in a bigger way.

LV: Okay, there is so much to talk about on that. I guess because the focus is youth and activism, I'm curious when you mentioned that your mom is the one that kind of inspired this: did your mom bring activism, or show you what activism was like, when you were young as well, or was it just kind of like a passive thing? Did she invite you to join her? Or was it just something she was very passionate about and she wasn't like yay or nay?

AK: [7:59] I think she wasn't going to rallies and marches and things in the way that I often do with Luna. For her—I mean—I remember her yelling out the car window at people who were littering and not tolerating certain jokes or commentary. So I do remember her being vocal with her beliefs, but also my mom fled to Canada with her first husband as a draft dodger, and then later on was granted landed immigrant status, but there was a period of time where she was here illegally as a political refugee I guess—or, I don't know the right terms but something like that. And so it's always been known in my family history that kind of why we are even here in Canada was a political reason, that her husband was conscripted because my mom is American, and he fled participating in the Vietnam War. And, as hippies, that was their strong belief system, and they were willing to kind of give up every aspect of their life to not participate in war. So the very roots in why my family is here in Canada—our story really does come from a place of activism, I think.

LV: Definitely, and the draft dodging is a significant part, especially of Canadian history and immigration, and our relation with the United States.

AK: Yeah.

LV: [9:54] *Do you mind talking a little bit more about—so you mentioned that your mom didn't go to rallies and stuff, so then, what kind of spurred you on to going to rallies? And I know you mentioned before that activism especially started with the birth of Luna, but what kind of nudged you towards physically being active?*

AK: Yeah, that's a good question. What comes to my mind is that, when I was younger and I lived in Vancouver, I would walk through rallies and protests happening all the time outside the art gallery. And if I was interested in the topic I might stop for two minutes but then I would keep going. I witnessed activities but didn't necessarily feel a part of them, and I think living here in Nanaimo has been very different for me in that a lot of my friends and coworkers and people in my circles do participate in these rallies and protests and things like that.

So it started personalizing the topics to me, that I do see myself and my family as a part of it. It's not just—Yeah, I think the ability to see things in an interconnected way grew for me with having a child because I was very aware of how my participation or lack thereof may be. Having a direct impact on what her opportunities would be in her lifetime. So I guess I feel a part of this community, and I started to personalize some topics that at a different point in my life I may have been interested in but not felt that particular call to action as though it was my responsibility to participate.

LV: [12:24] *How long ago was this transition from Vancouver to Nanaimo?*

AK: We moved to Nanaimo around 2010. So we've been here about ten years, and Luna is six years old, so she was born around four years after I moved here. (Brief pause) Yeah.

LV: *So it was coworkers and the community you were around. Was it communities that you were actively seeking out, or that you just naturally found your way to?*

AK: Yeah, I think they were communities I was naturally a part of. So I can think of this first rally, and that was all moms with babies there because we are the ones who take a strong care of what kind of medical options there are for families here in Nanaimo. And I guess the other circles are probably classmates from VIU.

[13:56] I guess twofold, both the people who—being around other activists, and that they know I care about similar topics. that then even as simply as getting invited and actually knowing that something is happening. Nanaimo can be a small place where many people can see photos or something that I'm doing after the fact and say they would have gone had they known. I think getting invited and knowing about things comes a lot from my community at VIU. There was something else there that I was going to say—what was your—Can you repeat your question?

LV: *Oh gosh.*

AK: It's okay, it'll come back if it was meant to.

LV: *It was how you found your communities, basically.*

AK: Oh right. The second thing I was going to say is that the more I started to attend activist things then the more I would be invited more broadly. So it has been a bit of [an] expansive situation. A lot of times—Nanaimo, being a smaller city, a lot of times it is the same people at all

these events. People known for caring and being willing to stand up and be visible in our community.

LV: *I'm familiar with the program you joined because I was there with you, but would you mind talking a little bit about your experience at VIU? And what drew you to it? Because it's a very special program.*

AK: [15:59] Yeah, it really is. So, I graduated with a Major in First Nation Studies and a Minor in Psychology. But when I went back to VIU, I intended to just have a major in psychology and a minor in gender studies. I was going to go into a masters in art therapy.

So I did not intend on landing in Indigenous studies at all. I was taking a gender studies course with an Indigenous women's focus with the professor who would later become my mentor: Collette Jones.¹ I just clicked with her so deeply, and everything she was saying, and the pedagogy and praxis with how she was teaching. I felt like I found the holistic healing that I was originally interested in doing, which I was rapidly becoming disenchanted with being in the psychology department, realizing that the focus, in my perception, was heavily on illness. And what I've always been interested in is wellness.

I think I probably would have dropped out of an undergrad and really lost interest in pursuing education without that connection. We'll never know, but I can really see that for myself having happened. I don't think I would have stuck in the psych department, heavily for four years.

(Brief pause)

Yeah so, it was meeting Collette Jones. And I just became interested. I followed her for a couple semesters, and through that met more students and professors. Then actually began to increase into other parts of the Indigenous studies department and stayed with it.

LV: [18:04] *I love it.*

(both laugh)

It's always such a happy unintentional find, and it just speaks to your heart.

AK: Yes.

LV: *I guess I would like to reign us back and maybe talk about (brief pause)—you mentioned the first time you brought Luna with you—*

AK: Mhm.

LV: *—Was to the NRGH?*

AK: Oh yeah, that's the Nanaimo Regional General Hospital.

LV: *Would you want to talk a little bit more about what got you into that, and also what it was like having Luna there with you and the thoughts that were in your head at that time?*

¹ "Collette Jones." Snuneymuxw First Nation. <https://www.snuneymuxw.ca/collette-jones>

AK: At that time I was working professionally as a birth doula, which I suppose is a bit of an activist role in it's own way. So it just made sense for me to participate in birth work related actions. It was being there that day—I, from many social contexts, kind of knew all of the moms that ended up showing up. Everyone had babies and was feeding and carrying signs and doing photos. I think it surprised me that it was actually a really fun day.

That started to change my perception of what it would be like to participate. But it really was that that particular cause was close to my personal beliefs as well as the work that I was doing. But being there changed my perception of what it would be like to participate.

[20:13]LV: *And do you remember the next significant instance that you might have gone to a meeting, but brought Luna with you again?*

AK: I was thinking about that. I know she was really young when—there was some kind of flash mob thing of Nanaimo women singing “I can’t keep quiet” when that came out. And I’m not sure what came first, if it was that or the first Nanaimo’s first Nanaimo Women's March. The year Trump—I guess he had been elected at that time.

I remember Luna being really little at both of those events, so I would think that would have been close to next.

LV: *Have you ever talked to Luna about the first—because she’s six—if she remembers the first time she was at an activist event?*

AK: I think that’s one of those things that she has a knowledge of it retroactively. Because in her photo albums, that are in with her normal picture books, there is a picture of each of those events. And the ‘I can’t keep quiet’ event—we were there with Luna’s aunty, and it was Luna’s aunty who had invited us. That’s in her photo album as a family outing.

(Laughing)

[22:09] Same with the Women’s March, actually, those pictures—her aunty is there. The three of us were there together. One of Luna’s, still, best friends that we see every week was there as an infant with her mom as well. So they are also there in that photo for Luna of that first Women's March. We’ve gone to that event every year since. So Luna has been to at least four of them now.

I know that she associates that to those friends and families that we often do those things with. I don’t know if she remembers it from that age but I know she’s aware of it from looking through her memories and things.

LV: *I’m so glad you brought up photo albums because that can spearhead us into 2020 in that photo albums are an amazing record of time, as you’ve just shown. Have you progressed your photo album*

(pause)

From youth to now? Is it a thing that you’ve actively pursued and then noticed a change in, especially in regards to 2020 and the pandemic?

AK: I think there were a couple parts to that question so I'll try to answer and you (phone rings) let me know what I missed.

[24:00] From that very first event outside of the hospital, at the time, I was doing a lot of birth photography. So I photographed that event and posted it, with permission, after the event. That actually got a lot more attention and airplay than the event itself. So it showed me the power of, for lack of a better word, marketing and images, pictures, social media. That marketing background gave me an interest in having maximum impact for our efforts. So photos definitely do that. It has to be a careful dance that everybody feels comfortable with, but I myself am comfortable with images that I've approved, circulating.

I have boundaries around what I would allow [to] circulate of my daughter, but, in general, when we are in these public spaces, photos and what could happen in that arena—we're fine with her being visible within the community. We definitely—

(pause)

[25:30] It's almost embarrassing. It's embarrassing to say out loud, so we have to acknowledge that it's a part of the cause, not a personal motivation, necessarily. But I have—because of my background in marketing and photography—have been aware of being able to position photos towards greater interest in causes. So yes, I definitely have always done that. In that way, have had far greater reach with my personal activisms, in that I'll have family members or friends, that aren't even necessarily in Canada, take interest in something that we are doing. Which otherwise would be very localized and not have the same reach.

LV: *Which avenues do you typically use in terms of social media, because there are so many different platforms at the moment?*

AK: Yeah, I'm a bit of a dinosaur, so I'm on Facebook and I just refuse to spread beyond that because I try to limit my screen time. I only do Facebook. I would imagine a lot of these things are getting reposted on Instagram and through other friends various social media accounts. But I'm only doing them on Facebook.

Though I have often—If I've been a part of organizing events—which there was a rally in solidarity for the Mi'kmaq fisherman last year.² I was a part of organizing that. So if I am a part of organizing something—oh, and I actually did participate in—I don't think it was 2020—it wasn't 2020 that I helped organize the Women's March. But if I'm a part of the organizing I will also reach out to local media sources and try to have a newspaper or news presence there as well. They usually bring a really good photographer who can capture really impressive images.

² For resources about the Mi'kmaq lobster dispute, see here:

Graham Slaughter. "Mi'kmaq Lobster Dispute: A Conflict Brewing since the 1700s." CTVNews. BellMedia, October 21, 2020, <https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/mi-kmaq-lobster-dispute-a-conflict-brewing-since-the-1700s-1.5153568>

News directly from Nanaimo:

Karl Yu. "Solidarity Rally in Nanaimo Sees Support for Mi'kmaq Lobster Fishers." Nanaimo News Bulletin. Black Press Media, October 23, 2020. <https://www.nanaimobulletin.com/news/solidarity-rally-in-nanaimo-sees-support-for-mikmaq-lobster-fishers/>

LV: [27:58] *I love that. On Facebook, what is your process—or do you have a process—of looking for other kinds of groups? Or do you keep it with what you are familiar with? What is your process in that regards?*

AK: I use my personal groups, and then I might, depending on what it is, I might edit—I might include less images of my child, but I will also post to the events public groups and encourage people to share freely or add to it. So in that way I know those groups are going directly to interested people who have already participated to some capacity. I think it's like a careful dance with images, so I'll just publicly encourage, "Share widely, feel free to use these images, add your own, whatever you like."

LV: *Have you had conversations with Luna about the images that end up online, and of them being of her?*

AK: I haven't. That's a really good question, because I do have friends who feel strongly to keep their child off social media or limit the way that their image might be utilized without their consent. Particularly at an age where they actually can't really legally consent. So it's a complex topic which I respect. At the end of the day I have made my decision based on—she is the biggest part of my life. She is—most my life revolves around her, and so I have felt like I want to share our journey together.

[30:00] If she comes to an age where she wants all of that removed I will do it to the best of my ability, and I am aware that I might not be able to do it fully. But that is something that I would respect if it came up.

LV: *And what I know about you is definitely that you aren't sharing anything that would potentially embarrass her.*

AK: I mean, I try to share her shining moments, and she's posing for the camera. She's been a pretty big diva lately, and there have been moments that she refuses a photo, and then I won't take it. Mostly she's just playing with power and control, and says no in random scenarios.

Most of the time she's happy to ham it up and her little friends are there. The friends and their parents will consent. Even if it's acquaintances that I don't know as well, I often will message them the photo first, if their child is in it, and ask if I can share it.

LV: *On the conversation of her saying no: has she ever said no to going to an event? Or is she normally kind of happy to go along? How did those conversations go?*

AK: She's never said no yet. I think she's excited, she knows a couple of her little pals are pretty much always going to be there. They run around, and they play, and they play tag in the crowd. I know she enjoys connecting with those other kids.

I believe that she knows she is going to see a lot of our loved ones, both friends and relatives at the events. I think she really looks forward to them because she's never said no about going.

[32:06] I sometimes have—I'll print shirts and have them specially made. Or I'll make her a sign, which she's eager to wear and eager to carry. She's shown full enthusiasm to participate in every way I've asked her. Even things like brushing her hair, knowing that we will probably be

photographed a lot. On most days she would resist, but on those days she doesn't. She really participates whole heartedly.

LV: *Beautiful.*

(Pause)

Oh no, I had a question. Where did it go?

(Pause)

From the way that you are talking about this, it definitely sounds like, in your household specifically, activism is 'always on' in a way. Are there ever times when it's 'off'?

AK: Hitting a bit of a sore point with that one. My partner is definitely an activist as well. He spoke last year at the Nanaimo Women's March event, and it's definitely one of the huge things that we connect on: our shared passions and politics.

[33:50] We can really burn each other out with our rants and late night dialogues about these global issues and complex and sensitive matters. There are times that—so we are working on it, is my answer. We've even had to adopt specific language around having the spoons or not, so that we can consent without hurting each other's feelings.

We are working on that so that there can be 'off times' in our home, in a sense. Particularly more when we need to rest or rejuvenate ourselves, or we just find it becoming too heated, too triggered. Part of both being really passionate activists is that we can have strong opinions that don't always line up. So that can be a challenge within our home, and we are working on language and boundaries to lessen that potential negative impact.

But that being said, I will also laughingly say there's a saying that I've heard—a teaching—when a community calls, you answer. So, we might very much be on a chill day and switch gears in an instant.

It's a great joy. I feel very blessed to share that with everyone in my household, but also we do have to work hard to take pauses.

LV: *How do you navigate—because I'm sure that those conversations are very different with your partner versus having those conversations and figuring out the language to communicate with Luna.*

AK: Yeah.

LV: [35:54] *How do you navigate that?*

AK: Again, twofold answer. I'm a strong believer that children participate in community and in life. So I'm aware that she witnesses a lot of big conversations around politics and activism in general. I'm always mindful of what she can understand, and keeping it safe for her in that way.

I probably have a bigger range of what I feel comfortable [with] her witnessing—discussing—probably than most of her peers at school, I can imagine. At the same

time, I make sure the tone of the conversation stays in a way that she can understand or that won't be harmful.

An example I could give of my best efforts, particularly during 2020, I did take her to the Black Lives Matter event here in Nanaimo.³ That was a really hard example of what you are asking about in that she doesn't know police brutality. I think that's a concept beyond a six year old, nor do I want her to really know about that. I know it's a privilege to be able to protect her from that reality, but as her mother I want to because she's still understanding the basics of how things work.

I actually don't advise her to look for a police officer, I tell her to look for a mom with a kid. If she ever gets separated from me. So I'm not trying to indoctrin[ate] her towards the RCMP by any means, but I also don't want her to be afraid of aspects of community that she, I don't think, would be able to understand. [38:05] So there [are] complex issues of privilege woven in there. And yet I need to be her mom first and foremost.

So I did bring her to that event. She carried a sign that said BLM and we talked a great deal about what Black Lives Matters means. I knew that would be a cognitive stretch for her because I honestly don't think it has occurred to her the reverse. I don't think she understands that there are many systemic and personal worldviews that create racial inequity and injustice.

That seemed tricky for her to wrap her mind around, but I remember her saying—because I was questioning her repeatedly, “What did your sign mean?” Because I didn't want her to be put in a position of being asked and not have her own voice or presence with it. I remember her saying things like, “all people are important,” and I was like, “Oh my god, I hope people don't ‘all lives matter’ her, she's only six!”

But, in those kind of statements, I could see that it was a mental stretch for her to really understand what that event was about. So, for me, part of that event was about taking a stance against police brutality, but for her, being six, her presence was really just about understanding—starting a very very tip of understanding racism.

[40:10] So that was a tricky example, and that was an event that I actually felt—it was the only event I felt really nervous bringing her. Both because it was at the beginning of the pandemic and we were wearing masks and I was really nervous about social distancing and that component. As well, it was such an escalated topic and moment, there was so much anger—understandably so—but I was concerned it wasn't going to be a safe environment for her. I was also concerned that there might be people with an opposite world view present. That it might actually be unsafe in other ways as well.

LV: I guess that brings me to a question of—There are definitely levels of high risk and low risk.

AK: Yes.

³ Greg Sakaki. “Black Lives Solidarity Demonstration Fills Nanaimo Park.” Nanaimo News Bulletin. Black Press Media, June 6, 2020.
<https://www.nanaimobulletin.com/news/black-lives-solidarity-demonstration-fills-nanaimo-park/>

LV: *Do you have a—not a preference—do you typically choose to bring her to things you know are going to be low risk, or, because this is your first instance of something could potentially be high risk.*

AK: Yes.

LV: *Do you want to kind of walk me through?*

AK: Yeah, I've always felt—everything else I've ever participated in with her I've felt is low risk. Without a doubt in my mind, to her benefit, to be present and to learn and to witness. Because there was a higher risk there, and there were more—the agenda was more complex, that was the first time I really hesitated to bring her. [42:14] In a very practical sense, as a single parent, it often just comes down to the logistics of: I go with her or I don't go.

So that has a large influence on my decision of will I bring her or not. That event, I do remember talking to her a lot around—and she was aware because I think she was at home from school at the time from the pandemic, so she was aware of the changing climate and issues. But I do remember saying to her, you know, for this event you need to be holding my hand or my pant leg at all times. I do not want you beyond an arms reach.

A friend and I—I went with a friend who has a kid around the same age, and we had parked strategically and had made exit strategies. We'd discussed in advance when we would remove the kids, at what point, if it came to that. And a lot of measures that are normally a non-issue.

And thankfully it was a non-issue that day. But I wasn't really sure what we would be walking into, or what might unfold in that event.

LV: [43:46] *So, this is a question that might not have an answer, so we can totally skip it. But have you put a lot of thought into Luna's future, and the potential that she might be interested in doing a little bit more high risk volunteering when she's older? Because there are a lot of youth activist groups especially relevant right now.*

So have you thought a lot about that, or are you just waiting until you get there?

AK: I haven't thought a lot about it. I suppose it's a bit of a dual irony or something in the sense of—she's participated very heavily in many activisms for her whole life. So I can think of two other of her peers who are as present and equally primed towards activism as her, but it's definitely a rarer reality, I think, as a six year old.

So clearly I'm really feeding her presence and involvement. I have friends that have children in their—well, they are not children. It is my friend's child (laughs), but they are adults. They are in their twenties, or mid twenties, and they participated in things like the sieging of the legislator last year,⁴ and other events that could—one of my friend's daughters was repeatedly arrested and very publicly—that was the point, that was the intention, and yet those actions could have very real impacts on her future. So I did get to witness my friend, whose daughter that is—was very in

⁴ Not to be confused with Trump's supporters who participated in the siege of the Capitol at the beginning of 2021. April is referring to Anti-pipeline activity that was prevalent in British Columbia during 2020.

support, very proud—went to be a grounding presence and a witness knowing that she was going to participate. She had already made her choices.

[46:14] So I really admired that, and sent solidarity and support through that experience. I would like to imagine being that graceful for my own daughter, and yet, of course, there would be this hesitation of wanting her to be safe as well as have all the opportunities she can in her future.

And that is something we have to consider with our activism, is that by the nature of taking a strong or public, visible stance, we may be closing some doors or relationships.

I guess we'll cross that bridge when we get there. (Laughs)

I suppose, at the minimum, my hope of what I could offer her would be at least a knowledge around how to go about things safely, and supports she can put in place. And many layers of ways to bolster activism so that it is both strategic and heavily witnessed really is a large part of the reality of being in a female body, and sometimes participating in things that may clash with political powers, like RCMP, police, and then also—I haven't been there—but I'm thinking about things like old growth camps and things where she might also be in isolated geographic.

[48:15] Definitely those power systems tend to be male dominated, but also the activism groups themselves could be heavily presented by men. And being a woman at this point in her life—if she still identifies that way—then it's a very real safety thing that we have to consider.

So I guess at the minimum I would hope to use my experience and insight to help her better position herself.

I mean, best case scenario, I'll go too. But (laughs) maybe she'll be doing things that aren't in alignment with my values, and so I keep being reminded she might not want me around.

(Laughs)

Not so much by her, but by friends who think it's delusional that I imagine us marching together. I believe it's possible, and I'm trying to parent her in a way that she would enjoy my company still (laughs) later in life.

But I'm aware that it is a potential that she might not want me present, but then I would help her strategize. Hopefully she can take some of that in.

LV: I love the mental image of you being the cool mom at the protest with all the youth, because I can see it.

AK: I've been at many actions where someone is pushing their parent in a wheelchair. I feel a lot of compassion but I also think that's going to be me. I'm going to be like, "Luna, give me a ride, I am not missing out on this just because I'm not mobile any longer!"

(laughs)

LV: [50:05] Oh, that's so great.

To reign us back to a little bit more of the present, unfortunately: I guess the conversation of—and we've already been discussing it, especially in your talks of going to the Black Lives Matter protests. If you could walk me through what you remember—and it's different times for everyone—but when you remember the pandemic being announced and how you had to talk to Luna about that.

AK: Um-hm

LV: *Because it's a hard thing to talk about.*

AK: Yeah, it is a really hard thing. I remember I was at work when Trudeau was on—I was watching online, maybe that's still called TV, I don't know (laughs)—when he was making the announcement of the closures.⁵ And he wasn't done his speech, and hadn't announced the school closures, and I decided to leave work.

I reached out to Luna's dad and checked in with him, and I was like I think this is the moment to pull her from daycare, and he agreed.

I remember leaving work that day, probably 10 a.m., I had probably just gotten there. I'm going to pick her up from daycare, and deciding, come what may, with work. We didn't want her in school at that time, and I was most concerned with how the unconscious commentary or stress of her care providers—I don't mean this with any judgement, understandably so—I'm very protective of what kind of messaging she is receiving.

[52:21] I was worried how the stress would impact her caregivers and what kind of things she might overhear. So that was my motivation to go get her. I hadn't even started unpacking the germ, virus, distances—all of that was still a mystery at that day. But that was my motivation to go get her from school.

Before the schools had even closed we knew we weren't going to send her, which is funny because I don't really have the privilege to back that up. I guess it was one of those intense moments of “we'll figure out those details later because she will not be going.” Which means I cannot go to work.

Everything shifted that day anyways, that we were all getting sent home from work within a couple days. The care centers were closing down anyways, but we had already made that choice.

I am a strong believer in always speaking the truth to kids, but keeping it developmentally manageable. I think I just told her there was a really bad virus, a virus is like a cold or flu, but this one is really serious, so we can't go to school and work.

To be honest, the first couple months of the pandemic were quite a delight for us. Every day I would tell her we were doing witch homeschool. We did a lot of harvesting, a lot of gardening, a lot of the kind of land based education that I would like her to have. [54:11] We were doing a lot of our favourite things.

⁵ World Health Organization (WHO) announced Covid-19 as a worldwide pandemic on March 11th 2020. On March 16th Trudeau announced restrictions on travel to and from Canada, including asking Canadian residents who were outside of the country to come home.

LV: *That's so beautiful.*

AK: Yeah. She talks fondly of that time. Now that she's in school she reminisces on how great that was. She was very happy to be at home and she often says—we have little inside jokes, but she says “Momsies the best, I wanna stay with Momsies,” and I'll say, “you have to go to school because I have work to do today!” (laughs)

I do feel proud that we succeeded in sheltering her from a great deal of internalizing the trauma of that, and did that fine line of speaking the truth to her, but not making it so big that she couldn't process what was coming her way.

LV: *You kind of touched on it a little bit, but how do you now navigate her being in school? Is it partly that she understands more now, or is it just that she understands this is how things are?*

AK: I think she was home probably about two months before things started to reopen. I think by that time there had been a lot of shifts in the narrative and people, I guess, having steady messaging. She went back—and her daycare provider was a very experienced woman who is incredible, so we knew Luna would be safe. She [Luna's daycare provider] would do everything possible to shelter the kids from any fear or stress by the time she was able to reopen.

[56:17] Luna went back there first, and then—and then it was summer break. So by that point we had to look at a slightly larger group and more like a summer camp situation where they have more workers, and more workers that we don't know where they are at, and what kind of things they might say that the kids overhear in the background. By that point—I was feeling very stretched, because the whole time Luna was home with me I was also doing my Master's degree, and my full time job, and being the only caregiver with no partner to help with anything—I mean, he helps a bit financially.

Oh, and Luna's dad's partner at that time is autoimmune compromised, so part of what their household needed was to not have Luna in their bubble. So I was literally getting no breaks ever. She was just with me the entire time, she wasn't even visiting her dad at that time, which normally she's with him very regularly.

By the time we had to make the decisions about summertime it was a tough choice in that I really didn't think I could do all of those things much longer. That was always a temporary solution for me. So Luna did go into some summer camps and things at that point.

[57:59] I think, probably, the sad truth of it is I don't know that I really saw much more option of what I could do. So she kind of needed to go somewhere.

I never went on CERB or anything like that. I remember when it was coming out of being offered I crunched my bills and looked at it, and I was like, “Oh, that's not even an option for me.” I cannot sustain financially the things I'm responsible for off that amount. So I had to keep my job, didn't really want to quit my Masters, and had to keep my kid. Or wanted to keep my kid slash had to keep my kid. (laughs)

So I think at that point, honestly, there was some desperation involved in the willingness to let her go to summer camp in that I didn't really see much practical option for us. School was very

much the same, to be honest. I had a lot of hesitation around her starting kindergarten. Up until the week before I was not convinced that she would be going to kindergarten at school.

We were really concerned. I have several friends who work in various roles in the medical profession, and I made these elaborate vows with them that the moment they pulled their kids they had to phone me and I would pull mine.

I was very nervous and very hesitant to send her, but not feeling great about the alternative. I don't know that it was a choice really that I wanted to make, felt like a bit of [an] estimated guess.

LV: [59:56] *A lot of 2020 does kind of feel like an estimated guess, that's a good way of putting it.*

AK: I want to acknowledge as well that being an only child—by the time she went back to summer camp, I was really starting to witness her deep loneliness for other kids.

I remember her crying one day and saying, "Will I ever see my daycare family again?" At six you don't really have—she didn't have in that moment much of a perception of how long two months is in life. Statements like that really let me know she was missing her people, and that there were a lot of mental health benefits and social benefits—especially when they are developing so rapidly still—to her being in groups.

2020 is full of tough choices for everyone, I'm sure.

LV: *Do you remember any moments that might not have occurred, but any moments that she might have brought up a kind of activism that she wanted to participate in herself? Maybe because she was lonely, but also because of how ingrained activism is in your life.*

AK: Yeah, totally, those are the big mom wins for me that make all the BS feel worth it. (Laughs)

[1:01:47] Last year, at the Women's March, I had taken on the role of being on the megaphone thing, and being a crowd rallier—it was a big stretch for me. I'm shy in my own ways, honestly. People don't always believe me, but I am shy in my own ways.

So that was a big growth moment for me, and my partner had agreed to stay with us and be the personal responsible for Luna that day, and her wellbeing. But she walked with me quite a bit, and I was on the megaphone all day, and for weeks after that she was saying to me, "my body, my choice," and kind of doing the rhythm of chants.

So I knew it had kind of gotten in her mind. She was also saying—she's always said to me, "no justice no peace," and I'm just like, "Music to my ears." (laughs)

So she repeats things—she repeated particularly from that year, I think because I was so vocal. She really repeated a lot of the messaging that was arranged by the committee and decided upon in advance—not just by me—and she mirrored it back to me in ways that I know it affected her without a doubt.

I do see it in small ways in interactions or conflicts with her peers. She'll often be the voice on somebody's behalf and say things like, "everybody needs to be included," and things that are direct quotes of messaging I have given to her over and over again. But I see her apply it and I know it's getting through.

But those things may be less tangible activism. Where, the things from Women's March, I know 100 percent that day impacted her mind.

LV: [1:04:07] *Maybe less tangible instances of activism, but at the same time it's like the starting of where your mom started from.*

AK: Yeah, totally. How she—the meaning she makes of that and what she does [with] it will be up to her.

LV: *We are kind of at an hour mark and that was a beautiful place to wrap it up.*

AK: Yes!

LV: *Do you have anything else you'd like to finish off with?*

AK: Not that comes to my mind at this moment. I will definitely read the transcript and if there is something I think of to add I'll check in with you. But I think that was very uplifting to remember some of these days and also think more about why I do what I do with her. So it was good to talk with you today.

End of Interview.