

## **2020 Wuhan COVID-19 Lockdown Oral Histories**

### **Scarlett Interview**

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Virtual Meeting

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## Scarlett Interview

**ROBERT BROWNING:** My name is Robert Browning, working in conjunction with the Reuther Library at Wayne State University. Today's date is September 5, 2021. This interview is with Scarlett, which is a pseudonym, about her experience of living through the COVID lockdown in Wuhan, China in early 2020. At the moment, Scarlett is located in Wuhan. This interview is being recorded remotely and will be housed at the Reuther Library, which is part of Wayne State University.

The Reuther Library will keep administrative information about this oral history project such as interview releases and deeds of gift in its case files. Case files are in a locked nonpublic area of the building accessible only to the Reuther Library staff. In the event of a criminal investigation or legal discovery proceedings, the Reuther Library will be compelled to turn over holdings in case files that are otherwise closed to the public, including the case files for this oral history project. [00:01:05]

All right, so to begin, Scarlett, are you connected or related to Wayne State University in any way?

**SCARLETT:** No.

**BROWNING:** Okay. Are you originally from Wuhan?

**SCARLETT:** Yeah. I'm a local Wuhanese.

**BROWNING:** Okay. Generally, where in Wuhan are you located?

**SCARLETT:** Hankou District.

**BROWNING:** Hankou District. Okay.

**SCARLETT:** Yeah, my apartment is just one kilometer away from the wet market.

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**BROWNING:** Okay, the Huanan Market?

**SCARLETT:** Yeah, the Huanan Haixian Seafood Market.

**BROWNING:** Okay. Did you always live in Hankou?

**SCARLETT:** Yeah, I'm Hankou-nese.

**BROWNING:** Okay. All right. [00:02:00] Very good. What do you do for a living?

**SCARLETT:** Well, I used to be a psychiatrist, but most of my time I have worked in the educational area. And my latest job is a general manager of an online business company that sells the products for English courses, something like that.

**BROWNING:** Um-hm. Okay.

**SCARLETT:** Do you need the name of the company?

**BROWNING:** No, that's not necessary. No.

**SCARLETT:** Okay. No, because, you know, your statement sounds very serious. It feels like I'm under arrest and you are a police officer who is telling me about my rights.

**BROWNING:** Oh, no, no, please don't feel that way. You know, if you have concerns, I can stop recording and I can explain.

**SCARLETT:** No, it's okay. It's okay.

**BROWNING:** Okay. All right. Yes, but it is not that way. [00:03:00] The whole purpose is to just get your story.

**SCARLETT:** No, it's okay, I'm just kidding. Don't worry.

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**BROWNING:** Okay, okay. I don't want to make you uncomfortable here. But I do want to go back to the late 2019, early 2020 time period. And I just want to ask you, when did you hear of the Coronavirus? Do you remember?

**SCARLETT:** Well, it was early January 2020 because I was there when it all happened. Uh, I went for a business trip to Beijing on January eighteenth. So I think it's, like, one week earlier.

[00:04:00] It was the first week in January in 2020. People started talking about the dangerous virus [that was] similar to SARS. But, at that time, the government announcement said that the virus would not be transmitted from person to person. So our life was as usual, until January twenty-first, when Zhong Nanshan, that famous academician, announced that the virus was confirmed to be transmitted from person to person. And as I remember I went to the pharmacy that day, January twenty-first, to try to buy some masks, but they were all sold out. On January twenty-second, my company was still working and I bought some N95 masks directly from some of my friends who were doing medical devices business, at a normal price, because I was told that raising the price of prevention materials at that specific time was kind of illegal.

[00:05:09] That's the experience they gained during the SARS, so I bought a hundred N95 masks from that friend.

And back to January twenty-second, I was in office with the people on my team. We were a big team. I have one thousand people working on my team. That day was supposed to be the last day of work before the Spring Festival. Many people bought tickets already to go home the next day, which was supposed to be January twenty-third. I think it was around lunchtime, they started to receive messages from the bus and railway station to remind them to consider if they needed to change their ticket that day because they also received the news that the city might be closed the next day. [00:06:14]

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Well, I'm the general manager of the Wuhan company, so I dismissed the team and let people go home as soon as possible and then made some decisions at that time. Now I think that these decisions were very important because I also have some experience with SARS. At first I asked everyone in our company to stay away from the hospital, as far as possible at that time. Because I remember it was the flu season and many people had cold symptoms, coughing and fever, something like that, especially when the virus was confirmed. [00:07:00] Many people crowded the hospital, like, spent hours waiting. I didn't think it was a very wise choice. The facts have also proved that many people who didn't have any problem at first were infected while waiting at the hospital. So I asked the people on my team to stay away from the hospital. I also asked them to measure their temperature every day and report the temperature in our WeChat group. At the same time, I also counted the people who had no masks. Because I had bought hundreds of N95 masks, I delivered the masks through SF. SF is an express company that did not stopped working throughout the whole period of that time.

And the next day was January twenty-third. At two in the morning, the Wuhan government announced that the city will be closed at 10 a.m. That time I remember exactly. [00:08:06] Some people chose to leave the city before ten o'clock. I did nothing. I just went to the supermarket to buy some food. I even didn't buy too much because I didn't believe China will be short of food. At that time, masks and hand sanitizers were in short supply, but we have definitely enough toilet paper. We never have any doubt about that.

I believe the twenty-fourth was the Spring Festival Eve and traffic in Wuhan was not closed yet. And some friends, some of them were foreigners, came to my house and we spent Spring Festival Eve together. In the beginning of February, the situation became more and more tense. [00:09:00] And foreign countries began to evacuate their people from Wuhan and traffic began to be closed. The government told people to stay at home. The gates of all of the communities were sealed, literally sealed and blocked. The government arranged grid administrators

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[neighborhood committees], I don't know if they have, you know, certain names, people who worked for the government in the communities, like, a grid administrator. I just translate directly from—

**BROWNING:** Are these the local communities, like neighborhood leaders?

**SCARLETT:** Yeah, those are people who work for the government.

**BROWNING:** But at the local community level, right?

**SCARLETT:** Yes, yes, exactly. [00:10:00] If you have the image of the whole map of the community, and you just put the map on a grid, they arranged a guy who took charge of that grid. And you [would] took charge of the second grid, so they worked in grids. So they arranged a lot of grids to pay close attention to the situation in the communities. They took full responsibility [for those].

**BROWNING:** Right.

**SCARLETT:** Yeah, and at first, the supermarkets were empty. Because people were crazy shopping, you know, but [with] this situation, I remember only lasted a day or two and then the shelves were refilled. When we were forbidden to leave the community, we could order food and things we needed on an app, like Meituan, like Eleme, which would be sent to the door of the community by the delivery guys. Also there were hundreds of delivery guys. [00:11:06] They worked every day during that time and did a great help. And so we just went to the gate of the community and picked up the things we ordered through the barriers or the iron gate. Sometimes the delivery guys, because if the things we ordered were too huge, they [would] have to climb up to hand the things to us.

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During the whole period, some policies were constantly changing. For example, at the very beginning, only one person from a family was allowed to go out and buy the stuff they need. And [then] only one person a week. They needed to change to some looser policy. [Later] two to three people in a family were allowed to go out. [00:12:04] And the prices of the products in the market were normal, because I remember there was one store that raised the price of cabbage. I'm not a person who is very sensitive or pay much attention to the prices of the products, but I believe that that price [placed by] the owner for the cabbage is a hundred or something. But very soon that guy received a huge fine for that. I read it on the news. So that's the thing that ensures that we bought products in a normal price.

**BROWNING:** Right—

**SCARLETT:** Uh, sorry?

**BROWNING:** Oh, can I just stop you for a moment?

**SCARLETT:** Sure. [00:13:00]

**BROWNING:** There's a few questions, I want to follow up, to ask you a little bit more, if that's okay.

**SCARLETT:** Sure.

**BROWNING:** Maybe before January twentieth or January twenty-third, do you remember what you were thinking or feeling about the Coronavirus before it got really crazy? Do you remember anything about that? How were you feeling?

**SCARLETT:** Um, actually, I was pretty calm. I think it's because I have already got experience during the SARS.

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**BROWNING:** Right.

**SCARLETT:** Yeah, I was in quarantine because of SARS for three months and I knew how the government was going to deal with things. Also I feel China has a lot of experience with fighting and preventing viruses, because before SARS we didn't have that fever clinic in hospitals and after SARS literally every hospital has that kind of fever clinic. [00:14:12] Though I didn't think it would be so terrible, especially at the end of January and the beginning of February. But there's one thing I have to blame, because our government was kind of slow to react, like, the local government here.

**BROWNING:** Right.

**SCARLETT:** And they did a lot of things, which were so stupid and actually [it was] the slow reaction that made people panic. That's why people crowded in a hospital and spent hours there. Some of the people, they just had a cold, a fever and flu or something like that. [00:15:00] But, you know, they got [infected with] the COVID waiting in the hospital.

**BROWNING:** Right, they got they just got worried and afraid, right?

**SCARLETT:** Yeah. And also the date you asked me about, like, the twenty-first, the twenty-second and twenty-third. The twenty-third was the day Wuhan started to be in lockdown. I went to the supermarket to buy some stuff. People were panicked, but some of the people still felt, like, Wow, something is happening, which is so exciting. I never had experienced [this] before, especially from young people. I never had that kind of experience before. It's like a movie and someone is shooting a movie or a documentary. They haven't faced death yet.

**BROWNING:** Right, yeah.



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**SCARLETT:** Yeah, and just as I said, I stayed at home and stayed in my community and stayed in my building. [00:16:02] For me, it's okay, because I kind of live a normal life. But I wasn't allowed to go out freely. But for those communities or buildings where patients were found, the situation actually was not so good. They were restricted to a narrow—narrower? Is there a word for that?

**BROWNING:** Narrower?

**SCARLETT:** Narrow, but bigger, compared to my situation at that moment.

**BROWNING:** You mean wider?

**SCARLETT:** Yeah, yeah. Wider and maybe narrower space. If patients were found in their building, then people who lived in that building were not allowed to leave. But every day the government working in that community, volunteers would send them the stuff they need for living, [going] door to door, but for sure, their quarantine would be much longer than us. [00:17:12]

**BROWNING:** Right. Of course.

**SCARLETT:** Yeah. And, as I just said, many people went to the hospital, then contracted the virus due to the large number of people. The medical system crashed and in the end of January and the beginning of February, people—

**BROWNING:** —um, sorry, sorry—

**SCARLETT:** Sorry?

**BROWNING:** Sorry, let's kind of just stop again. If it's okay to just stop for a moment again.

**SCARLETT:** Sure, any time.

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**BROWNING:** I do want to talk about the end of January, early February, because you seem to have mentioned that a couple times. But again, I just want to go back quite a bit, actually. And could you just tell me a little bit more about your experience with SARS? [00:18:02]

**SCARLETT:** Oh, that was terrible. Because I was in Hong Kong at the very beginning. I was actually evacuated to the mainland and then I stayed in Beijing, but there was an outbreak in Beijing also. So I was stuck in a building for around three months. I stayed in one room. And, at that time, it was seventeen years ago, right?

**BROWNING:** Right, kind of a long time ago.

**SCARLETT:** Yeah, so we didn't have smartphones. We didn't have [the] social media we have right now. So it's kind of isolated, like, fully. [00:19:00] I didn't know what was happening out there and I didn't know what's going to happen to me. It was a terrible, terrible situation for me. And, also, I couldn't read any news from my phone. Because, I think by that time, I only have something like a basic screen, you know, old school phones, like Nokia.

**BROWNING:** Right.

**SCARLETT:** Right, and we couldn't even use the internet on the phone. The phone was just for us to message people and call people. That's all. So I think now the things are better because of the high tech really makes our life more convenient, because at that time I was asked to stay at home. We [now] have so many ways to know what's happening out there, or what really, truly happens. And people— [00:20:00]

**BROWNING:** Or just keep in touch with other people, you know?

**SCARLETT:** Yeah, yeah, we talk with people every day. And also I use Weibo every day to update information. As I remembered, there were people crying for help every day on Weibo, because

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for those people who contracted [COVID], they couldn't get a bed in the hospital. The doctors or the hospital and the government asked them to stay at home and do the quarantine at home. So they had to wait at home in a sealed building and also with other people in the building. They asked for help on Weibo every day with a hashtag as people died in Wuhan. They were asking to be hospitalized. [00:21:00] And that's a really terrible memory.

**BROWNING:** Yeah, of course.

**SCARLETT:** And if we knew which hospital had a vacancy, we could tell them immediately. I remember—

**BROWNING:** You okay?

**SCARLETT:** Yeah, because I remember— (interviewee becomes emotional)

**BROWNING:** Take your time.

**SCARLETT:** I saw comments one day on Weibo from a guy, who commented, My dad just died of the virus in the hospital. Go there. They have at least one vacancy right now. And, also, I think there is a famous video showing a woman hitting a pan crying for help on the balcony. [00:22:00] I think it was the darkest moment.

**BROWNING:** For you or?

**SCARLETT:** Yeah, for everyone. For every Wuhanese. I don't know why, for me, it felt darker compared to the experience during the SARS when I was locked in Beijing in a building for— actually, the quarantine in Beijing was much longer. But, I don't know, I felt more terrified this time.

**BROWNING:** Why?

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**SCARLETT:** Because, as I said, in Beijing, we were isolated. But, this time, I can see every day on Weibo and WeChat groups and WeChat moments, people were crying for help. Something like that. [00:23:00] So I stayed alone during that time, but I just felt I really needed to do something. It was terrible. I felt people were dying there and I was sitting at home doing nothing. So before long I decided to do something to help. I attended a group for—sorry?

**BROWNING:** Oh, go on, please explain what you did.

**SCARLETT:** Yeah, I took part in a group of volunteers. At the very beginning, we drove the medical staff to work and home because the traffic was shut. The government gave us permission to drive, so we drove the medical staff to work and take them home after their shift. [00:24:00] I also went to help build up the field hospital. I used to be a licensed psychiatrist, so I [also] talked with people who needed someone to talk with through WeChat. I talked with the doctors, the nurses, the family members of the patients and even the patient and the people on my team. And, normally, during that time, every day I had to spend hours to talk with people. In the first week, literally, around the sixth or seventh of February, we started receiving all kinds of help from all over the country, like, construction workers gathered to build the container [temporary] hospitals and groups of medical staff came to Wuhan to support the medical system, which was already fragile. [00:25:09] And as the volunteers, we received a lot of permission and help from the government.

**BROWNING:** Right. Sorry to interrupt you again, but can I just ask, did you do the volunteering from the first week to the very end of the lockdown? How long did you do it?

**SCARLETT:** I started in the February, the first week in February, and I haven't finished till now.

**BROWNING:** Till now?

**SCARLETT:** Yeah.

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**BROWNING:** Wow, so—

**SCARLETT:** I still have some people I talk with every week.

**BROWNING:** Oh, so something like therapy or something to do with psychiatry? [00:26:01]

**SCARLETT:** Yes, sessions for people who have suffered PTSD. Actually, there were lots of volunteers at that time. The young guys that helped to carry the food and the things we received from donations from other places. And, also, as I said, for the sealed buildings, there must be some people to deliver food and the things they need, like, door to door. Actually, the officers from the government, they didn't have enough people to do that. So I think volunteers helped a lot.

**BROWNING:** Right, yeah, of course.

**SCARLETT:** Yeah, I never needed to worry about the food and the supplies. [00:27:01] Because the convenience stores and supermarkets and even the drugstores were open all the time. We could just order from home. And once or twice a week, the community asked us to go downstairs to take vegetables and meat and some other food donated by people from other provinces. And, which is funny, actually, because some of the vegetables were really huge, you know, the plants and vegetables grown in the north, and I remember I received a broccoli that was as huge as a basketball. It's not too common to see here.

**BROWNING:** So you did a lot of volunteering. That's the impression I get. So you drove the medical staff to the hospitals and to home? [00:28:07] Could you at all tell me what they were telling you, if anything?

**SCARLETT:** Oh, they were quite different. Some of the doctors, when they finished their shift—I think at that time, they were overloaded, so some of them they just didn't want to talk. They

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just told me, Sorry, I'm really tired because they didn't want to act rude, which I fully understand. I could tell from their faces, from their eyes. They had the red eyes all the time and some of them were crying, because after I picked them up, I said something, like, You are heroes and some of them they just started to cry. (interviewee becomes emotional) [00:29:11]

**BROWNING:** Right.

**SCARLETT:** And they're ordinary people. They're not the heroes who can fly because of the cape, like DC heroes. They're ordinary people. They're like us. When I worked as a psychiatrist, I also considered myself a doctor, but actually compared to them, the help I could do is very little. So some of them were pretty quiet. And some of them started to cry after I said, You guys are heroes, and some of them gave me some masks and to, you know, try to thank me in a way they felt was a decent way to show their feelings. [00:30:11] They told me, It was so terrible, but I have to hang in there. It was so terrible. People are dying in the hospital and we didn't have enough staff. And I said, hang in there, because there is help coming. [They said], Yes, we know about that. [That gives us] strength and power so we still could work every day.

I still talk with, I think, two of them and they're nurses. And there was one lady, because I didn't ask for her for permission, so I think I cannot tell the details, but she stopped working. She has stopped working for six months, because her condition is not so good and she started to have nightmares and sleeping problems. [00:31:09] I think there were lots of people fighting on the front line. We have so many expectations and hopes on them that they have to carry on. They have to carry all of the weight and the responsibilities, but actually, only because they chose the occupation to be doctors, like, medical staff, but actually generally speaking, they're normal people. Yeah, they also felt terrified and desperate.

**BROWNING:** Right. (Sighs) Amazing stuff. You know, it's similar here in America where the medical workers have faced similar conditions. [00:32:09]

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**SCARLETT:** Yeah, I can imagine. But I feel, actually, that's quite a memory and experience. But now [when] we look back, I felt, at that moment, people are more like people, more like human beings. I can give you an example. When we went to get the donations, we would always pay attention if the older people lived alone in our neighborhoods had been helped. We checked. We double checked in a group and sometimes we knocked on their doors to make sure they received a message or we could help them to get the donations of the food or the things. [00:33:08] But, in fact, the community staff delivered food to them every day.

**BROWNING:** Um-hm.

**SCARLETT:** Yeah. So that system is a great system [and] ensured that no one in need will be missed.

**BROWNING:** So do you mean you helped handle donation stuff, too?

**SCARLETT:** Yeah.

**BROWNING:** Okay. Like food?

**SCARLETT:** Yeah, I have a neighbor, who is disabled and also he's kind of old, and he doesn't know how to use smartphones to order food and the things he needs from the apps. Even if he ordered, he's disabled, so he couldn't go downstairs to pick up things. [00:33:58] So some of the neighbors on the same floor would just take shifts to help him. Also, the community staff helped him to make sure he had everything he needed.

**BROWNING:** Right. Very good. Very amazing. It's great that you did all this stuff.

**SCARLETT:** Yeah, I think the things we've done are so limited. So little, actually. As I remember, from the second week in February, things were getting better and better. Those people who asked for help on Weibo were fewer and fewer and some of them updated with good news that

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their family who used to be in the ICU were moved out to the normal ward of the hospital. [00:35:01] But I don't quite remember about the date. That was the first time I saw that kind of message [after] being locked up for more than seventy days. I think it was seventy-six or seventy-nine, um, until April when everything returned to normal. We came back to the office to work, but we had to pay attention to social distancing. We got to use to the green codes to scan before we needed to enter some places. Most of the people have been wearing a mask for the whole year and Wuhan is quite hot in the summer days.

**BROWNING:** Yeah, of course.

**SCARLETT:** Yeah, only very few people complain about that. We just got to use to wearing a mask when we need to go to the public places, such as malls and subways. And in the spring of this year, which is 2021, more and more people got vaccinated here. [00:36:05] So here [there are] no anti-maskers, no anti-vaccineers. We are learning how to live with the virus in this kind of condition. Actually, I don't know if you heard about it, in July this year, Wuhan experienced another crisis caught caused by Delta.

**BROWNING:** Yeah. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

**SCARLETT:** Yeah, the second wave, and people went to the supermarket to restore their fridge, like crazy. I was like, What? Why are people doing that? So I talked with some people I know and they just wanted to prepare to stay at home for a while like what happened a year ago. It looked like they were more experienced.

**BROWNING:** As far as I know, I remember seeing pictures of empty streets during July. [00:37:05] But, as far as I know, I might be wrong, the government did not really tell people to stay at home. People kind of willingly stayed at home for some time, right?



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**SCARLETT:** Yeah, yeah, actually, that's Chinese people. I think the first reason was because some people have experience from SARS so, at that time, the best way is to isolate themselves in a safer place, to minimize the contact with others. Also, the second reason was because it's close to the Spring Festival, most people just, you know, finished working, started the holiday already. [00:38:00] And because I got the permission to drive, I remember once or twice, I drove into town to pick up some foreign friends because they're being evacuated. I remember it was supposed to be rush hour in Jiedaokou. You've been in Wuhan, right?

**BROWNING:** Yeah.

**SCARLETT:** Yeah, Jiedaokou is literally the busiest street—

**BROWNING:** —Lots of shopping malls—

**SCARLETT:** —in all of Wuhan. Yeah, and thousands of students there.

**BROWNING:** Right, because it's near Wuhan University.

**SCARLETT:** Yes, but, at that moment, my car was stopped waiting for the traffic lights to change, but actually, I don't know if it's necessary, but I felt like I needed to do that. The traffic lights were working but, literally, there was no one on the streets. [00:39:00] I was the only car at that moment. It was rush hour. It was 6 p.m.

**BROWNING:** Right.

**SCARLETT:** And yeah, all the lights are on. Even the lights [were on] in empty buildings and also we have some lights, like slogans, like *Jiayou Wuhan*. But it's all red. It was in bloody red. So I felt, Oh my god. The city is bleeding. (interviewee becomes emotional)

**BROWNING:** Right.

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**SCARLETT:** The city is bleeding, because—I'm a local Wuhanese, but I used to travel a lot. And I was, you know, out of Wuhan for so many years. I have been [back] in Wuhan since 2012 and have never left.

Actually, before this, I didn't have much empathy for this city. [00:40:00] I think sometimes people are rude and the construction of the city is not so good. But, at that moment, I started to feel something, like, this is my hometown. And now, the city's bleeding and I really needed to do something. That's the first moment I felt the connection between me and the city.

**BROWNING:** Right.

**SCARLETT:** And I cry again because after I pick up my friends, we drove back to that street and it shows that, Oh my God, this city is like a ghost town right now. I cried. I burst into tears in one second. I said, No, this city's never going to be a ghost town. Look at the buildings over there and there are lots of lights. [00:41:00] Behind every light, you can see through the window. There's a family and there's a hope.

**BROWNING:** Right.

**SCARLETT:** It's been two years, right? One year, two years?

**BROWNING:** Year and a half about.

**SCARLETT:** (laughs) Okay, one year and a half. I still feel the things and the feelings I felt at that moment.

**BROWNING:** Yeah, I can definitely tell.

**SCARLETT:** Yep.

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**BROWNING:** So there's another thing I'd like to ask you about. Like you said, because of your background in psychiatry, did you talk to people? I know that there were hotlines where people maybe were having some emotional problems or mental trouble. [00:42:09] Is that something that you did?

**SCARLETT:** Oh, actually, the things I did was not official. Oh, actually, I remember when was the time—because you know, as a psychiatrist, I don't think China is very sensitive towards those kinds of mental problems. It's now getting better. So I remember the time I read it from the news that there was a group of psychiatrists that came to Wuhan to help. But I think I kind of remember it was kind of late. It's not like the medical staff arrived in the first week in February. [00:43:00] I think the psychiatry squads arrived in March. I think for me, it's kind of late. It's very late. And, also, there were some hotlines and, also, everyone could talk with any members from that squad. But the people I still talk with this is the people who shared the experience at that time. It is the people I know when I went to the hospital to pick up the doctors and the nurses.

**BROWNING:** Um-hm. Right.

**SCARLETT:** Yeah.

**BROWNING:** Um, all right. So that's good. Thank you for clearing that up.

**SCARLETT:** Um-hm.

**BROWNING:** And, okay, so let me think here. Your experience has been very compelling, I can say. [00:44:05] What I want to ask you about is your work situation, I guess. What was that like? I mean, how did that work with what happened with the lockdown?

**SCARLETT:** What was the time when we finished the Spring Festival? I think the first week in February I was busy volunteering and, at the same time, because the Spring Festival holiday

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was over, I also began to work from home. And because I work for online companies, our business wasn't affected that much. We have close contact with all the team members on my team, which is one thousand people. [00:45:05] I talked with them every day and we started to work from home. I think it was in early February. We needed to update the system. We are a call center, like a sales department. So I remember we had a lot of meetings that day, to update the system to let people to work from their home, to call the clients, like they usually do. So it's okay for us to work from home.

**BROWNING:** Well, yeah, that's a good thing.

**SCARLETT:** Yeah, my life didn't change that much because of this whole pandemic and my work goes on after that. [00:46:00] But, for so many people, their lives have completely changed because of this. Some people lost their families, others lost their jobs and some businesses couldn't stand such a long period of time of [being] locked down. So I remember in April last year, the flea markets were everywhere in a short amount of time. People who had lost their business wanted to earn some money by selling stuff in a flea market to support their family.

**BROWNING:** What do you mean? Selling what kind of stuff? Stuff from their stores or their home?

**SCARLETT:** Yes, some stuff from their store and some of them import or they just buy from some huge market and sell on the streets, like this. [00:47:01]

**BROWNING:** Right.

**SCARLETT:** And I think Hubei people are always tough. After not very long, they found new jobs and started a new business. But a flea market, yes, that's quite unique.

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**BROWNING:** I mean, that's the impression that I've had of Hubei people and Wuhan people is that they can be very strong minded. And, you know, it could be trouble, but it can be also admirable, I think, too.

**SCARLETT:** Yeah, the symbol of Wuhanese is the phoenix with nine heads. So we're tough and smart and—

**BROWNING:** Right. [00:48:01] So you mentioned the end of the lockdown. I guess I want to ask you how did you feel when the lockdown began to be relaxed or when it ended? And how did you feel towards the end?

**SCARLETT:** Um, actually, it's quite funny because I even felt some panic when the lockdown finished, because I hadn't been in a crowd for a very long time. It took me some time to get used to eating with people in restaurants. When people looked at each other, we all had the feelings of survival. And, actually none of my relatives, friends and colleagues and not anyone I knew we're infected. [00:49:00] That was fairly good, actually.

**BROWNING:** Yeah.

**SCARLETT:** And I felt for a very long time, people became very friendly and patient with strangers. But, actually, not many people are willing to recall their memories at that time. Yeah, especially if they have the special memory.

**BROWNING:** Yeah, it can be very difficult, I think.

**SCARLETT:** Yeah, yeah. And, also, there's one thing I just recalled. I don't know if you know about it, but I think it's worth mentioning that people became very united and begin to feel proud of their country, from the bottom of their hearts. Because I use all the Western social media like Facebook, Instagram and YouTube and everything. [00:50:02] So I know exactly how

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the Western media talked about China and the CCP. I'm not even a member of CCP. I'm not even religious. But, for most of the Chinese, we were taught from an early age, when we were students in school that we're supposed to be friendly and hospitable to foreigners. You know, "One world, one home" is written our textbooks. Because I have experience working overseas, I know about the Western media, their attitude and opinions about China. So, actually, I was not surprised to see some fake news during that time. But I remember at that time, there were some young people [who] shared news and comments from the Western media to Chinese media at that moment. [00:50:57] Like on Weibo, and also WeChat moments, and more and more Chinese people started to realize that most of the Western media have been talking bad about China.

And even the comments from ordinary people from foreign countries were also not friendly. I even often heard complaints from foreigners who stayed in China throughout that time. They were interviewed by the media from their own nations and basically their statement were very objective and positive. But, the final version in the media was distorted and maliciously edited, like that. So, at the very beginning, Chinese people who started to know about that were angry and shocked, because they became more and more calm, day by day, only because their life returned to normal. [00:52:02] But also the Western countries, their situation was getting worse. Because I remember there was a period of time I was questioned by some of my friends, even colleagues every day, like, Is that true? People hate us like this? Why do they hate us? Only because they believe that the origin of the outbreak was here in Wuhan or only because we're Chinese, blah-blah-blah, like that? And I think the fight against the virus will take a super long time. The most practical thing is to live in safety and dignity. So, now they're cool, but actually it's kind of weird, back at that time, it was a time, like opening a box to let most of the Chinese know how they were treated in the social media. [00:53:10]

**BROWNING:** How they were thought of.

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**SCARLETT:** Yeah and I told my people on my team, or my friends and my family, that we must involve ourselves with anything unexpected happening in our lives, to deal with the next possible crisis. Like, to grow bigger and stronger, to take care of ourselves and the people we love. Because scientists [have] said that there could be a pandemic every fifteen years or twenty years in the future. [00:54:00]

**BROWNING:** Yeah, I mean, it's quite common in human history, you know?

**SCARLETT:** Yeah, yeah.

**BROWNING:** I think the world as a whole has been very lucky in recent history where we haven't had many pandemics or epidemics, you know, and we—

**SCARLETT:** Yeah, it must be a challenge even, although we have already gained a lot of experience. But still, some of my thoughts and even plans of my future life have changed. Because before I had a plan for retirement to buy a house in Norway, when I reached my 50s or 60s, I just want to spend the rest of my life there in my house, but now I changed my idea. [00:55:06]

**BROWNING:** What do you want to do now?

**SCARLETT:** I don't know, stay put in China. If I just follow my plans to buy a house there in Norway and I'm old, I could be abandoned by people and no one could give me even a ventilator. That will be a problem. I'm not noble enough to give up my life. I just want to live longer.

**BROWNING:** Yeah, understandable.

**SCARLETT:** Yeah, [so I want to] stay put in China.

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**BROWNING:** Yeah, completely understandable. [00:56:00] I guess, I have one question to ask you, but you've given me several examples as an answer already. Well, no, before I do that, a couple other things. Sorry. You talked about that you have overseas experience. What did you do there? What went on with that?

**SCARLETT:** Oh, that was a century ago. What was the year? This year I just reached my forties. In 2009, I went to the States. Because my company had a project and cooperated with UC-Berkeley and I was the one who was in charge of that project. [00:57:02] I went there for nine months.

**BROWNING:** Okay. That's a good amount of time.

**SCARLETT:** Yeah.

**BROWNING:** So I want to just go back again to the end of the lockdown. When the lockdown ended, did you do anything special to kind of say, Oh, we're finally free. Or there's something that I missed and I really want to do this now to kind of express that this is over and I feel better. Or somewhat better, you know? [00:58:00] But, basically, what was the first thing you did after the lockdown ended? Did you do anything at all?

**SCARLETT:** Um, actually, it's kind of funny because I consider myself as a person who has realistic feelings. During lockdown, I felt the first thing I would do after lockdown was to celebrate. Go to the bars and to the pubs and to the restaurants. But, actually, after it all finished, I kind of lost the motivation to go there. So, actually, there's no celebration. One of the reasons was because I felt a little bit panicked being surrounded by people again. And the second, I felt I started to feel you finally have survived and you feel empty. [00:59:03] It is like *I Am Legend*, the movie. Especially when you finish watching the movie, there was a blank in your mind. There is nothing you want to do. There's nothing you want to think of. There were



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some days after the lockdown, I locked myself in a room. I started to feel a little bit of trauma, especially at that moment.

**BROWNING:** A little bit of what?

**SCARLETT:** Trauma. Because during the pandemic, I felt I had a lot of responsibilities that I put on myself. I needed to help my people. I need to take care of the people who worked on my team. [01:00:00] But after it all finished, all of my responsibility was finally released, like, taken away. That was the moment I feel exhausted and empty, so I really didn't do anything to celebrate to make the day, like remarkable. I know lots of people went to party, but I didn't. Also, this is strange for me, because I had a lot of plans. I wanted to go to Brussels [bar in Hankou], I want to go to Bouncy [bar in Hankou], I want to go to blah-blah-blah. I really wanted to go to the hotpot and fancy restaurants I used to visit every week and I hoped they're still there. And I was kind of tired of ordering food from Noi, because when the food has been delivered to my table, the flavor has changed. [01:01:04] And, actually, the first time after all this—the first time I went to Noi was August of last year. So it was a while after the lockdown was finished.

**BROWNING:** Okay. Yeah. Well, I mean, I'm sure you were not the only one that went through that kind of experience, you know?

**SCARLETT:** Yep, and I think I went to Brussels in May, in the middle of May, I thought it would be crowded, but, actually no, it was half empty. Also, MQ, and everything in MQ [local club in Jiedaokou area of Wuchang], it was literally empty. [01:02:00] And the whole city has changed a lot.

**BROWNING:** Right. That is actually one of my last questions or topics, I guess, that I want to ask you about. You have kind of talked about this. You've given some examples of changes in the

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city and the people and yourself even. So what I want to ask you at this point is, is there any other examples you could share?

**SCARLETT:** Okay, because I work in the educational area, I have lots of friends who work in same area. [01:03:00] They started to complain it was very difficult to find foreign teachers, because most of them went back home and, for a very long time, it's not easy for them to come back again. So for the rest of the foreigners who stayed in town, they have good chances to earn lots of money, which they're very happy about. And I have a friend named [redacted] and I think it's okay to mention his name here because he's quite funny, his story. He was on an evacuation plane. I don't know if you know him or not. He's English. He was literally on the plane. He was on an evacuation list, but he had been drinking while waiting. His temperature was a little bit high, so he got rejected from the plane.

**BROWNING:** Wow.

**SCARLETT:** Yeah, and why it's kind of funny, because, at that time, I remember the next day we saw lots of news from England, like people saying, We got to save [redacted] from that shithole, from China, from Wuhan and from that horrible, terrible situation. [01:04:14] We got to save his ass, blah-blah. Poor lad, it's like this. And even some people created a website to collect donations from people to try to maybe arrange another plane for him, to rescue him. But it turns out he's mostly safe in Wuhan, or on this planet. He was fully occupied during that time and he had classes all the time and earned lots of money.

**BROWNING:** Quite an experience there. [01:05:01]

**SCARLETT:** Yeah. And, also, I was quite, you know, curious about the about the buildings in the universities because they have a lot of dormitories for foreign students only. Because we had an organization called WISCS which is a psychological help group for the international students

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there. So, at that time, they were being evacuated to return home and even after the lockdown most of the international students left Wuhan in August, because it was also their graduation time. Now if you're walking on the streets even in a spot, which is very popular for the expats here, there are less and less foreigners.

**BROWNING:** Really?

**SCARLETT:** Yeah, even Bounty is closed. [01:06:01] Bounty was closed this year. Because that kind of bar counted on business from foreigners.

**BROWNING:** Yeah, when I was living in Wuhan, I knew that there was always a certain number of bars, or specific bars, that foreigners would like to go to.

**SCARLETT:** Yeah, but now there are not so many foreigners as before and I wonder how it is in the buildings of the dormitories of the foreign students. They've been locked [down] for one and a half year, for sure. It still hasn't opened yet, so it's still going on.

**BROWNING:** They're still locked down? Is that what you're saying?

**SCARLETT:** Yeah, I think so. In CCNU [Central China Normal University], yes. Because I went there last week. It was still locked [down]. [01:07:00]

**BROWNING:** Huh, that's pretty crazy.

**SCARLETT:** Yeah, and, you know Han Show. They used to only hire the foreign acrobats. Now they started using Chinese acrobats instead because they didn't have enough foreigners.

**BROWNING:** Yeah, that's a big change.

**SCARLETT:** Yeah. And now there are lots of new bars in town in some different areas for local people only, like new music, new vibes, new styles. And David, who is the owner of Brussels,

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still stands there strongly. And what about other things that changed? [01:08:00] Hm, people are used to wear masks. It's necessary now. And the green code.

**BROWNING:** The green code?

**SCARLETT:** Yeah, now we don't need that green code anymore, but we still have it on the phone.

**BROWNING:** That is to show your health status, right?

**SCARLETT:** Um-hm. That's pretty much all.

**BROWNING:** Okay. So I guess just one last question really. Is there anything else you want to talk about? [01:09:00] Maybe I forgot something. Maybe you forgot something. You know, just kind of check to make sure that you've said what you wanted?

**SCARLETT:** I don't think so.

**BROWNING:** Okay. All right.

**SCARLETT:** Yeah. This interview helped me review a lot.

**BROWNING:** Yeah, it seems like it. Before I stop the recording, I should tell you that I really appreciate you doing this and that I'm very thankful for it.

End of interview