

Interview with Jill Smilow

Emma Eichenbaum, Interviewer

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Macalester College

St Paul, MN (Interviewer), Lexington, MA (Interviewee)

Conducted via Zoom

[00:00:00]:

Emma Eichenbaum: All right. So once again, any questions now [laughs]?

Jill Smilow: I'm all good. Thank you.

EE: Okay. Great. So as you know, you know, me, I'm Emma. And can you just tell me a little bit about yourself to start with?

JS: Sure. Yup! My name is Jill Smilow and, I live in Lexington, Massachusetts, and have lived here for most of my adult life. I am married and have two grown children in their twenties who also live in the Boston area. So, you know, I'm sort of knowledgeable about what their experience has been during COVID too. But yeah, I professionally I have my own business. I counsel high school juniors and seniors through the college process. So, I'm an independent college counselor and, that's what I do. I also do a lot of volunteering. I am president of a college scholarship fund for, students who get bused to my community for the past 50 years as part of the busing crisis back in Boston, in the late sixties, and Lexington was one of the first

communities that did that. And, so that's been something that I've been very busy with in my extracurricular time, because those students have also needed a lot of attention during this time.

EE: Can you think back to when you first learned about COVID and what your reaction was initially?

[00:01:24]:

JS: Yes. Yeah, it's interesting because, I was scheduled, uh, one of the other extracurricular activities that I do. I'm very engaged with our local Jewish Federation, and Boston and the city of Haifa in Israel have a very close city partnership, and we do programming together and have done so for well over 30 years. And so part of my volunteerism has been an annual trip for the past 10 years to Haifa in March, in mid-March to meet with our counterparts, the volunteers, the professionals, to plan our year ahead to do our budgeting and that kind of thing. And so, one of the things that was happening because Israel -- there was conversation going on in Israel. And so our counterparts were talking about COVID as it was manifesting in Israel and what was going on there. So I was hearing about it, thinking about that experience, which was coming very close. And I began to hear about it in, you know, in March when we were all beginning to hear about it. I actually very much remember March 13th, which was a Friday, as the day when schools, you know, officially schools were being shut down in the state of Massachusetts which was beginning to impact my students. It was also, I remember it because March 13th was my father's is, was, my father's 86th birthday. And he and my mother who were down in Florida at the time were talking about going out to dinner with friends. And I remember being like, ah don't do that! You know, because of the kinds of things I was hearing and yet they were like, yeah, it's fine. No problem. So, I remember it was that kind of thing. I was definitely hyper-focused on what was

happening in Israel because I literally had a plane ticket. No, let, let, excuse me. I was supposed to fly Monday the ninth, because the meetings, of, of March and on, on, so I was very clear that - - and cancel, the meetings were canceled. And so that was a kind of huge, that happened March 9th and March 10th because they called the meetings, and canceled them officially, on like the 9th, 10th it was. And so I remember that was huge. And then Friday's when kind of everything here shut down. So it was sort of a one, two for me because of my -- Israel was a little bit ahead of, of us, I think in terms of grappling with some of these issues, and because I was about to go to Israel, that was an impact. So, I'm trying to think if there were other indicators. I think also again, my children, my adult children in their work, I think there was conversation. One of my children went to a party that night, which also made me nervous. And then the next day I remember too, he went to a party. And the next day we had a conversation, and I think he finally, he was like, I don't think I should have done that kind of thing. You know, luckily none of my immediate family got sick during -- with COVID, but we all came to it in terms of how we thought about our own behaviors, differently. Yeah.

[00:04:24]:

EE: Yeah. How was the, the Israel meeting? How was that impacted this year?

JS: Ah! It was fully remote. But what was amazing... Okay. So here's an amazing thing! I'd never heard the word Zoom, I didn't know what that was, that there was a thing called Zoom out there. One of the things that was pretty, that was remarkable was that the Israelis and Americans began to meet, almost within a couple of weeks, pretty, pretty close after the March meetings were cancelled. Their, we, the group, had a Kabbalat Shabbat, which is a, you know, a morning meeting at nine th -- it was 9:30, every Friday morning, here, and 4:30, every Friday afternoon in

Israel. And we sort of, obviously it wasn't spontaneous because someone there was working hard and making it happen. But to some degree it was a fairly grassrootsy immediate response for us all to get together. And, we met weekly! For many, many, many, many, many months, and there'd be people, you know, and there were literally dozens and dozens of us on each of these Zoom Kabbalat Shabbats. And they were for an hour, 9:30 in the morning. And they became like, you ha -- I, I couldn't imagine myself being anywhere else, but in front of my computer at 9:30 on Friday morning, to see my friends. And what was amazing -- and I'll, we can talk about this further about like silver linings of COVID that were discovered -- and, was that, I have now, I have now been able to interact on a more regular basis with my, in this particular context, my Israeli friends, who I knew I would go, and I would see, I would see once a year, like we would get together in March, you know, we'd maybe WhatsApp each other and talk to each other during the course of the year, you know, a little bit periodically, but we would like to spend this intensive four days together in Israel during those times. And, and just like, you know, literally 24/7 together for like four or five days. What COVID imposed upon us was, not seeing anyone [laughs] in person from our own homes, but because of Zoom, being able to connect with one another, more frequently, the entire year! And in fact, we continue to do that. Out of that came another, on Tuesdays, we now meet every single week. There's something they call the, the, the Boston Haifa Cafe. And they bring speakers, and about 25 or 30 of us, you know, from this group of people come to this program every Tuesday and we get to see each other, but also have these different conversations, and that would never have happened! That would just never have happened. And so that, that was amazing that that happened because of COVID.

[00:07:22]:

EE: That sounds amazing.

JS: And so this year, to, to answer your question. So, this year there was a -- here's another interesting thing that happened to your question, is that, so, another community that's been very involved with our local Jewish Federation is, a Ukrainian community. Dni--pro... I can't remember. It's hard to say we call it Dnep. Anyway, Dnep. And we also have a 30-year partnership there, but those things would have been separate. It sort of like this Jewish kind of inter, um, global Jewry has sort of had these siloed activity with Boston and Dnep, and Boston and Haifa. And what happened this year is they pulled together an online conference and we were all able to be part of it from all of these communities, so much so that the actually, the very final activity of the four day program was challah baking with the Rebbetzin, the wife of the Rabbi in Dnep. And I'd never seen her, met her, but there were people on the call who knew her so well. Whereas there were people who spoke during the course of the conversation, you know, the [three way?] conversations that I knew really well from my time in Haifa. So that was amazing. And I think that, my hope is that does not go away even as the world opens up and we can fly and be together in person.

[00:08:41]:

EE: That sounds incredible. So you, you think that that's going to be a long-lasting sort of meeting?

JS: I hope so. A component of that. I mean, that doesn't say that I don't hope that we go back to in-person meetings, because I think there's some, obviously something critical about that. But the idea that the only time we can gather, you know, is by this like huge sort of manpower driven,

huge expense to get to this place [Israel] once a year. Whereas we could gather for a couple of days this way. Again, not as ultimately satisfying, but it still is a way to connect that I think has huge value and productivity. Yeah.

[00:09:21]:

EE: So you touched on the phrase, silver linings.

JS: Mm-hmm.

EE: Let's talk about that a little bit more. What other silver linings would you say came from this experience? Came from this pandemic?

[00:09:31]:

JS: Yeah. So again, I think a lot of it is around alternative ways of connecting with people that I didn't think was possible, certainly not possible to do on a deep level. One of the things that happened shortly after March 13th, when everything shut down was a friend of mine's mother passed away. I mean, she had been sick for a very long time, and not surprisingly, she wasn't able to have a funeral at her synagogue. And so it was the first funeral that I attended or, you know, sort of Memorial service, that included her, her Rabbi was there, you know, her Jewish -- her Temple community was certainly there. It was a Zoom funeral. But so was her sister in Israel, and relatives in Michigan, and all across the country. And again, I go back to that... people were able to participate and, and I could see my friend and her sisters, and sort of be present in a way that we would never have been able to do! Would never have been able, in the moment to do. And so, so, so that's something. We were able to, during the course of the year, I mean, my

husband and I, we pretty much, we only left our house to go grocery shopping. That was sort of what we did. That's really all we did in this first, I don't know, six, seven months. That's pretty much what we were doing. So we definitely shut down the two of us in our community, uh, in our home. But, we were able to have, we would call them like, you know, Zoom cocktails, or we called them, you know, Zoom family time, or we would do Zoom game nights. We figured out, you know, we have friends who we do play games with. And so there's one game in particular we love, and our friends were able to find a link to the board that we play with when we're in person. And so we would meet, and we're still doing that. Like, we have a date to do that in a couple of weeks, to play games together. And so, you know, we, we, we just, we figured it out, and because of this moment, like, I'm so grateful that we had to have this moment now, as opposed to, I can't imagine what people did in 1918, you know [laughs], they were completely isolated and left to, you know, die in their own homes, you know, in total isolation. So for those of us who, thank God, we're well enough, but just in lockdown and didn't do any kind of connecting outside of our, you know, immediate sphere, I really think Zoom was a lifeline, a, a social lifeline and connection lifeline. I mean, it was exhausting because I also did it through work. And so a lot of us were on Zoom all day. So that was exhausting. I was tired of talking after a while, but, but it didn't mean that I had to choose isolation always. So that was, that was something that was good. You know, a silver lining, I mean, not that I was questioning this, but you know, my husband and I both had to... work from home. And in our home, and in the house 24/7, we were together. And, I learned that, you know, I wasn't surprised by this really, but, you know, that can put a lot of pressure on relationships. And it worked out just fine and wonderfully. And I, you know, I just admire and love him even more, you know, so there's

something to that that was like, you know, kind of in the, in a pandemic, what you, what you deal with and, and kind of what you never thought you'd, it would be like.

[00:12:53]:

And, and yet, you know, we really managed to do just fine in this critical moment. So, that was kind of nice to know. Oh! Also we learned [laughs], you know, we have, we built this porch and -- on our, on our house a couple of years ago, and the creativity of my friends and, and what we were able and what we were willing to do to see each other from a distance. Like, I have a group of, of girlfriends who we would meet, like every, you know, there were seven of us and we would meet regularly every six weeks or so. And we literally met through the winter, out in her backyard. She had this huge fire pit and we'd come dressed, you know, in our parkas and in our snow pants. And she, a lot of my friends bought those, you know, bistro heating lamps. And they're like all of a sudden we all became expert on what's the best, you know, heating device. And I, we, my husband and I bought four electric blankets. So when people come to our porch in the winter, everyone had their own, you know, blanket to wrap themselves in. You know, the resilience we figured out, like we were meeting, hanging out with our friends in their backyards in the middle of the winter. And I don't think any of us would have ever imagined we'd be doing that. And yet we did it! We figured out how to do it. And, and, and, and it made all the difference. And we've got these really kind of cool memories now of, of being in the middle of the winter and, you know, in our snow pants and our hats and our gloves and our scarves and our electric blankets around our fire pits and, and we can do it like, you can do it, you can make it work. And, and, and I still think that we'll probably be, be, be out on my porch, like into November, December, you know, why not? Right. Even after the pandemic, because it was just really fun, even, you know, I don't know when I'll feel comfortable bringing people in the house,

we'll see about that. That's a different story, but those are the kinds of things that I'm talking about, is like, you know, those things that the silver line -- I call those silver linings, because I think it's ways of, broadening one's perspective that like, I didn't, I could have lived my whole life without knowing some of these things. Right? But the fact is that in the m -- in it, I think I'd like to think I became a little more resilient. I'd like to think that I learned, wait a second! I can, you know, withstand cold in order to see my friends, you know? I can, you know, be very happy weeks on end, just really, basically being with my husband in my home and that's okay. You know, so those are what I mean.

[00:15:25]:

EE: Yeah, that's awesome!

JS: Yeah.

EE: And that you guys were able to figure out ways to still have that social interaction.

JS: I should. Can I just say one thing?

EE: Yeah, of course!

[00:15:35]:

JS: I should, I do want to, want to preface all of that or, or maybe overlay, how, how privileged I know I am, we are. All of, you know, my immediate friends and family, to even be able to think

in those terms. You know? And, and recognizing that as well, even amidst the backdrop of the horror of watching what was going on in this country and the horror of how the pandemic was dealt with by, you know, the government at the time. And, those horrors took a huge toll also. And the stress of that piece of feeling the helpless piece, was part of that too. So I don't want to, I don't want to get the idea that it was some kind of Pollyannaish, you know, we, we, we made it through! You know, cause I'm, I'm fully aware of that, that I was very aware. I, I, the downside was also, I was on the news a lot. I mean, I am a person who is a news junkie. It's sort of what I listen to when I'm not doing other things. And, and that was tough. I probably should have taken a little more time away, but we did watch some really great, you know, Netflix too. So, [laughs] that was good too. Anyway, I just wanted to put that out there because I don't want to negate that part.

EE: Yeah, of course. Were you able to pick up any hobbies to sort of, either for fun or to help you deal with the, like the stress, for example?

[00:16:59]:

JS: So, that's a really good question. Because of the nature of my work -- and we can talk about that, you know, in another part of the conversation -- you know, well, let me, let me, I'll, I'll say a little something about that. So my, my work model up until COVID was to go and visit my students. Like I would go to their homes and see them in person. And that was a very, for me, a very important part of how I thought I did my work well. You know, I'm very sensitive to body language. I just really enjoy being with people. I'm not a telephone person -- like I don't like talking on the telephone generally. I'm not, you know, so I was a little skeptical of this whole, like Zoom kind of, the screen in between me and my students and whether I'd be able to do my

job well. And so I think as a result, I wound up working a lot. I think I met with kids probably way more than I would typically have done. And that added a stress of keeping in touch with them and being on top of how they're doing and making sure, you know, I had to rethink some of the ways that I did my work in different phases and how I could connect with my kids to make sure that they were, you know, getting the services that I wanted them to get from me, but also that I was getting the information from them that I could get from them. And so I definitely spent way more time this past year, I think just sheer hours, both thinking about that, and with my students than I might've been a typical year. So that kind of was a little bit more burdensome, but I put it on myself cause I really, I wanted that and I felt I needed that.

[00:18:30]:

One of the things that I had always done for like decades, is I have a health club down the road in my town that I joined -- that I belonged to since '93, when we moved to this town, community. And it's this little, it was started as a little local club and then became part of a national chain. But basically, you know, I would go there five days a week and I'd do classes, you know, with different instructors that I've known for literally 20 years. And you know, the funny thing about something like that is sometimes there'd be like a month where I would see people in those classes, because several of us did the same classes, more than my dearest friends. Like, I'd see some people, you know, so it became, it was a community, right? It was sort of a community. It's not like these people were my close friends, but you'd go in there, you'd see people. Hello. How are you? You knew the instructors. There was a, a familiarity that even though the club there was, had a lot of its downsides, I loved it! Because it was both, you know, it, it was the exercise that I enjoyed, but it was community. I would see the same faces. I would see the same instructors and it was something that I loved. And it was a very big part of my day. I always left

it as like a block of time each morning, just sort of me time when you, you know, it's not a hobby, but it's something that was sort of about me. Okay? So, then of course everything gets completely shut down. I am one of those people that truly, I will not do a sit up on my own in my own home. I just, you know, I'm a person that needs, I'm not a big exerciser, like, woo! I'm going to do it on my own now. And that was not going to happen.

[00:19:55]:

So, you know, for a while there I'm like, what am I going to do? And I discovered like this one woman on, you know, friends of mine made suggestions of like, like try this yoga person and try this thing. And I was like, nah! But finally there were a couple of instructors from my old club who continued to do their classes -- again, I go back to Zoom silver lining -- did their, and still to this day are doing their, their core classes. And the beauty of it is that I realized, so they started doing their classes. So I still five days a week do my classes. It just happens that I do it up in an upstairs bedroom. But, when I come on and want to come off the Zoom, Zoom exercise hour, if I wish I can click on the gallery view, and they're all those faces, you know, all those people! And they'll be like hi Jill! Or, you know, how you doing? And it's nice to see you! And so there is that. So I'm, I'm so grateful for that part and that piece. And I think that has helped me get through. And my hope is that these instructors, I mean, frank -- actually to be perfectly honest, the company went out of business. So like there's not even a place for us all to go back to, frankly. So I, my hope is that these women that I, I'm so familiar with and hold these classes, will continue, you know, even post the time when we could all gather in a, in an actual place. But if they don't, I'll have to find something else cause I don't think I'm going back to that model of a gym, but that, but that's something that I do for myself. As far as anything else, no, again, I have, in terms of extracurricular, I do a lot of, there was a lot of time spent with my Jewish -- you

know, the, the Boston Haifa work. A lot of time, I spent a lot of time -- there was a lot of conversation about what we were doing and how are we delivering what we could do, through meetings and things like that. It's been, I took a lot of time with that. And then also, you know, again, I go back to the, the scholarship fund, there were a lot of questions and we were concerned and we were sort of, we made a, a concerted effort amongst our group to do even more outreach that we, that, to our kids, you know, who are in college to see how they were doing, and see if like people needed help and that kind of stuff. So those kinds of things, I think my work and my volunteer work, there was probably more time spent because of the nature of the work, problem solving, how can we do better? What do we do in this moment? How do we check in? Those kinds of things.

EE: So you mentioned your work a little bit. How else has that been impacted? You've had to move to zoom, but has that changed anything in any other way?

[00:22:28]:

JS: Well, yeah, I mean, it changed a lot. Uh, it changed how I deliver materials to my kids and, and how I, uh, I mean, it's not, to be perfectly honest. It hasn't been all bad. After a while, you know, sort of it's, it's, you sort of have to go through something for a little while to self-reflect on it. Right [laughs]? It's like this conversation. But, so, you know, half, halfway in what I was discovering, because it was the model, Lexington is, it's sort of in the Boston Metro area, which, prior to COVID, it, it just, the traffic was insane. It's a, it's a very dense, you know, [challenging?] community. So to, to go and travel to all of my students, it was a big time sink, you know, it could take at five o'clock in the afternoon, it could have taken me an hour to get back and forth to a student's home because of traffic. And so I say that because now with

COVID, that hour has been removed from my work day, which has actually been really nice. So, it's made me think that even post pandemic, when I open up my -- when things open up a little bit more, I'm definitely going to go back to checking in with my students in person, but not every meeting. Like I suspect that sort of in each I'll wind up doing sort of strategically planned meetings with my students one-on-one when things change, and when we're doing some really kind of in-depth, um, work together, but then other times this model. And they're also, they've become so facile with it, you know, I mean, obviously they're of an age where they're much more facile with screen time and communicating through screens anyway, then I had to grow into, but, I don't think it's an issue for them to, to get to that sort of quicker feeling of trust and sort of authenticity and comfort, then it was for me to understand that I could do that and get that. So, I think it's going to be, I think I'll now balance that a little bit more, so I'm not schlepping around as much and wasting as much time doing that, but rather spending it, you know, working directly with the kids through Zoom.

[00:24:35]:

EE: Yeah. And I know you mentioned this in a separate conversation, how you were able to expand?

JS: Oh, yes, yes, yes, yes. Yeah, thanks for reminding me. Sure. That's and that also will continue. So, last year, so right, because of that model, prior to the pandemic that I would only travel to my students and I had this, I had this notion that I can only do my best work if I could really see the person and get to know them face to face. And what, you know, that went out the window. Cause even I, I just, it wasn't a possibility. And I have one, one mother that I've worked with her kids and she's terrific. She recommends me a lot, which is lovely, but she recommended

me to her brother for her nephew and they live in Arizona. And at first I was like, nah, I don't think this is going to work. And then I was like, wait a second. Why, why couldn't this work? Of course this can work because this is how I'm working with all my students. And so I was able to work with that young man and I loved it. He was awesome and it was great. And I think I was helpful with him. And this year I've taken on a set of twins who live in Rhinebeck, New York, which is of course not anywhere near me right now, you know, it's several hours away from me. And, so my guess is that that will, I won't be as quick to say no to a family that wants to work with me that are further away than, you know, driving distance. Yeah.

[00:26:04]:

EE: Yeah. That's great.

JS: So that has changed. Thanks for reminding me because you're right. That's a big, that is a big deal and that's, it's kind of nice to be able to do that.

EE: Yeah, definitely. And I hope that continues to work!

JS: Yeah, me too. Me too. I mean, it's funny you say that, cause it's interesting this year, I don't know whether it was just -- I actually have helped a lot more, a lot of my, some friends with like graduate school advice and those kinds of things and a lot of it, because of Zoom again, it's a great tool to be able to like share screens and read essays and also talk through things. So, you know, I've been able to use this tool, Zoom tool, in a way to help even more deeply, you know, even friends who turned to me for that kind of advice. It's kind of neat.

[00:26:44]:

EE: Yeah. That's awesome.

JS: Yeah.

EE: So we kind of talked about some opportunity gains. What about opportunity costs?

[00:26:51]:

JS: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Oh God. Seeing my parents, you know, my parents, well I should, I should, I should, I should temper that. Cause in -- seeing, seeing people, seeing friends hugging! I'm a big hugger and, that, you know, just not being able to have that kind of contact with people, even if we met, you know, outside in someone's backyard, that distance was very challenging. That part, it felt like we were like almost there, but not quite making it through. Or I don't know if you, you saw, I remember early on the pandemic, there were some creative parents that had created like these like plastic walls with like these plastic arms that grandparents could put their arms through and, and hug their grandchildren, you know, and they just like broke my heart and made me happy at the same time. You know, and so that, that, that kind of stuff was the, the not being able to be with, you know, be with friends and, and, and family not being able to hug my kids, you know, that was very hard. Even not feeling comfortable having my children in the house, we'd even meet them on the porch masked up. We'd only go for walks and things like that. Cause you know, they had their lives, they had roommates. And also, my mother-in-law lives very close by. She lives on her own, very close by. She's actually turning 90 in May. Lives on her own. And one of the things is we are the closest,

grown children to her and it was critically important that we could always get to her and go to her and visit her and help her if needed. And so that was kind of another layer of caution. It wasn't just about my health and Howie's health, my husband's health, but it was also about, you know, being able to -- this one singular person that I felt we had a responsibility to be able to go visit if we needed to. And we would visit her with our Purell, with our masks, we would, we would, we continued to visit her. And, you know, again, she'd sit on one end of the living room. It was just so, and she's also nearly deaf and it's hard to see. So, you know, it was definitely a challenge even when we visited with her in person, but I'm not sure she could always hear the conversation, but we got to see her! But that was critically important. So as a result, I think some of the other, like, you know, we had friends who, we knew, some people who were a little more lackadaisical about it. But we couldn't be, we didn't want to be, we weren't interested in that. And you know, there was the stress, there was the stress of masks and will we be able to get, you know, like everybody toilet paper and, you know, the, the things like that when things were happening and it just felt... that stress was hard. We did, you know, we, I'm trying to think now, you know, it wasn't six degrees of separation, but like a couple of degrees of separation from us to people that we knew who lost, you know, colleagues, family, friends, to COVID. We have a lot of friends who are doctors, you know, or nurses and working in -- or have kids who are medical students. So that was like a level of stress that was like up here, worrying about them and about what they had to do in their own homes and the, you know, having shower, -- you know, living in the basement for a while.

[00:30:25]:

Oh no, I take it back. One of my students, her father had to live in the basement for 10, 15 days, I think, cause he got COVID, you know, these kinds of things. And then my student was very

stressed. Understandably. These kinds of things kept kind of weaving its way into our, our isolated experience and that kind of low grade fear. That said Howie has a great aunt who's 97, lives in a nursing home, got COVID, survived COVID and is still with us [laughs]. And there were those kinds of stories too, you know, it was kinda crazy. So, yeah, but the stress, the not being able to hug the, not being able to see friends, the, yeah, that was hard. Though I will say again, the being -- and it had to do with my parents, one of the things because of COVID I go -- I'm going back to the kind of that, like, silver lining side. The silver lining side was that, because of COVID and work, it used to be, we would visit my parents, who are usually around in the summertime, you know, about two hours from us in the Berkshires and we're able to see them. And so our usual model in the summertime would be go like on a Friday and stay maybe until Monday morning, or to Sunday night and see them every couple of weeks and, and see them quite -- which we thought was quite a bit. What we did in COVID is that my sisters and I, not at the same time, but we all kind of spent -- we'd go and we would stay for a week or more. Why? Because we could work there. Well, my parents finally got broadband, so that made it possible. Their WIFI was good enough that we could work there. Right? But once that happened, we were able to go and we all, you know, we're isolated, so it's not, you know, we were doing the, that, that part. So there was that. And I just visited them in March, even before I was vaccinated, I took the risk, but they were fully vaccinated. I went down to Florida, where they were, for two and a half weeks. Cause it had just been so long since I'd seen them. And you know, I got tested. The testing on both sides of the trip and I knew I wasn't going to really infect them. But, uh, but that was just, wow, that was a blessing. And, and again, because of this moment, I didn't have to be here doing my meetings with my students. I could talk to them and I worked from there. I met them from there. So, that was neat. And I think that model -- also it'll be interesting to see like all

of, my husband and one of our two sons, have changed jobs in, in the pandemic. And so, you know, they're not, none of them are going to the office. And then the third one that I, sorry, this my, my, my other son, his business, like they, they leased out their office space. They don't even have office space to go back to right now. And so, you know, this whole model in your mind of like, what's the work like the nine to five -- no one, no one ever does nine to five, but you know what I mean. Like the, the commuting in to whatever your office is and doing your office thing and then leaving your office and going home. That is like, I have a niece who's like traveling all over the country. And working! But traveling all over the country right now, my niece and nephew did that. My son did that, went for three weeks out to Colorado during this time. So, it's been really fascinating. That piece of it, again, part of the privilege piece of it, but still, really interesting and we'll -- it'll be interesting to see how that changes and adjusts as we go back to some semblance of normalcy.

[00:33:47]:

EE: Yeah. Have there been any, issues or concerns, either personally or in your family, that have either been caused by the pandemic or exacerbated by the pandemic? Whether it's medical or mental or anything?

JS: Mental. That's the one that's been -- taken the biggest toll. Yeah, definitely, absolutely. Isolation. And that, what I just said about the work environment, like how nice it may be on one hand. I think that getting, having a communal space to go to during the course of a week to engage and to be with people, you know, my, I think that's very important to, to, to some family members and, I think that's taken a toll. So, yeah, that's been hard and I, and not, you know, not just him. I think that that's true of a lot of people who miss that opportunity. I have a lot of

friends actually, you know, I have a lot of friends who were teachers, educators. And so that was something we've been talking with them the entire year. One who's an educator in a high school teacher and one who is an administrator at a college campus. And so all year long, we talked through and talked about and talked what if and how, you know, around when the, when for instance, the vaccine was rolling out and who's considered essential workers and those kinds of things. Really interesting conversations. And I felt for them, you know, the personal safety versus the desire to absolutely be in the classroom with their kids again. You know? And, and, and that, that juxtaposition, you know, I have friends who are cancer survivors or have lung issues. I have a sister who's a three-time, you know, has had cancer in her lungs three times. And so for her, it was, that was terrifying, literally, like -- and she has a high school senior, you know, junior and senior and, and a husband who commuted into the New York City for awhile. And so there was a lot of fear around, just, you know, what the hell, you know, she was sort of trying to hermetically seal herself, but, you know, she lived in New Jersey and, and it was just, you just didn't know how things could creep in and knowing how vulnerable that she could be.

[00:36:17]:

So, that was something that I'm like, I can't tell you when she got her second vaccine, you know, that was huge. That was really, really, really huge. And also her husband got his second vaccine and then, you know, her daughter's on her way. So like that relief now is huge. Absolutely huge. So yeah, there was that kind of like a low grade, sometimes not so low grade, concern and stress throughout the year. I was worried about my parents. You know, my parents were being careful [laughs], you know, but they would talk about like having friends come over and visit their lanai, which in Florida, that's that outdoor space, you know, under a screen and like, oh, but they'll come in from the other side! And we sit across from each other! And, you know, it was, you

know, I mean, it's what also keeps them alive, but like, it wasn't without being stressed about it. Right? And so, you know, I have a dad, even though he was a, a doctor his entire career, you know, like when he talks, he pulls down his mask as if you know... yeah [laughs]. So, I'd be like, dad! Keep it on! And, you know, I mean, so those kinds of things just would like, and also just, you know, having my children who are in their twenties, and this is the time when they should be, you know, in bars and, and, you know, meeting people and going out to dinner with their friends and socializing and going to parties and all that stuff. And, you know, the toll that, that takes of either not doing it, or deciding I've got a bubble, you know, it's like, okay, okay. I gotta just like trust, trust it, right?

[00:37:52]:

EE: Yeah.

JS: Not that I don't think that they were being smart about it, but, you know, seriously, this, this whole, what I think you learn about in something like this is everyone has a different level of comfort and understanding of what's quote unquote safe. And, and that's true in my own friend group as well. That's six women that I was telling you about, you know, all of our partners, you know, three quarters of them I was like, yeah, I know they're good. But I know the other partners who were still very dear friends of mine, but these got their, their, their spouses or husbands or partners were like, they're just like, does, it's not in their makeup not to be with other people.

You know what I mean? So, you kind of had to make your way through what your comfort level was. And I always respected anybody's different comfort level. I had my own. You know? We had our own, so that was interesting. I don't know. I think I went off topic of what you asked me. Okay.

[00:38:47]:

EE: No, you're good! What do you do when you're in a situation with someone who doesn't necessarily have the same COVID boundaries that you do?

JS: Right. So, I'll be honest. We are still, for the most part, still pretty locked down, my husband and I, and, and in sort of a very controlled scenario. And of course now, it's a little different now, because the majority of our friends are, are two vaccines in, you know? Or I got the J and J so -- are vaccinated and out of the --

EE: [Claps]

JS: I know, right! So they're all, you know, so it's a little different now. So we're now sort of, it's like, it's almost like, you know, like a PTSD, like slowly lowering our masks and, you know, slowly embracing those of us that are, you know, know that. But, like in the grocery store or in, I just, I was a little militant, not verbally, not vocally, but like in terms of my own actions, like if I saw a situation that was uncomfortable, I just literally went the other way. You know, I just avoid it. I was hypervigilant when I was in the grocery store and, you know, I'm lucky I'm in the suburbs. So my grocery stores are, you know, ginormous, you know, I go to these humongous grocery stores where there's tons of aisles. I always, I must say, I always gave the hairy eyeball evil eye to people who wouldn't like, couldn't somehow pay attention to the arrows on the floor. Occasionally I would, I would like think of friendly way of saying, excuse me, but just so you know, you know, you're going in the wrong direction. And most of the time that worked out and

some would be like, oh, I'm so sorry. I'm just looking for the rice kind of thing. And I'd be like, hopefully I at least mentioned it so that they like pay attention. And then there were other times where people would just be like, whatever, you know, like, okay, okay, whatever, I'll just leave the aisle, you know, so, you know, but there weren't that many opportunities for me to be that way. I live where there's a bike path.

[00:40:41]:

And so I, there are times of the day that I, I will go on it and other times I'll avoid it because depending. But in my town, I, I'm lucky in that I live in a community that believes in science, for instance, you know, literally. And so, you know, the masking up was a fairly common -- that was to, to see the unmasked person was, was more uncommon, was more the abnormal than the masked person. But like I said, even now, I, we're not going in anywhere. I, I'm, I'm, we're going out to dinner tonight with, with our kids. And it's outdoors on a patio so we'll see how that feels. I'm a little nervous, but we're all, like I said, we're all vaccinated. And, my Eli, our youngest son has one to go, but he's been out and about in the city. So if he feels comfortable about it, then, then I'm comfortable about it. So, slowly. But I don't see myself going inside a restaurant. Going inside a theater. Going inside anywhere, inside anywhere, anytime soon, no way. Not for an extended period of time. Yeah.

[00:41:47]:

EE: So another main issue, both that is part of this pandemic, has been exacerbated by this pandemic, and sort of runs its own storyline alongside this pandemic, is social inequities. Whether it's racial inequity, socioeconomic inequity, or gender inequity, or others, how has, or has your community been affected at all? Have you been affected at all?

JS: Well, by being a human being that happens to live in the United States, I've been terribly affected by it and seeing what's going on. And, you know, I, you know, celebrated the verdict, you know, the Chauvin verdict, which I, makes me sick to my stomach, that it required that much evidence to prove that that man was killed by a police officer. But, yeah, and, and we have -- look, I live in this uber progressive community and, you know, the METCO, METCO is the bus, is the busing program. That's the name of the program. And so each community that has students come from Boston, they have a program director. Who's usually a person of color. And apparently the METCO director, the director from a community next town over, was driving through Lexington and got pulled over for driving while black I'm sure. You know, I mean, so it's, it's here, it's everywhere. It's everywhere. I ju -- it's... I mean, it's not, all that's not new. You're right. It's been exacerbated in the pandemic, the, you know, social inequities seeing, you know, working with the students that I work with, the Boston students that I work with with the college scholarship fund and then, you know, seeing, the impact on kids having to drop out of schools for instance. Yeah, I mean, you know, it's... I'm trying to think. The reason I'm pausing is I'm trying to think about COVID, you know, I mean, I think, I think COVID was like the exclamation point, on for me what was happening already within the Trump administration, frankly. And the horrors that from the time that administration came in, I was, you know, kind of one of the millions that was suffering from seeing the impact, seeing and wondering like, what the hell can I do?

[00:44:20]:

I mean, that piece, the, what the hell can I do? That was, I think part of the biggest stress, is what, what can one person do when faced with, you know, all of these bombs going off across

our society with inequities and racial injustice? And, and then, you know, again, like one of the things I'm concerned about, I've always been concerned about, but seems to be potentially? I don't know if it's even worse now, is the, you know, the what's happening with gun, guns and shooting, you know, shootings and, and, and people using guns to take out their, their, you know, anger or whatever. I mean, I know, I feel like I'm a little all over the place. And I think part of the reason for that is I think I would have to think a lot longer about the impact of COVID per se, on my thinking and feeling about those various issues that you described. The social inequities, the racial injustice. That those things, like, I wonder if, I, I think Black Lives Matter post George Floyd. I, I think that the protest, would probably only even have been bigger without the pandemic. You know what I'm saying? So, I'm not sure, like, I, unfortunately I didn't go to some of the protests in Boston that I would have been there in a nanosecond, because of COVID, you know, because I didn't want to be in the crowds. It was at a time that was really not a great time to go. And my son went and I was nervous about him, you know, so, but that didn't mean that I wasn't there spiritually in my head. Right? So, it's a really interesting question. Now that said, just to go back to one of my own stressors, and again, you just asked such a huge question. So, there's no, there's very little correlation to what's happening. People who are really suffering and long-term suffering and of social, you know, society -- inequities in the economics and social inequities, economic inequities, racial inequities. But you asked the question about stress. And one of the things that we were grappling with here, was also, you know, with my husband, he was, you know, not working as much, like a lot of companies had stopped. He's a consultant and had stopped working. So, you know, there were some con, concerns, you know, during the course of the year, it was a challenging year for us too. Granted, we're s -- you know, we're lucky ones it's not like we're going to lose our house or something like that. So, you know, that factor,

the stress piece, you know, it's, it's real, it's real. And, again, I go back to the social inequity piece that you asked me about in COVID. I think the answer is yes. Like, you know, when I think about school, schooling and kids having to learn from home and the kids who didn't have access to broadband or WIFI. Things like that, something as simple as that affected a lot of kids. And, food, food inequities. So those things I think, yeah, definitely the pandemic exacerbated them.

EE: Yeah.

[00:47:39]:

JS: Yeah. I was kind of all, I know I was all over the place and hopefully when you w -- there's some sense you can make out of what I was saying when you listen back to this –

EE: -- It makes sense!

JS: -- but it should, you know, it's not like these things I started thinking about, you know, March 13th or when, when the pandemic hit. But, how it impacted people. Like those food lines. It's just disgraceful. You know? Health care. Access to healthcare. Even now with the, the vaccine rollouts, you know? But these kinds of things. Some of it was true before the pandemic, and unfortunately will stay true after the pandemic, unless there's a lot more concerted effort, which I hope this moment maybe will help with!

EE: Yeah. I know that earlier you mentioned you're a big news person.

JS: Yes.

EE: What are your impressions, or what have your impressions been of media coverage around this pandemic and more recently around vaccines and vaccine hesitancy?

[00:48:41]:

JS: Yeah. Full confession. I'm really pretty much an NPR and a PBS news hour junkie. So, you know, I'm, I definitely full disclosure. I know this will come as a big shock to you. I'm fairly progressive in my news consumption. But, I have trouble with Rachel Maddow [laughs], on one end of the spectrum, but I truly, it's very, I, I kind of, I wish I could force myself to also watch FOX, just to kind of -- but I almost feel like I don't necessarily need to, because I hear it somehow I hear, I hear it and I don't feel the need to. But, I think... you know, the news, news coverage in general, especially during the Trump years, it has, I believe that it has exacerbated the, our siloed, siloed society, you know? And I think that... the fact that we can all listen to our own little echo chambers is not good for our democracy at all. And I put myself in that category, you know, I'm not really hearing a whole lot of differing opinions. And also, I, you know, it was easy to work myself up into a frenzy about a lot of things. Part of that is because of the way Trump led, you know, his communication, but, sort of the response to it was difficult. And frankly, the whole, you know, to go to your question about vaccine hesitancy, I think there's a lot of different reasons for different communities to feel, rightfully, questioning about, you know, about vaccines. I think some, you know, even at the beginning, I was, I was kind of, it felt like when these vaccines rolled out, I mean, we all had always heard that the quickest vaccine that was ever created was what, like four years? Something like that.

[00:50:42]:

And then how could it possibly be safe and done in six months? But then I was fortunate to hear Tal Zaks who, who's the Moderna, was at Moderna. One of the, I think CEOs of Moderna, give a talk about the vaccine and sort of how that the technology that they took advantage of -- and same thing with the J and J vaccine, frankly, which is a different one -- that, that the vaccines that are being used today, their platforms were already well-established. And it was just a -- just a matter, listen to me [sarcastic] -- it was a, a matter of, you know, rejiggering, and, and creating the science to sort of go that final mile with the platform, which amazingly they were able to do, which also helps that, you know, that there was that, you know... an investment, you know, to the, to the credit of the Trump administration, you know, that stupid work speed named thing, but investments were made like money was thrown at it and put into it and, all around the world, I think that that enabled these companies to kind of focus on the vaccines in such a way that it was able to be done quickly. So I think, but I don't think, I think it was complicated, you know, the, just the science alone, number one, then you've got, you know, you were already coming into the pandemic, you were coming in, in the United States anyway, to, you know, a growing, I mean, anti-vaccines, anti, the anti-vaxxer movement, didn't start... again, March 13th. The anti-vaxxer movement has been out there, you know, parents screaming about anti-vax and autism and all these, you know, just totally specious claims. That's been out there and, and, you know, celebrities have been pushing that bullshit for such a long time. So, it's not, that that's not new, although that I find the most egregious cause that's just like, anti-science. Like, idiot anti-science people.

[00:52:37]:

So that one, I don't have much patience for, I think, in the black community, especially African-American community, where there's sort of a historical, they can actually turn to, you know, times in, in, in our collective history where, the U.S. government has actually used, you know, African-Americans as the guinea pigs of testing for different vaccines and medicines and medication. So I get that, I can totally get that and that distrust of -- there's a historical basis for it. And also needless to say from this administration, like, you're going to believe that this administration, you know, the last one, is, has my best interest? If I'm an African-American person, you know, in mind? My health in mind when there's never been a sign of that in any other area of healthcare? Like why now? So I can, I can understand that. And my hope is that, that, that -- and I think it's beginning to happen that the communication around that gets better and I think it's slowly happening, that they figure out who the right messengers are for the communities that don't trust the vaccines for, you know, for relatively, I would say pretty good reasons, you know? And then also when the, like I was worried about the rural community, when I heard about how, what was required for the Moderna and the Pfizer vaccines in terms of this really, you know, super cold, and once they're undone, you have to quickly get them in the arms. I was thinking, what, what about like the rural community? Like, how the hell do you get that done? You know, when you have to go miles and miles and miles to accomplish this goal. And so that's where the Jon -- when the J and J vaccine came in, I'm like, oh my God, how, what a wonderful thing. And also frankly, for like the homeless community and for the, you know, for the, you know, kind of communities that might only be willing to come out of a shadow once, you know, not more than once, I was really excited. So right now I'm sort of, I hope the J and J vaccine can come back on the market for that reason. But, so I go back to the hesitancy piece and the media, cause I think that was part of where we started this conversation. I think even though I

talked about the siloization, I do think now there's maybe an opportunity of siloization to be able to figure out the communication pathways to some of those communities that are, that are hesitant because of historical, you know, doubt and skepticism, which I think is rooted in all the right places. But my hope is that, and I I've seen more and more, whether it's celebrities, maybe it may be whether it's clergy, whether it's, you know, professionals, whether it's, you know, just, just friends and family. I hope that that hesitancy goes, goes down, more in those communities. Cause God knows those are -- often those are the communities that many of those communities are the ones that are like left behind to begin with. So hopefully that hesitancy will get a little easier as the communication rollout is better through the media and other mechanisms. In church, you know, whatever the mechanism is that helps with that.

[00:55:51]:

EE: Definitely. Have you come into contact with any other COVID conspiracies? You talked a little bit about anti-vaxxers, which has been an ongoing thing, but...

JS: You mean, in my personal life or in my media consumption?

EE: Both?

[00:56:05]:

JS: Well, I mean... yeah, I mean, you hear about it kind of... I mean, it's, it's, it's a fairly, I think, you know, right now I know in the state of Mass, it was impossible to find vaccines for those of us who wanted to get, find a vaccine, you know, whenever the age, like it was impossible, but now, you know, it's sounding like it's more and more easy to get a vaccine, which I don't think is

necessarily a good sign because I think we've only -- in the state of Massachusetts, for instance, I think, we're like, I don't know, 30%, which is good. [For?] vaccinations, I don't know. I don't want to be misquoted here, so I don't want to use the wrong numbers. The good news is I think we're on our way, but we're nowhere near what would be required for herd immunity. And for us to feel completely comfortable about the, about the rollout. I think... I'm trying to think, you know, I, I don't have it not surprisingly in my own sort of sphere of friends and family. Everyone was chomping at the bit to get it done, to get it [the vaccine]. No, I don't think in my sphere. And I just, I'm only hearing what's, what's on the media and listening kind of in horror of people who are still like, yeah...? Although I did hear a good, a good news report the other day. Someone was, I think it was, Ashish Jha is his name, I think, from Brown that is, you know, who's been a great spokesman and a physician, you know, a PhD who talks, who has been very much a sort of a voice for, the, you know, pro-vaccine and all that kind of stuff. And he was talking about, that we have to be cautious not to see hesitancy as a total negative, but that some people are just like either waiting, cause it's like, ugh, I'm not waiting on the lines when it opens up a little more, like, they don't feel the same urgency as some other people, but it's not like, they're not anti-vaxxers, it's like, yeah, when I get to it, I'll do it.

[00:58:12]:

That'd be great. I also love the idea, you know, Biden just proposed a tax break for companies to allow their, workers that don't have the luxury of like getting an appointment at three o'clock in the afternoon on a Wednesday. Right? Of being able to have a tax break so that those, those people can get a paid day off. And then the next day, just in case they need to recuperate from the vaccine, you know, as a tax break for companies to be a little bit more, flexible in, in allowing their employees and being able to pay them to, to, to go and do that. So, I think that's

another reason. Like, again, I think there might be people out there that actually do want to, but just can't figure out how to make it work in their schedule or how to get there. I hope I've been hearing more about like back to thinking about rural. I heard a wonderful report about a farmer, who opened his farm to be a vaccine clinic and everyone who lived like in a 25, 30 mile radius, which wasn't that I think it was like 300 people. So it wasn't that many people in a rural area, but it was something and they're like, great! I'm hoping they get more creative about, you know, I was thinking, I'd been fantasizing about like, you know, [unclear] at some of these school buses with these deep freezers, you know, and drive around neighborhoods and take it to the streets, you know, literally. And I think that is probably gonna happen. I think part of it, it was such a massive rollout that, I mean, I don't know about, about, but, but most of my family members were vaccinated.

[00:59:39]:

Well, I was vaccinated in a huge auditorium, you know, like a big gym at a university where there were literally hundreds of people in the room at a time. One of my kids went to CVS, you know, the other one and my husband and -- the other three of us were more like the large, you know, environments. So hopefully after those big efforts, you know, places like CVS, Walgreens, I think they've stepped up and are trying to do it in the community, kind of. So people don't have to walk more than a mile to get one. Right? I think that's the, that's like the next step. That's what I've heard in the news is the next step, of not the anti, there's the anti-vaxxers over here and the absolutely nots. But I think there's a whole bubble of people from me, who's like, whenever, can I get it as soon as possible? I think there's a bubble of people that would like it, but just don't know how to access or get it, or they can't. And I think that will

happen slowly. So, that's what I'm getting from the news. Is hearing about that kind of stuff. So I'm, I'm optimistic about that piece.

EE: Yeah. That's, that would be great.

JS: Yep.

[01:00:36]:

EE: I know that you talked a little bit about sort of vaccines in your area, but I also know that you were in Florida. What's the difference between Lexington and Florida, whether it's vaccines or whether it's masks or behavior?

JS: Yeah. So... the mask thing -- now, I'll, I'll again, I was in a very particular spot. I was in Sarasota, Florida, which is a fairly progressive, a lot of, you know, folks from other places there. So, and again, didn't really go out much. But I did, you know, we did go to one place for lunch outside, outdoors, you know, in, in, and, and most people wore masks. There were signs that said masks were required at this restaurant and so people were honoring that. But people are really close -- like, were standing literally in a line waiting for their food and like one, one right behind the other. So they definitely weren't doing the social distancing thing. So, I wasn't very comfortable with that. I, I was down there before I was vaccinated, so that didn't make me happy. And then [laughs] Howie and I, my husband and I, went to the beach one day and it took us a while! We moved like four times because we would put our seats down, and then a big group would come, and just set up way too close to where we were comfortable. So we would pick up

and move and then another big group would come [laughs], so it was a little stressful. We're not big sit on the beach people anyway, but that was kind of stressful. And the only other time we went to the beach was a cloudy day and overcast, and we loved it because there was no one, no one was there [laughs]. We just got to watch the birds and the clouds and it was awesome. So, that was disconcerting. You know, the rollout there was, you know, we, we dealt with the nightmare rollout scenarios with my parents first. So, they took, it them a long time for a couple, long time. Now, in hindsight, of course, classically, it's not probably that long, but took them like two or three weeks to get vacc, vaccine appointments. But it seemed like forever! And, you know, all five of us, my, both my sisters and my parents were each trying to get them appointments. So, it was really a mess. And it was a mess here too. That part, it was like, why in Massachusetts? Why the heck could, I mean, my God. We've got some of the best technology in the entire planet here in Massachusetts [laughs], in eastern Massachusetts. And they couldn't figure out how to set up, you know, for, for several weeks I would get an, a note I'd signed up online in Massachusetts to be on like the registry to get, you know, notified that it's my turn. And a couple of times I would get these, these questionnaires texts. Hey, you know, you're up for a vaccine! I'd be like, oh, yay! And then I'd have to answer a few questions. And the last one, and this happened like literally three days before I was going to be eligible to get the vaccine because of my age, when the age was changing.

[01:03:24]:

And instead of saying, great, we'll give you an appointment on Monday when you're eligible. They said, okay, then you're not eligible yet. And just knocked me out of the system. And so it was just like, yeah, it was things like that that were, that were so infuriating that it couldn't get done. You know, obviously in Florida, like Howie, we drove past places when we were going to

the beach, in front of the beach, where there was like these outdoor bars. And it was like, what you'd imagine in South Bea, you know, South Beach in, in Florida, you know. No one was masked, these little Tiki bars, people flow, you know, flowing out onto the sidewalk, no masks, their drinks in hand, you know, cheek by jowl. And, and I mean, I, [laughs] we were in the car in the street and I rolled up my window cause I didn't even want to any of their germs, like they were still across the sidewalk. I was like, we were at a stop light. I was like, I do not want to breathe that! I didn't want to breathe that. So, we were very judgmental from our car, but it was stupid! It was crazy! It was ridiculous! It was ridiculous. But you know, that's a ridiculous state, you know, at least I feel co -- governor, you know, in terms of leadership. I mean, it's just the leadership. I think it just requires a little bit of leadership, not much. And that leadership was just, of the state was stupid. And, you know, I do believe in my leadership in Massachusetts, you know, and they're trying, I, I, I believe in it, that they're, I still think that some things, some decisions are kind of crazy in terms of what's opening and how, but, you know, I have been, I should say I have been to a museum, a local, in Boston when they opened, timed. It was on a timing, you know, window of time. They, you know, long line outside the museum to get temperature checks and to get, you know, a questionnaire. And I mean, I could of lied, but you know, so I was, I wanted to try it. And so I felt comfortable, like I went to, I've gone a couple of times to that kind of environment I'm going on. Yeah. So I did do that before I got vaccine. I should say, I know, I did say I wasn't going to go anywhere, but I did. I tried it out. I gave, I gave the MFA [Museum of Fine Arts] in Boston, a try and they did a good job. So I, I only went a couple times, but still.

[01:05:32]:

EE: That's awesome.

JS: Yeah. I'm, you know, but I tr -- again, I sort of trusted them and the rules that they had to abide by. And it seemed to work. I was comfortable and people were being respectful inside. Yeah. Yeah. It was weird though, to be inside.

EE: Yeah... So, thinking about this pandemic, what, if any, implications, do you think that it could hold for the future?

JS: Oh my gosh. Well, I mean, there's so many levels that, that ans -- that I could answer that question. I mean, I would hope that government officials, both state and federal level would -- here's the problem. Okay. You know how one of the challenges. I'm going to tell you this, this is one of the things that is like one of the biggest challenges of what happened I think with the pandemic. The challenge with something like public health, is if you're doing your job well, nothing happens. Right?

[01:06:36]:

EE: Yeah.

JS: If nothing's happening, if it's not bleeding and leading, if you don't have a pothole in front of your house and it's all smooth going, then there's no emergency. And therefore, when it comes time to decide on a budget, people will say, why should we spend money on that? There was no problem! And I think what happened leading up to the pandemic, especially under the Trump administration, was those kind of places were completely hollowed out. Hollowed out! Funds

were disappeared, experts disappeared. It was like, we don't have a problem. We don't need this. And then you have a pandemic and guess what? It's a problem. And so my hope is that, unfortunately, I don't think we're a people that has a very long memory. My hope is that enough... in the, at least in the next five, 10 years, that we'll have a collective memory that actually, this is something that needs to be thought about. We need to store and plan for whether it's, you know, PPP, you know, PP, you know, the PPE, sorry, the PPE equipment to make sure we've got stockpiles to make sure that we, you know, do an analysis of what went so tragically wrong, so damn quickly. I mean, now what you see going on in India, for instance, in India, you know, they, they, they, they exported their vaccines. They exported their oxygen that they made there. And now they've got people dying because they don't have oxygen to put in their lungs. You know, I mean, like, wai -- you know, there's got to be a, a sense of, of, you know, public health matters, public health is, is, think of it as the, as one of the best vaccines you could have, right? The inoculation is to be prepared. And, you know, you look at other countries that were able to shut this down pretty quickly.

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Granted, not our size, but, but because they believed in the science, and because the leadership from the top said, this is a problem and we are gonna provide resources and, you know, not maybe do, shut down the whole place, but shut down here and shut down there and, and be mindful and that that's going to be a priority. And, and I think that's really important to do and to, be aware of. So there's that, and the implications. I also think one of the things just in another totally other category and other basket is I think that companies and corporations and employers have discovered that maybe their employees don't have to literally be in a room, in a building, under the same roof with each other to prove their productivity. And that, in fact, they're not

going to, if you, if you give them some slack on being in the office or, you know, create a hybrid scenario that actually, they'll get their work done, and that will actually work out pretty well.

And my hope is that that stays true. I wouldn't want to be in commercial real estate, you know, if that stays true because that's going to cause, have an impact. But, but I think that that's something that I think is going to be a topic of conversation for a lot of companies and corporations. I think that, and I'm one of them, I don't think I'll ever fly in a plane without wearing a mask again, or be on a train or be in a clo -- on a subway car without a thing of Purell in my pocket and use it and, and a mask on and, you know, be on with a mask. For that part, you know, for that period of time when I'm in an, or, theater or, you know, movie theater or wherever I may go where there's a variety of people. And I don't feel like I'm, you know, where there's it just feels like there's all a communal air that I'm not comfortable with. And I suspect we'll see that, for those people who believe in that [laughs], I think we'll see that, you know, like I think we'll probably see a lot more people like in New York and Boston and places that believe in, you know, science where they're, you know, forced to be a lot closer to one another to transportation or whatever. I think that's probably going to remain for a long time. I think those are some of the, are, are some of them I think we -- and, and to go back to your question about social inequities, my hope is that some of the implications that have some of the, you know, the realizations by the majority of what, like the minority contends with even before COVID, my hope is that, that, that, that consciousness raising that not everybody will go back to where they were like a tide, you know, come and going back and just going back into its' comfortable place.

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But rather, my hope is that there will be more attention paid and talk about and communication for those kinds of, of things. Including, I mean, one of the things, another area, another basket, I

think that, you know, what's going on with voting rights right now and the voting system and the fact in the pandemic that, you know, mail-in balloting and opportunities for more people to engage in voting because of the pandemic. I think that, for me, that was only a positive, you know? And if there was cheating happening, it was probably just the same percentage of any kind of cheating, even if you went into a ballot box, you know, and that's been proven, but, but I think that, that the fight to make sure that, that, you know, that experience during COVID, I think has some lessons beyond COVID and when the pandemic ends to make sure that people have access to vote, and those kinds of things. So those are just a few areas, I guess -- you know, food security -- that, you know, clearly was and, and, and also, just being kind of prepared, better prepared for how do we get, how do we get people, what they need in, in these emergency times. And just being more prepared and having better emergency plans in place, both at the very, very local level and the federal level and everything in between. So, I think maybe those are some of the implications sort of a consciousness raise across a lot of different areas.

[01:12:54]:

EE: Yeah. Thank you. Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experience or your family's experience or thoughts on COVID?

JS: I mean, I've talked a lot. Yeah, I mean, I'm just so grateful. I've got, you know, my nephew's getting married in September and my --

EE: -- Yay!

JS: -- I know! And my prayer is that they'll be able to have the wedding that they want, you know? And so I think going back to... life, you know, going back to the kinds of things that everybody, you know, gets joy from, safely, will be huge. And each time we do kind of one of those in-person things I know it's going to be like, we, we use, you know, a Shehecheyanu moment, a time of blessing, a time of like, thank God we got to this place and how fortunate we are, you know? So, I think that's something that I'm excited, and each time I there's like another thing, like, again, being with friends this past week where I was able to hug several of them, that was a moment like that. You know, tonight to a restaurant, you know, with my children, that will be a moment like that. The wedding in the fall will be a moment like that. Although in between, I still have an online Zoom Bat Mitzvah tomorrow morning. So, you know, though, I went to a funeral yesterday that was, you know, 50 people were, were, were in the funeral home, but everybody else had to be on zoom. And just like that created this whole other, like, you can't imagine what the first 20 minutes of that, like, it was all about tech, technic, technical stuff, you know? I mean, it's just, I hope at some point we'll, you know, we'll get back to a kind of normal, that will be a new normal, I think, but a normal that we can all do our life cycle events and, and enjoy and, and sorrow and, and feel like we still have been together, you know?

[01:14:48]:

EE: Yeah.

JS: Yeah.

EE: Well, thank you so much for this! I'm going to stop the recording.

[01:14:54]:

JS: Thank you.