

Interviewee: Craig Zehms

Interviewer: Sam Zehms

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Abstract: Craig Zehms was born and raised in Sheboygan, Wisconsin and now lives in Jersey City, New Jersey. In Jersey City, he works as a realtor, is a member of the board of directors for the Barrow Mansion, and a volunteer for Van Vorst Park. Craig's secondary place of residence is located in the town of Dingmans Ferry, Pennsylvania. In this interview, Craig explains the impact of COVID-19 on his life with particular emphasis on his work and his neighborhood. Craig shares how some parts of his job, such as hours, have remained somewhat the same. He continues that other aspects, such as the seriousness of his clients and the "double migration", appeared after the pandemic began. Craig compares his two places of residence, laying out similarities of the two in regards to the pandemic. While detailing the experiences of his neighborhood in Jersey City, he illustrates what is perhaps the centermost point of his interview: the pandemic, despite keeping people apart, brings some closer together. He explains the difficulty of not seeing some of his family and friends but reflects upon how his neighborhood has grown closer together through activities such as banging pots together for medical workers and picking up groceries for those who are unable to. Craig also highlights the different responses between the local and federal government, describing the local government as proactive and the federal government as taking "a lot of missteps".

SZ: This recording is being conducted on November 13th, 2020. It is approximately 3:17p.m. Central Time, both interviewer and interviewee are participating via Zoom from their respective homes. In New Jersey, there were a total of 19 new deaths due to COVID-19, bringing the total to 16,495 deaths. There were also 3,492 new cases reported bringing the total to 268,787 cases in New Jersey. Nationally, there were a total of 1,172 deaths due to COVID-19, bringing the total to 242,861 deaths. There were also 163,402 newly confirmed cases, bringing the total to 10,637,418 COVID-19 cases in the United States. So what is your name, and do you mind sharing s-some demographic information for the study?

CZ: Not at all. My name is Craig Zehms, and I live in Jersey City, New Jersey. I am of German and French origin, and I'm 68 years old.

SZ: Okay. Where-what is it like to live in Jersey City? You know, how densely populated is it, what is public transport like, that kind of thing, anything you like.

CZ: Well, Jersey City is the second largest city in the state. It is approximately 250,000 people and it has a landmass of about 21 square miles. It is considered, as of this year, the most diverse city in the United States. So, it's an exciting place to live because of that, because it reflects itself

by the restaurants, by the shops, by the people that you meet at the park, as a very fra-family friendly town too. We have a pretty proactive government here, in the state and certainly in Jersey City. Public transport-the PATH Train, which is like a subway train, which goes into Manhattan, and then at some point is above ground here in New Jersey and goes to several cities in New Jersey. It connects with the subway system in Manhattan. It also collects-connects with a light rail here in Jersey City, and the light rail goes from Jersey City to Hoboken north, and south to Bayonne. And we also have public transportation in buses, too.

SZ: Thank you. Are there any other places-do you have any other places of residence and what is it like to live there?

CZ: I have a small house out in Dingmans Ferry, Pennsylvania, which is about an hour and a half from Jersey City. It's just across the Delaware River. It's a small town, there's not even a town center. There's about 7,300 people in the town area that are considered members of that community. In contrast, 86% of them are white, and it is not a diverse community. The backgrounds are basically German, Italian, and I'm not sure what the other one is, but it's a very, very conservative area in the state. There is no public transportation. There are bus services that go between the towns, but there is nothing that really makes it easier for people to get from place to place unless they have a car, so everybody has a car. They're conservative, Jersey City is very liberal.

SZ: Thank you. So since you spend most of your time in Jersey City-

CZ: Right.

SZ: And-so what is-what are the primary things you do on a day-to-day basis in Jersey City?

CZ: Well, I've been a real estate agent now for a little bit over a year, so I go to the office at least five days a week, which is only three blocks from the house, and set up appointments, do a lot of research for-for people. I have become involved as a volunteer with Van Vorst Park Association, and the park is half a block from my apartment. I was elected to the board of directors in December, and I am a new board member for the Barrow Mansion, which is four blocks from my house. I also am in charge of volunteers for Van Vorst Park. We have a farmers market on Saturdays from eight until two, and-so I have-because of COVID guidelines in the health department, we have to monitor it with volunteers to make sure that everybody is socially distancing, wearing a mask, not bringing-bringing a dog or an animal into the farmers market area. People have been very, very wonderful about obeying all of these-these rules, and it's a way of just becoming involved in the community. I also live on a very, very friendly street, and know close to 40 people by name on my one street alone. So it's-it's a nice-I'm-I'm-I live in a historic part of town and a part of town where people have been for a very long time, so there's a lot of local history in this neighborhood.

SZ: And s-other than, you know, having to change the farmers market to adapt to COVID-19, how else has COVID-19 affected your day-to-day activities?

CZ: Well, it makes you very aware of the things that you need to do in order to leave the house. You've got to be wearing a mask, you've got to be conscious of social distancing. I allow a little bit extra time. I also find that people are even more friendly at this-at this point, so I always allow for an extra 10 minutes if I am heading to the PATH station, if I need to get into New York

City, which doesn't happen very often anymore. But I know that if I'm crossing the park, which I am doing every single day, that I will run into one or two people that-that I know. It makes you much more conscious of any public place that you're in, like the grocery store, for instance, or if you have to go to Home Depot, or anything-or the drugstore for instance, you're just really aware of your own personal space and not infringing on someone else's. And you're also aware of people that are not paying any attention to the guidelines, and leaving enough distance between you and them. Luckily, here, they're very respectful of that, but not always.

SZ: And, you know, when all of this started, you know, COVID-19, when you first learned about it, what were your thoughts on it? And how have they changed over time?

CZ: Well, I think that, like many people, I didn't understand how severe it was going to become, and I think part of that was that we weren't getting a lot of information ear-early on from the federal government. And I think a lot of us, myself certainly, felt that the government would be better prepared for something like this, since there had been a pandemic force that had been established, I think, at least during the Obama administration. The reality of it is, I was working a part time job when this happened and March 18th was the last day of work, that was in New York City. And the idea of isolation, and having a lot of what many people consider [chuckles] their rights or liberties taken away from them, makes you very, very aware of how you need to change your life in order to assist in getting this under control. It makes you think, you know, it makes you think a lot-it makes you not take things for granted that you might normally have taken for granted, and I-and I know myself early on, the idea of going to the grocery store was frightening. I mean, you were worried about touching things. I was wearing gloves when I went to the grocery store, and I know a lot of people who were really thoroughly washing all their produce when they came home from the grocery store. I washed it, but I wasn't putting it in a bleach solution. But, I mean, it's rethinking the normal things of your life, because everything's been heightened and you can't do everything the way that you used to do them.

SZ: So-is-then would you say in terms of the issues that have concerned you most about the COVID-19 pandemic: What were they and have they evolved over time? So at the beginning, perhaps, you're more concerned about, you know, how contagious it was, or something, and perhaps later on it changed to something else?

CZ: Well, I think that-a couple of things. I think one of the things, certainly for the people in my neighborhood, was when we were mirroring New York and the salute to the medical workers at seven o'clock every night, and I kind of became the musical director for all of that. So every night at seven on the stoop, there I was banging a pot that my mother used to make oatmeal in and an old wooden spoon, and we had everything from a cymbal to, you know, school bells, badly played bugle, guitars, tambourines, a gong, every-I mean, some days we had 12 people that showed up some days, we had, you know, 30 people that showed up on the street, on their stoops. And also, on my block, we have two doctors and two nurses. So it was something that brought th-the ceremony, the-the ritual of doing this, not only honored them, but I think it brought everybody closer, and this is a very special block of lovely people to start out with. It ma-I think it made everybody realize that this is something that's larger than all of us. And while a lot of people get caught up in what they think their rights might be, I think that the better word to use is responsibility. The responsibility that we have to our fellow citizens, whether they're in our own community, or in our country, or around the world to have to follow as many guidelines as possible. If you know, it makes-it makes you do a lot of thinking it makes you value things in a

slightly different way. It makes you prioritize differently. It affects your daily life. As far as some days, it's hard to motivate yourself and other days it's not. You're restricted in the way that you exercise. I used to go to the gym three times a week, well I don't go to the gym, so you take walks and you find-you-you-you're recreating your life on a, you know, in many, many ways. And there's very-I think the frustrating thing, and the scary thing for a lot of people is that you're not in control of very much. And that's-that's kind of a substantial adjustment to make no matter how old you are.

SZ: So the lack of control is arguably one of the most concerning parts of this pandemic, you would say.

CZ: Yeah I think so Sam and you know, also, I think one of the reasons that I've enjoyed so much volunteering at the farmers market is-is that it is its own ritual. We started later this year because of COVID, we have very strict guidelines established by the health department and they send someone every Saturday to check up on us. But it's-it's a community effort and it's-it's a sign of normalcy. We had to cancel the summer film series, we had to cancel the Halloween party for all the-the kids, we had to cancel most everything that th-the park does, which is a very active park. But it also brought people together on a regular basis, and this is a neighborhood with lots of families in it, and I like nothing better than walking across the park and having some little kid go, "Hey, Craig", because, you know, he met me standing at the entrance for the farmers market and I chatted with him and his parents, and, well, you know you know me I chat with everybody. And it's finding those-those things that are rarer now that you can focus on and-and understand in a very, very basic way, how important they are, and how they unite us, and how they keep us moving forward, I think.

SZ: N-to focus more on the employment side of all of this-

CZ: Mm-hm.

SZ: -how, I-I remember you mentioned March 18th-

CZ: Right.

SZ: -you'd had the part time job. So how-in terms of how it's changed your employment status, and in what ways, so that apart-that part time job then was definitely part of that change.

CZ: Yeah, I was working a job for a company that a friend of mine is an executive act-at and doing that through the holidays. And the-and as I was, because real estate is new for me, as I was building a real estate career. I mean, that affects you financially, certainly. It also affects you as far as a purpose, as far as a place to go four or five days a week. I was eligible for unemployment and one of the things that many governments did, state governments, is they furloughed a lot of their staff. So from the day that I filed my unemployment claim to the day that it became activated was five months. And I know lots of people who have had that exact same issue, and the only reason I was able to get mine activated in five months was that one of the women that I work with at the real estate agency's husband works for the unemployment office, and he was able to get my papers to someone there that could actually assist. Now, this didn't-after he got them, it was still another, like, six week process, and I didn't know my friend's husband worked for the unemployment office at the-at the time when I first met her at work. But that's-I mean, you know, in a-in a larger sense, when people are furloughed, or have lost their jobs because a

business has closed if it's temporary or permanently, they're, in many cases at, you know, at the mercy of the social service network, which is challenging. And if you are not a legal immigrant, that's a huge challenge. There is not a network for an awful lot of people. Our local food pantry at the church, right next to the Barrow Mansion, is-they've-I think they have quintupled their outreach on a weekly basis to people that need food. It's-it's, you know, you want to support your local businesses. Yet, when you are being more careful with money, you are being more careful with money. And so you're not supporting them in the way that you would have before COVID started. And because th-there's nothing about this that's finite, we don't know what the next three months, or six months, or years going to bring, it makes many people, myself included, more careful with how they're spending their money, and certainly what-and-and-and certainly what they're doing. If we knew there was going to be a miracle cure in two months, people might spend more money right now. But, you know, in New York City, a third of the restaurants have closed. They're working limited hours. Here in Jersey City, there's a lot of boarded up stores and-and restaurants. It's-it's affected everybody, and I don't think that we've-I think this is the tip of the iceberg. I think it's going to get a lot worse before it gets better. I hate to say that, but I-I think that's going to happen.

SZ: And in terms of your, I mean, in terms of how your job personally is going now, in what ways has it changed all-has all-has all of this changed your job?

CZ: It's changed my job a lot, because well, initially, real estate is a non-essential industry. And the-how you build your career in real estate is by meeting with people personally, by staging open houses by showing properties, whether rentals or for sale, in person. And we couldn't do that for a lot of months. We couldn't even get into some places to shoot, you know, a visual record of them. So you are really very, very challenged in how you can do your job. That has relaxed a lot. Now we're worried with this surge that's coming up if that's going to have to be pulled back once again. I-I-I don't know. It-it-it makes you reinvent everything, basically.

SZ: So-so have it-has it affected the hours you've worked and the kinds of properties people are looking for in your-and their locations in your experience?

CZ: It hasn't so much influenced the hours, because in-in real estate, you have to be very, very flexible. Some people want to see things during the day. Many people-most people most people want to see things on the weekend, but not always. A lot of people want to see something at night. So it's-it can be definitely a 24/7 job. What's happened here specifically in this area is that there's been a double migration. You've heard all about what's happening in New York City with people leaving New York City and Brooklyn. Now I would say about 90% of the people that I've been showing rentals to are from New York and Brooklyn. They have, after all of these years, realized that if they just come across the Hudson River, which takes them less than 10 minutes, they will get more for their money. They'll get a larger space for their money and they will pay less rent and they will have a lot to choose from. Currently we have three times as many rentals available as normal. What's also happened is, not only people in New York but people here in Jersey City, who have families-not just who have families, but a lot of them have a family, have decided "Well, I don't need to live in, you know, this urban environment. I can move 20 minutes or 30 minutes out into a really sweet town where there's a better school system. I can own a house with a yard that my kids can play in." And so there's been a migration out there. So it's been really, really fascinating. There are bidding wars for houses in some of these smaller communities because they don't have enough houses available to sell. And it has certainly

affected rental properties here. We have three times as many as normal, so it's a renter's paradise basically. I rented an apartment to a couple a couple of weeks ago, the-it was originally listed at \$2,650 [a month] for a two bedroom apartment with a deck, and it rented for \$2,250 [a month]. And there's one that I rented a while back, and it was a rent-I think it was a rental originally \$2,500 [a month] and that rented for like \$2,150 [a month]. And I'm dealing with a couple of other rent-rentals right now where there's nowhere that they're-they're going to get the rent that, you know, the landlord has declared, and the landlord's most of them are pretty smart. So there is that, and that's affecting the industry. In Manhattan, there's over 16,000 empty apartments, and they're also negotiating back there. As a landlord, you'd rather have someone paying some rent, than not anybody there. So in-in my industry that has affected things. And you know, I was an actor for many years, and I have a lot of actor friends and director friends. Well, that is, you know, as far as live performance, that's dried up. So a lot of those people have given up their apartments, moved back home, moved in with friends. Yeah, it's-it's-it's kind of a seismic change in-in the larger industry.

SZ: Is-s-so you mentioned the two different migrations that you've observed. Did this-you know, has that-I mean, it changed throughout the course of the pandemic. Was there a-did one come before the other, or-in your experience, or was it more they're kind of both happened at the same time or ho-how was it-how did you-how do you think it changed throughout the pandemic? If it did at all.

CZ: Well, I think there was this certainly a delay as people were acclimating themselves to the seriousness of the situation. As soon as classes became virtual at all levels, you know, elementary through high school through college, that changed a lot. As jobs became virtual jobs from home, that changed a lot. You know, from New Jersey, whether it's here, Bayonne, Hoboken, it's an easy commute into Manhattan. Well, people weren't having to commute into Manhattan, or maybe only having to commute one or two days a week. So all of a sudden, they could examine not only where they needed to be, as far as their relationship to their workplace, but where they could be now because their work-the idea of the workplace has-has changed, and I think a lot of these changes will remain. I think it's a big-a big change in that. And I-and what I will say is that, I'm not sure that there was a specific timeframe as this happened, but I will say as people have, in a way gotten used to this new environment, they have been more focused in how they're dealing with where they want to be. When someone comes to look at an apartment when I'm showing apartments, they're serious. They're not just the person that has nothing better to do on a Saturday or Sunday. When I'm trying to sell a house or a condo, same way. They have a list of things they're looking for, so you're not wasting your time and they're not wasting their time. And I mean, that's-that's good. Who knew that real estate, particularly in this area, would be kind of a hot commodity right now, but it is.

SZ: You mentioned before that you have, you know, friends in the acting community who were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, you know, in terms of employment. Would you mind talking a little bit more about that, and perhaps other friends you have that were affected by the pandemic?

CZ: Sure. Well, my friend Bill [Castellino], who you know, is a director and he directs theatre, specifically, all over the country and in New York City. He also writes and produces corporate entertainments for big companies. That's a very lucrative business. Well, since no one's gathering in large groups anymore [chuckles], for the most part [chuckles], but let's not get political

[chuckles], well we could. But, you know, that's just completely dried up for him. And he gave up his apartment in New York at the end of June. And his husband lives in Long Island, and he moved out there. And he can do lots of things of course, online and-and all of that. He's been working on some project, but the actual working to create something at the moment aspect of the job has ended. You know, a couple of friends I know were working-were in Broadway shows. Well, those shows closed, and the earliest Broadway is going to be opening is going to be-maybe something's going back into rehearsal next summer, and then perhaps opening literally in another year, but who knows. Certain shows may never reopen again. And a lot of people in the industry support themselves between theater gigs working in restaurants, or working retail. Well, when those jobs don't exist anymore either, your option-and your unemployment benefits aren't extended, your option is move back home, move in with friends, get out of an expensive city. It's not less expensive just because we're having COVID. It's as e-New York is just as expensive as it's always been. What you find out, shockingly, is how connected everything is [taps desk]. It's not one-one simple thing that is affected, it's a lot of different things that are affected. And I know that a lo-that people are creating things that-that they're, you know, they're performing online, and all of that. So there-there is-there is a forum for performers, not necessarily a paid forum for-for perform-for-for performers. I don't think it's made people that I know want to just give up, but it's made them rethink where they need to be right now. And I f-I will-I say 100 percent are very hopeful that-that things will come back. It's just when and then in what form.

SZ: S-So do you-what-what concerns, if you have concerns, do you have about the effects of COVID-19 on your employment and the economy more broadly?

CZ: I think that in order to boost the economy, the federal government is going to have to be more involved. I think there's a disconnect between a lot of our representatives in Congress, as far as what's really going on in their districts, and how badly affected people are going to be. And as I mentioned earlier, I think we've just seen the tip of the iceberg. I-I don't know, I've always been a survivor, but I'm not a kid anymore, and I-I just wonder how things are going to ultimately roll out. I mean, I'm, you know, selling places to people that have a certain amount of money to spend at the moment, and there's a lot of wealthy people out there, and I'm renting places to people that are still employed, even though most of them are working virtually. So I don't think my job is going-I don't think my job is going to end. It's changing though, and that's not necessarily-that's not necessarily a negative thing. I am worried about some people whose jobs ended and are very talented people, I'm not talking about in the arts, and are finding it difficult to find employment. I think a lot of people when they're finding employment are not finding employment at the rate of pay that they once had, and don't have the kind of maybe job security that they wanted once ha-once had either. I think that it's pressed many, many buttons. I mean, people are socially distance from one another, not just six feet, but a lot of people live rather isolated lives to start out with. I'm lucky I don't. But you know, how-how has this affected me personally? Even though I have-I'm surrounded by some really great people, you know, you can't avoid being lonely sometimes. You can't-because you can't control your life in a lot of aspects, and you suffer bouts of depression, because you see what's happening. My health is great, but you see what's happening to a lot of people, and how isolated they are and if they've got a family member in the hospital, or they have a family member in the hospital and dying and they can't be there. We've all seen a lot on the news where you can't continue to process it anymore because it's just so upsetting. I think it, you know, it's a challenge to motivate yourself. Some days I am really good at self-motivation, and there are other days where it's just really hard

to get going. And some days, my time management is wonderful, and there are other days when it's like, you know, you're happy you brushed your teeth. I mean, I usually do better than that. But, it's-there's not I-I think there's a-consistency to the inconsistency, 'cause days blend into one another, weeks blend into another, all of a sudden, here we are in the middle of November and we're all looking at ourselves, like, "How do we get to November?" Now we're reinventing the holidays, as far as not being able to be with our families and the people that we love, and finding something that's special to compensate for that. I don't know, it's-it's a really-it's-there's-there's too many buttons being pressed in too short of a time. Yeah.

SZ: S-So how has the COVID outbreak affected how you associate with your friends and communicate with them and your family? In-in what ways?

CZ: Well, I mean, I never was much of a person on Facebook, and I, you know, go to Facebook in the morning. I've connected with some, you know, high school and college friends that I haven't seen, most I've seen since those days, but some I haven't, and people have interesting posts, and I think that there's certainly a community of shared feelings that is supportive that way. I spend much more time texting and emailing, and I cer-have certainly spent more time on the phone. I've sent more cards than I normally send. I reach out more. I mean, I can be very happy being by myself, but I've reached out a lot more to people-I've reached out to people I haven't talked to in ages. I am very proactive on the block here by saying, "Hey, it's nice out tonight. Anybody want to meet on the stoop, socially distance, and perhaps have a beverage?" You can fill in the blank on the beverage, Sam. But it-it-it-it's made me do a better job of-of reaching out and not-because it's more important. Because we all-we don't know when we're going to be, you know, when are we gonna be able to travel safely? Really safely? When are we gonna be able, you know, to hug people that we love? I mean, it's just-when you think of it, it's just idiotically crazy. And it's-it's kind of on, ya know, I guess I could choose to be more isolated. People said, "Well, how come you don't spend more time out in the country at your little place out there?" And well, it's beautiful and I love it and I do get out there every once in a while, I know that I-this would have been 100 times more difficult if I was out there by myself. I would have had a real tough time with that.

SZ: S-So then, perhaps what-what, in terms of the biggest challenge you faced during this outbreak, would you-I know you mentioned isolation, separation from others, and you know, even how, you know affecting employment, that kind of thing. What would you classify as the biggest challenge or challenges you faced during this outbreak?

CZ: I think one of the challenges is-is not letting the current situation define your future. A challenge is setting realistic goals. A challenge is not buying into this very amorphous time where, as I just said, days blend into one another. Of making su-I'm pretty disciplined as a person, but making sure that I take that walk that I, you know, I-I create some time, that's just for me. I started taking a creative writing course last April, which is one of the best things I've ever done. So that there's-and creating things in your life that are things that you're looking forward to doing. And I-but that's-that's a challenge as some days, you just feel very, very unmotivated, and are looking for that-that glimmer of hope. And one of the things that's kept me sane is doing some of this volunteering, because I realize I'm not in the same-I-I-I-I'm not in a boat by myself, there's a lot of people in, you know, i-in this boat. It's-I think it's really hard to be disciplined, though, in-in this environment and-and to think-and to be future oriented.

SZ: In terms of how this outbreak has affected your community, you know, anything from, as you mentioned, the arts community, to your-to the farmers market, to the, you know, your street and everybody that-your neighbors, how would you say it is affected them, if there's, if there's anything else you'd like to add to that?

CZ: I think for the most part it's brought people together in a different way. I think that you see more open acts of kindness. I think people are, and I live with a bunch of very generous people, but are sharing, and not just-not, you know, physical things, but are-are sharing, are being more available. One-One of my favorite stories is, one night after we were banging our pots my-one of my neighbors, Margaret [Carne], who lives across the street who is still working as a therapist at the age of 87, thank you very much. She was raised in England and has been in the United States for over 30 years. She owns her townhouse and her tenants upstairs, young couple, and Kristin [Uszak] is a nurse and she's been-she was assigned to one of the COVID wards in New York City. And after we were done banging our pots one night, Margaret [Carne] said, "I have an announcement to make." And this was about two months into it, and we thought, "Oh my God, she's going to tell us that someone's died or someone's gotten sick that we all know." And so we gathered round, and she said, "I have a presentation to make." And she told us the story of her mother, who drove an ambulance during the Second World War in London. And the nurses in London in the-at the time, were mostly women, and they were called sister nurses. They weren't Catholic, but they were called sister nurses, and they had uniforms that they wore, and they had a belt buckle, a silver belt buckle with, like, angels on it. And she ha-she-she says, "I've been sorting through things lately." And she-she held up this belt buckle, and she told the story, and she said, "There's someone here that I think should have this belt buckle now." And Margaret [Carne], very fashionable when she was younger from the pictures I've seen, used to, you know, like, wear it on a belt with a black dress and stuff, like very elegant. And-and she said, "Kristen [Uszak], I would like you to have this." And she said, "You're on the front lines every single day, you know, dealing with really, really sick people and I think my mother would have loved knowing that you have this now." [Exhale] I'm near tears now telling you this, Sam, there wasn't a dry eye in the house. It was like one of the simply most beautiful things. Here's this very, very old lady understanding the significance what this-this symbolized and wanting to give it to someone else, and-and to honor her. And Kristen [Uszak], God bless her, who's a delight, is old enough-she's in her probably mid-30s, she's old enough to, like-she got it. I mean, she really got it. She really understood it and how resonant that was, [clears throat] as did the rest of us. And it's th-it's things like that, that make everything-and just the memory of having that happen, make everything more doable, more possible. More, more human [clears throat]. Yeah. That's a true story.

SZ: So with this togetherness, or, you know, bringing actually people in a way closer together and, you know, being more available for one another, that you mentioned, how else have people been responding to the pandemic, and in terms of differences between the Poconos and Jersey City?

CZ: Well I think y-the re-the response that I've seen, at least in the people that I know out in the Poconos, [clears throat] who are friends, they've been very generous, and they've been good about following procedures and all of that [clears throat]. The contrast between there and here is that that's a very conservative area, although my friends aren't out there [clears throat]. And here it's very, very liberal. O-when I was looking at the questions I thought, "Well my gosh, there's

not a-there's not a huge amount of difference.” People out there are required to wear masks if they go into a restaurant or into a store, and people are pretty good about, you know, well they won't let you in unless you're wearing a mask, but people have been pretty good about-about all of that. You do get, just because of, basically, the profile of a lot of the more conservative people that live out there, you have that whole thing about, “Well, my-my rights are being taken away from me.” [clears throat] And there's-there's that whole kind of thing. That's not an issue here. I think it's because it's such a diverse city, and it's very liberal city, and people are living close to one another, and are coming in contact with one another more frequently than people who live out in the country, who are living in more isolated existence. I-and I-I will, uh yeah, it's-it's-it's confusing, because well, there's a whole different thought process going on. I don't think there's a huge amount of difference in the way people are running-running their lives. And a-a lot of people out there, if they're working outside, they don't have to wear a mask, you know? If they have-if-if they're in a con-in construction or something like that they don't [clears throat], they don't have that as a, as far as I know, as a-as a rule these days.

SZ: So then the difference, you would say, is primarily not so much action based but more attitude.

CZ: Yeah, and I think people out there tend to be more, in a way, independent. And I think in Jersey City, it's let's, like, work together. And it's-I mean, it's two very different political parties. It's much more democratic here. This is a democratic state [clears throat]. Pennsylvania, in the area that my house is, is very, very Republican and very, very conservative Republican.

SZ: A-

CZ: And I-and I think too Sam, you know, people's reaction to all of this and how they carry themselves has a lot to do is if they know someone who's come down with it or has died from it, their response is different than just seeing something on the news. If it's-if it's personal to them, then-then there's a big similarity between how people react.

SZ: So have people around you then changed their opinions, day to day activities, relationships in response to the pandemic in Jersey City and then how would that compare, to your knowledge, in the Poconos?

CZ: I think-I think people have had no choice but to change-change here in Jersey City. It's a lot of people. You are-your social interactions are more frequent because you are not driving a car to get many places, most people are walking, and you have very strict guidelines enforced here. Out in the country you're in the country, and it's-it's –it's a different ballgame. People have changed the way they run their daily life because of these guidelines. And I think, you know, no matter where you are, you're-you're tired of having to do this. I mean, nobody wants to wear a mask. When I'm doing an open house, I'm there for three hours, but I'm setting up beforehand-you know, it's four or five hours wearing a mask, and who wants to breathe your own breath for that amount of time, you know? I mean, i-we-when I'm at the office, I have to wear a mask all the time. Here at home my don't, but it's-it's-it's all of the-all the things that are other levels of complication on how you-how you do things. I mean, you don't go to the movies anymore, you don't do this, you don't go hey-say, “Hey, let's go someplace for coffee.” Well you can if the weather's nice and you're sitting outside, but you're not sitting inside. So I think [clears throat] it has affected people in many ways, because our routines have been affected, and when you're in a

routine of this is what you do on this day of the week, and you go meet so-and-so for coffee on Saturdays after the farmers market. Well, maybe no you don't anymore, because of all of these other guidelines. So you're-you're-you're adjusting. And-yeah, most people I know have adjusted because they understand that it's a responsibility for the greater good. Not always easy, and it can make you grumpy some days because you just-you want it to be easier.

SZ: In terms of self-isolation and flattening the curve, you know, two key ideas that have-

CZ: Mm-hmm.

SZ: -emerged during this pandemic. How have you, family, friends, community responded to the requests to self-isolate, and flatten the curve? I know you mentioned, you know, socially distance on the stoop and new protocols at the farmers market. How else have they responded to these ideas?

CZ: Well, I think in lot, I mean, I think in lots of ways. I mean, people know that if you're going to be outside, you've got to be wearing a mask. You-people plan things differently. They think things through differently. I think they don't act impulsively as they-as they might have done. And one of my neighbors, who's a doctor, early on came down with COVID. She had the gastrointestinal version, and she was only sick for about four days. But, her-her partner, because he has some ow-some of his own physical issues, he got an apartment somewhere else because he didn't want to be-he's got diabetes. He didn't want to [clears throat] because his system is compromised, so he didn't want to have to be affected by that. And she has a daughter, and her daughter moved back from Chile with her husband, and so they isolated for two weeks. People have been very good about isolating and quarantining. I don't know of anyone who hasn't. I know of-and I-I honestly, I know of people who have gotten-come down with it. I know of four friends who have come down with it, and all were very sick, but didn't have to be-didn't have to be hospitalized.

SZ: So what-what are your other experiences in responding to the sicknesses of your-these-these friends that, you know, did come down with the Coronavirus?

CZ: Well I-you know, it's-it's because none of them-two-two are in Connecticut, friends of mine who are a couple, and one in New York City. I couldn't be around them because of their quarantining, and so it just makes you, you know, send an email or send a text or, you know, communicate that way. It's long distance communication, which is really, really frustrating. You can't go to the store. I mean, if anyone in the neighborhood needs to have something, those of us who have cars will always go, "Hey, I'll pick something up for you." It makes you aware, once again, of part of the challenge of this disease is that, with the isolation and the quarantine, people are fighting this very much by themselves. And I would think that that would be really difficult to do, would press a lot of buttons, and be very scary, very frightening. You feel helpless in a lot of-in a lot of ways. Despite all the guidelines and everything, you also can't put yourself in an unsafe situation, because that's not going to solve anything.

SZ: In-looking at the government, their response to this pandemic, how have the municipal leaders and the government officials in your community responded to the outbreak?

CZ: Well, we have a pretty progressive government here in Jersey City. The mayor is in his second term, he's well liked. The city council is very diverse and very, very active. So they

stepped up to the plate right away, and they were mirrored by the mayor in Hoboken, which is kind of our sister city. The, all the community, you know, groups, associations, became very, very involved early on [clears throat]. One of the good things about living here is-is that the tri-state area, which is New York, Connecticut, and New Jersey [clears throat], is all very interconnected. It's interconnected with public transportation, with businesses. And those three governors met, early on, very frequently, in-because there was so much travel in between the states, to try to come up with sensible policies that would that would work not only in their individual state, but in all three states [clears throat]. So I've-I'm living in a place where it's been very, very proactive as far as protecting people's health, making some really tough decisions about closing businesses and restaurants, limiting transportation. You are required to wear a mask on the subway in New York City, or you will be fined. And I think the fine is-I think it's maybe 50 bucks. But there are people out there writing tickets for that. I mean, they've gotten very, very serious and [clears throat] I had to go into town today for a doctor's appointment, I was in there yesterday too, and everybody on the-on my subway train was wearing a mask. Now the subways aren't remotely as crowded as they used to be [clears throat]. But you see that on the PATH Train, too. I mean, part of it's through legislation, and part of it is that people just get it now. And I-I-I mean, I-I-it's, yeah, I'm glad-I'm glad I'm living where I am [clears throat] where it's been supported by the larger community, in the most part, because they realize that this is what they have to do now, and these are the standards [clears throat] that the government has put into place and the cities have put into place.

SZ: And if I may ask, you know there was an initiative in Jersey City, where you could request th-the government was willing to provide-

CZ: Mm-hmm.

SZ: -masks upon request. And, you know, provide resour-other resources to businesses. Do you think that-what was your opinion of that? Do you think it was a good response? Is there anything else you wish they'd done?

CZ: I think it was a good response. I know they told-they-it was talked about mailing masks out and if they did, I didn't get one.¹ But I live only three blocks from City Hall and they've been very proactive as far as initially providing masks [clears throat], I believe hand sanitizer as well. There have been places where you can go and pick up, you know, free boxes of gloves and things like that [clears throat]. So the social service organizations have also stepped up to make it easier, because initially it was really hard to get those supplies. They ran out of the-there-people were buying them all and they were-they weren't at the drugstore anymore or at the grocery store. They have instituted, I mean, an outdoor eating plan for downtown Jersey City, well basically for all of Jersey's cities, so-but it's a reduced capacity. They, I think, are doing a good job of

¹ On November 14th, 2020, Craig sent me a message explaining that "Jersey City is planning on mailing out a packet consisting of a mask, hand sanitizer, and wet wipes to all citizens." While it hadn't happened yet, it "should be implemented soon". Later that day, Craig talked with James Solomon, his "council person", and said that there would be five masks included in a package to each household. On November 19th, he messaged me again explaining that the "initial outreach will be to 1500 households". On December 5th, I received another message from Craig with a picture of the "Mask Up Jersey City" package sent out by Jersey City. He explained that he received the package on December 4th.

respecting the business community, but understanding that literally the health of the populace is more important than that, trying to find a balance so that places aren't closing.

SZ: And comparing this-these government officials to the state and federal leaders, how would you say that they are responding to the-this situation differently?

CZ: Well, I think the federal-federal government has done a pretty bad job, pretty abysmal. And- and not just because of my politics. I think that they've made a lot of missteps, and I think that there has not been a coordinated federal response [clears throat]. I think a lot of stuff needs to come from the federal government, and there has to be standard for all states, not letting each state make up their own standards. Luckily I live in a state which has put really good standards into place [clears throat]. And I think that's been frustrating, because people are-are hearing a lot of different things. When you have a president who likes to hear the sound of his own voice, as annoying as that may be, you know, give vent to all sorts of crazy theories about this disease. There's some people that buy into that, and that's the last thing that we needed now. This is science and medically based it-bottom line. And people, I think, need to understand that. I think that with a new administration there'll be a better effort in coordinating things and making sure that supplies are made [clears throat], and I'm sure a lot of them will be made in the United States, which is a good thing for businesses, and that it will all-these things will work together and make more sense. So it's not [clears throat] them versus us, this versus that, that it will be everybody's in this together, and hopefully businesses will benefit from having to produce these things, and they will be supplied at all of these hospitals that are completely overwhelmed right now, by more patients than they know what to do with.

SZ: And how-how has this entire experience for you-how has it transformed the way you think about your family and your friends and your community? And what ways?

CZ: Well I'm, you know, I'm-I've always been a family guy, I love my family. And they put up with me, and my sense of humor. But it, and I have-I have the best friends in the world, and I-I think that it, and I don't take it-I never take that for granted, but I think this [clears throat]- because we've not been able to visit people, we've not been able to be in the same room with people, we've not been able to hug them as I said earlier, we've not been able to act in the way that we're used to acting with people, it has made us value the times that we have and look forward to the val-to times that we will in-in the future. It's about, I don't know, it's-it makes you-you realize that no matter how old you are, we all have an opportunity to build bridges. We all have an opportunity to reach out, and we all have an opportunity to celebrate one another's differences. And this is certainly a time to be doing that, and it's a time not to be putting ourselves first. It's a time to be [clears throat] literally, it sounds like a bad movie of the week, but, you know, opening our hearts and finding the kindness within us, and being-being able to help in whatever way that we can, in order to, all of us, get through this. And I think [clears throat] many people will be stronger-be a stronger person in a lot of ways because of having come through this. I'm hoping. And perhaps a more open minded person and perhaps all sorts of good qualities that one might not have had to experience a lot of in the past. I don't know, I just want to be with my family.

SZ: [chuckles]

CZ: You might know some of them. I'm not sure [laughs].

SZ: Is there anything else you'd like to add today? Anything else that we didn't cover that you'd like to talk about?

CZ: I don't think-I don't think so. We've pretty-we've-we've covered-we've covered a lot of-we've covered a lot of bases. I think, you know what, I think one of the important things, and thank you for all these great questions, because quite honestly, it made me do a lot of thinking. And I think it's not only thinking [clears throat], for me, it always helps to write stuff down, but then it also helps to share. Because we're not in this toge-we're not in this alone, we're in this together. And if we can share [clears throat] our experiences, I think that it makes it something that is slightly easier to navigate.

SZ: Well, thank you very much for participating in this interview today.

CZ: You're welcome.

SZ: And I will be sure to send all of the, you know, the transcript and the recording to you as soon as everything is done so you can look it over, and information on where you can access this.

CZ: Good. Thanks. And I'll send you that-I'll send you the paperwork.

SZ: All right, thank you very much.

CZ: All right, Sam.