

## Transcript Ron & Lisa Schwartz

Transcription: Ron & Lisa Schwartz

VC: Hello I'm Vanessa Corwin

KK: And, I'm Kathleen Kaan

VC: We are here with Ron and Lisa Schwartz of Teaneck, NJ. So Ron and Lisa, you decided to drive cross-country to southern California in the midst of a pandemic and at a time when I believe California was a hot spot of the virus. What led you to make the decision to do this?

Lisa: Grandparents were called. The calling of grandparenting. Honestly, I'm not sure that we would have done it just decided to take a vacation to go cross country. But we have family on the West Coast our son and daughter-in-law live in southern California in Redondo Beach a beautiful beach area a nice place to visit. And they have two daughters two-1/2 and 4-1/2 and like a lot of young people living through this pandemic they are one of the lucky ones who still have jobs and working from home but working from home in both management positions and lot of responsibility and trying at the same time for 3 months to care for a 2-1/2 and 4-1/2.

Ron: A very active 2-1/2 and 4-1/2.

Lisa: So they did it for three months and then the girls went back to their childcare provider who then took a vacation herself for 6 weeks from mid-July to right after Labor Day. So our kids asked us if we could possibly drive out, and if we would consider driving and we hadn't but we were not going to fly. We just didn't feel safe flying. So we thought a lot about it and honestly, we were very anxious about it. I was extremely anxious at a time when the numbers were going up not only in California but in every state that we were driving through and in some states where people were resistant wearing masks. So I got really anxious and about a week before we were going to leave a couple of our friends said we don't think you should go. We're really worried about you. So I panicked a little bit and called the kids and said look we're really worried and then when I saw the look on their faces I said we have to go they just really needed us because they would have had to be on their own again for six weeks while working.

Ron: We were on face time with them and we even suggested that you could just see the drop in their faces. Because they were totally exhausted after this three and four-month period of taking care of the kids and trying to hold on to a job their faces actually dropped.

KK: I'm told Lisa you did all the planning. How did you decide where to stay over I'm sure you drove three or five hours and then you made the decision to stay over. Was that all preplanned?

Lisa: I'm a planner by nature anyway. My career was in community organizing my first career and I just love to organize. And I especially love, love travel it's a passion. And I love planning travel so it came kind of naturally to me but during a pandemic. In terms of where we stayed

initially, we had hotels and it was all preplanned. Everything was preplanned. I booked hotels I called hotels to go on the first floor the last week after our friends talked to us I rethought it and canceled the hotel reservations and looked for airbnbs.

VC: Why airbnbs?

Lisa: Because I felt there was more of a chance ... we really sort of were quarantining as we were traveling. The kids didn't ask us to quarantine because we assured them we wouldn't have contact with anybody other than two friends, two single women we stayed with that hadn't been out of the house and were very careful so they were okay with that. Other than that we saw nobody at all, but if we would have stayed at a hotel there would be more of a chance we were going through the lobbies and seeing people so we made sure the airbnbs were self-check-in and I communicated with the hosts to tell them what my concerns were. So that's what I did. I was denied an Airbnb, the first one I was denied.

KK: Why, what did they say?

Lisa: So this was a place in Illinois, and I had texted the host and asked what precautions you were taking during the pandemic, and FYI we wear masks. This was a room in a private home and we distance, and I hope you do too. I got a note back saying this may not be a good fit for you. We do not wear masks in our own home. I said "good, I'm glad I asked."

Ron: Even though they were renting out a room in their home to strangers as an airbnb.

KK: It's interesting to me that people under all these circumstances during a pandemic, people were still renting rooms in their homes.

Lisa: People are, and I will say part of it was the planning and communication and part of it was luck. I would go back to every one of them again. They were spic and span clean and the hosts left little goodies, and they were just people who loved doing this. I had used airbnbs a lot so I kind of know what to look for and only go with the super hosts and look at the reviews. It was a lot of planning.

VC: So you've got the accommodations worked out. What about eating? Did you go to restaurants? Did you go to restaurants on the road? What did you do about food and drink?

Lisa: We brought wine.

VC: I would expect nothing less.

Lisa: A corkscrew.

Ron: That was a very important piece of the equipment.

Lisa: I kind of figured people who camp do this. We're not campers but we could do this. We had our cooler and I got pieces of cold chicken, cut up vegetables, stuff that would stay in the cooler, made some pasta pesto, turkey loaf and froze it, peanut butter and jelly which we never opened. So you know we didn't eat gourmet meals but we ate out of the cooler and the only time we went into a store we got gas, and they always had a convenience store and I got ice. I knew it was \$3.00, handed the guy my \$3.00, took my ice bag, and put it in the cooler. We did that every morning when we got gas. And then it turned out I didn't know for sure if all the places would have a refrigerator but one Air B&B did have a full kitchen. So we had pasta and I bought prepared sauce. We ate okay. Lots of snacks I packed the back seat of the car with the snacks so you could get to them quickly

VC: Snacks are important!

Ron: So we didn't have to stop for lunch. We would have breakfast at the airbnb and we wouldn't stop anywhere for lunch. We would have our snacks in the car. Lisa had planned every trip that we would have no more than seven hours. That was the longest trip we had. We would get up around 7:30 in the morning, be out on the road by 8 o'clock, and we would get to the next airbnb before the sun went down. We didn't want to drive in the dark. And we would have time to unload everything and we would prepare dinner. Most of the places if they didn't have a store or an oven, had a microwave or a toaster oven. So we were able to prepare the foods that we brought with us. And not go to restaurants or see the host. Every B&B we had was a separate entrance so we wouldn't have to deal with the host and we wouldn't have to meet them. They had a code on the door so we could go in and out and not see anybody. This is why Lisa said we kind of quarantined on the way out and it took eleven days to go out.

KK: How long did this trip door to door take you?

Lisa: We're retired and not doing much anyway so we figured well let's take our time. We did take the most direct route out through Route 80. We didn't want to go through the South. So I looked at the map and looked at where the stops along the way would be. I did get pretty close to the highway for the most part. Sometimes we had to drive a little bit not much. And then I looked at the distances. I don't know how I would have done this without Google Maps. I Google mapped from Pittsburgh to Cleveland, and it tells you how many hours. We have a friend in Pittsburgh, so our first stop was six hours. So we spent two nights with that friend. And we had two home-cooked meals.

VC: So you had a visit with your friend, so that's good.

Lisa: We hadn't seen her in a lot of years.

Ron: We knew the friend was a single woman and had been very, very careful about going out so we felt really safe there. We also have a single friend in Denver whose place we stayed in for two nights but also had been very, very careful. An old friend of ours. And then we stayed two

nights in Zion National Park in Utah and Arches National Park, also in Utah. Again in a separate unit where we didn't have to go through a lobby or eat in a common area.

Lisa: Those places were really nice. We kind of splurged there and stayed in a very nice lodge with beautiful views. And people had reviewed it and stayed there during COVID. So they were really careful. No cleaners came in. They left it free 24 hours between people, separate entrance so that was great and there were not a lot of people traveling.

KK: What did you do in these travels when you saw people without masks? Did you see a difference from East Coast driving and West Coast and the changes people took these guidelines to wear masks?

Ron: Yes we certainly did. That was one of the interesting political things that we saw going across the country in the course of 3200 miles. It seemed the more West we got from New Jersey the less masks we saw on people's faces and then when we got to the West Coast, everybody had masks. In Nebraska, Iowa especially, people would be walking around the streets without masks. They would be walking in public without masks. It seemed very much like the Corona virus had not really become part of their lives. Like they were able to ignore it, or maybe their political affiliations helped them to ignore it but definitely there is a difference between the two coasts and the middle of the country.

VC: That's scary because when you're going through these places you want to protect yourself.

Ron: Each day we're driving between five and seven hours and you had to stop at rest stops to go to the bathroom. That's another issue for older people.

VC: A very important issue.

Ron: We not only had our regular masks, we had the face shield, and a better mask, the N95 mask, to go to the bathroom. But I did notice, as a guy, I kind of lurked around outside the bathroom to see who was going in there but I had to go in sometimes when there were other guys in there. Whenever a guy came into the bathroom who didn't have a mask I found myself getting really angry. I had my mask on and there were other people who had their masks on but there were other people. Some jerk coming in who didn't have a mask and would stand next to you in a urinal. And then there was this whole thing about washing your hands so only one guy could wash their hands at a time. So would the other guys stay six feet apart waiting to wash their hands or get too close to you? These were all interesting things that we would not think about before Corona virus. But again in Nebraska, Iowa, and Ohio, too people would be coming in without their masks on. I would get angry but the issue is are we going to say anything to these people?

KK: I would want to pull down the window and say where's your mask. Did you ever do that?

Lisa: No. I almost did, actually the first stop in Ohio there were very few cars but I think it was the first day that the government issued mandatory masks, but the people were not complying. So the rest areas were commercial areas.

VC: Like where the truckers go.

Lisa: There were very few cars, but the first stop I got my N95 and put my face shield on and it was pretty empty. There was an older couple not wearing masks and I noticed the woman looking at me and kind of give me a look. You know, like we were from another planet. I really wanted to say something to her and I had practiced what they would say but I didn't end up doing that. But I was going to say, " Hey, you know I'm from the New York-New Jersey area and I don't know if you know people who died from COVID but I know several people who died from this." I think if it doesn't hit you personally you think it's all a hoax, or nothing more than a cold. But I didn't say anything. That actually was the only time I felt somebody looking at me that I had the urge to say something.

Ron: One other bathroom issue before we go. For those of you who are thinking about doing this, be aware that the further west you get, especially in the Midwest and the near west is that there are less rest areas on the interstates. Some of them are rural states and they just don't believe people have to go to the bathroom all that often, I think. So there are less bathrooms that you can go to and more time between when bathrooms become available to you. So Lisa will address the issue on how we dealt with that issue and how we planned for that issue.

KK: So you planned for that too, Lisa.

VC: So tell us.

Lisa: So for females, and this is great for hiking too, there's something called a female urination device and it's basically, if you have to pee, I don't want to get too graphic but it serves as kind of a...

VC: Like a jar? Like you pee in a jar?

Lisa: No, it's not even a jar. You put it up against your vagina and it's like a penis so you can pee. It's like a funnel. You don't have to worry about squatting but I never wound up using it.

Ron: It certainly was the subject of many jokes.

VC: Lisa, like did you ever pull over and go in the woods?

Lisa: The first time we went to a state park we did that. We did purchase on Amazon a porta-potty, a good one. Very easy. You put it in your trunk and I used that twice and it saved me, because it was very uncomfortable. This was the route in eastern Colorado between mid-Nebraska and Denver where there is nothing and that was kind of a funny story because we

pulled off the road there was no shoulder. We were in this real farm rural area on this dirt road and I ended up using it where there were a bunch of cows. There were thousands of flies! So the trip was driving to Denver another 2-1/2 hours with a fly-infested car.

VC: When you got to California, where did you stay, and what about social distancing with the family? How did you handle that?

Lisa: I have to say we kind of hugged immediately when we got out of the car. It was very emotional because we didn't know when we were going to see them again. We hadn't seen them for over six months which is very unusual for us. As you know, Vanessa, we would go out often to see them every other month, because kids grow up and yeah it was very emotional, and we just hugged. We stayed with them-- they have an extra bedroom for us--and we basically took the kids out every day in the morning to a park. The kids did have contact with other kids. You know, I guess that was somewhat of a risk because kids can carry it, but we just did it and they kind of ran around and played but we didn't have any real contact with anybody. We found a tree we sat under the tree.

KK: How long did you stay with your family?

Lisa: Five weeks.

Ron: Yeah, five weeks chasing a very active 2-1/2 year old and a very active 4-1/2 year old around the world. It never stopped by the way; it just kept going all day long.

KK: When did you think-- "Oh my God, I have to go back and do this all over again?"

Lisa: By five weeks we were ready. We were exhausted and actually driving was restful. We also had a very comfortable car. We were going to buy a car in a year but we said okay, bite the bullet and buy it now. It was a comfortable car and that made the difference.

Ron: Especially the air conditioning. We passed a lot of places in the West that were 104/105 degrees.

VC: So you really needed that. So you guys, when you got back home, did you quarantine at all?

Ron: Basically, we felt we had quarantined the ten days that it took us to get back.

KK: Ever think about writing a book?

Lisa: People have asked us to write something. I am going to do, if people are expressing an interest actually, a workshop so any listeners...

VC: Can you share some of your tips for people who want to do something like you did?

## Transcript Ron & Lisa Schwartz

Lisa: I think if you do it right, the advance planning absolutely is key. There is also something I didn't mention, and this is my greatest anxiety. What's the worst that can happen? what's the worst-case scenario, a car accident? That could happen anytime. but what if one of us got sick on this trip while we're on route? So I actually looked to see where the hospitals were in every single place we stopped, to make sure it was a decent hospital at least fairly close. I mean we didn't get sick and there was no reason why we should have because we didn't really take any risks during our travels. So I would say that was important and I did pack what I called a COVID bag with zinc, Gatorade and lots of water and I also thought of the Gatorade and the electrolytes if I needed it. I also had three telemed sessions with my doctor who actually convinced me that I was okay to go.

Ron: Let me just add if you're thinking of doing this. Think about quarantine in a car for like ten or eleven days. Plan that you are quarantined-- it's not like a normal trip. The second thing is don't overdo it. Don't exhaust yourself each day 'cause that could put you in danger. Just plan on driving during the day, keep your nights available for eating and resting and it would help if you have a partner driving. I think Lisa could have done this by herself, but for me, I was very happy to have another driver to switch back and forth.

Lisa: I love to drive. Road trips are something I enjoy better than flying.

VC: Would you do it again?

Lisa: Yes.

Ron: And we will.

Lisa: We might be the only way we could see our kids for a while.

Ron: And you know what, there is the benefit of seeing the country. You see the country from your car and also observe, especially if you're from the metropolitan area, observe once you get out of your bubble and you see political differences because they're obvious as you drive across the country because it is a political season. Driving through the towns you see the signs, the competing signs. You see the Black Lives Matter signs, you see the Blue Lives Matter signs. We walked around Lincoln, Nebraska and we counted how many Biden/Harris signs we saw as opposed to how many Trump signs we saw. It's like getting out of your bubble driving cross-country and it's very different from the New York City metropolitan area. And like you said, the two coasts and the rural areas in between are just quite different. And I think every American should do that at least once.

VC: This sounds like you had such a fantastic trip.

Lisa: Yeah, we were lucky.

Transcript Ron & Lisa Schwartz

VC: And we just want to thank you for sharing all this with us.

Lisa: You're welcome and we hope some people would consider it. It's safer than we thought it would be.

END