

Interviewee: Reed “Thad” Engle

Interviewer: Westley Hart

Date: December 9, 2020

Format: Video recording, Zoom

Location of interview: Madison, Wisconsin

Transcriber: Westley Hart

Additional Transcription Equipment used: Otter.ai

Project in association with: University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

Abstract:

Reed “Thad” Engle, a California native who moved Madison, Wisconsin with his family after sustaining a career-ending injury, is a full-time father to two daughters, ages 6 and 8. In this interview, Thad shares his thoughts and experiences adjusting to life amid a deadly pandemic, namely, SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) which first emerged in Wuhan, China, late in the year 2019. In his spare time prior to the pandemic, Thad was pursuing a career in healthcare as a radiographer. He discusses the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on his education, his concerns about adjusting education regimens at the public-school level, and his thoughts on actions taken by the Wisconsin state government that have hindered efforts to ensure the safety of residents living in Wisconsin, a state that has been regarded as one of the nation’s worst COVID-19 hot spots throughout the summer and autumn months.

WH: Okay, so today is Wednesday, December 9, 2020. The time is 6:23PM. Could you please state your name, where you live, and any other biographical information you'd like to share about yourself?

RE: Yeah, my name is Reed Engle, I go by Thad Engle. I live in Madison, Wisconsin. I am 43 years old, and, yeah, I guess that's probably all we need to start.

WH: Okay. Alright, so you mentioned you live in Madison. The county there is Dane County, Right?

RE: That is correct.

WH: So, Dane County has 30,375 cases of coronavirus, the specific disease associated with the pandemic that we have been dealing with all throughout 2020. So, 30,375 cases and 110 deaths Wisconsin has accrued 448,000 cases and 4,059 deaths, and the United States has had 15.2 million cases and 286,000 deaths. So just off your—off the top of your head, what are the thoughts that you have with those numbers?

RE: I don't want to say completely avoidable, I don't think that's a realistic thing to say, or blame anybody on, however I think the numbers could be lower, or more manageable, if this was taken more seriously by some of the authorities, at the very beginning of this. I know, you know, you mentioned the numbers that were in Dane County, I believe—I could be wrong, but I believe Dane County was the first county to have a confirmed case in Wisconsin. And I think that the city and the county officials tried to move as quickly as possible to sort of manage it, but the state legislature has kind of stifled the current administration in Wisconsin, at almost every turn. So for that reason, that's why I would say I think that the numbers could be more manageable, if this was treated differently from the beginning.

WH: [speaking simultaneously] Are there any—

RE: [speaking simultaneously] It's frustrating.

WH: —Are there any state-level roadblocks that the government has made, that you can think of?

RE: Yeah, and I don't want to get into too many details, just because I don't want to misspeak or misinterpret. But I know generally, very broadly, the state legislature has taken the governor's safer-at-home order and tried to take it to court several times. They—have, sort of, handcuffed the governor in kind of strange interpretations or enforcements of his authority. Specifically, because he had some sort of—again, I don't want to misrepresent the actual information here, so I'll try to speak broadly—but I know that he had a number of things that he was trying to put in place—or keep in place, rather, that the state legislature said, “No, you're only allowed one emergency order at a time. And because you already have this one in place,” they would not allow him to make a second or third emergency order. I believe that they had to do mostly with mask mandates, but some of them had to do with maybe business closures, or, you know, sort of restrictions on—like, with the restaurant, maybe they were limited to 20 or 25% [occupancy] or

something like that. And I know the state legislature was really trying hard to undo all of those restrictions that the governor had tried to put into place. So yeah, I guess—I don't know, it's really frustrating to think that with just a little bit of sacrifice from everyone, we could be in a much better place right now.

WH: Yeah, for sure. And do you particularly blame any one group over another? Like the general public, or the government or corporations, small businesses, or even the international—

RE: [speaking simultaneously] Oh man.

WH: [speaking simultaneously] —community.

RE: Honestly, I think it's a marriage of all of those things. This may be a very silly or broad statement to make, but I think that money has everything to do with it, and because all of those entities that you just named, in one way or another, put money sort of higher than, you know, the health and welfare of people, or business, or environment or, you know, pick a thing, money seems to be the most important thing. So I find it hard to blame one entity in particular. I think it's really a combination of all of those things, and the motivation behind the poor judgment seems to be money, in my assessment.

WH: Yeah, absolutely. So, the first case of coronavirus was reported in Wuhan, China on December 31, 2019. When do you remember first learning about COVID-19?

RE: Oh gosh, I don't know specifically, but I mean, I feel like it would have to be late 2019, you know. I know it was definitely in the last school semester of 2019, we were already talking about it in school. So it would have been November-, December-ish 2019.

WH: Do you find it odd that the first case of coronavirus wasn't reported until after people started finding out about it?

RE: I would like to think it was odd [laughs]. But like we talked about before with all—you know, the way that, you know, money seems to be so important, I think that it seemed like a threat to the economy of, in this case, China. I don't blame China specifically, but—however, you know, their standing in the world, they didn't want it tarnished, and they thought that maybe they could get on top of it. So, I would like to say I think it's sad, but I think it's just the way things are in this world right now.

WH: Mhmm. What were your first impressions when you were hearing about it in late 2019?

RE: I mean, it sounded terrible, but it also sounded like it was on the other side of the world. I remember hearing all this stuff with SARS, and Ebola, and all these other pandemics that have kind of happened, you know, over the course of my lifetime, that I've been aware of; and initially, it didn't feel like something that we were going to have to deal with here. So yeah, maybe I am also guilty of not taking it as seriously as I could have been at the beginning. But yeah, I mean, it's—you know, it just seemed like another terrible thing happening somewhere else.

WH: Yeah, for sure. Do you think that—at the time, did you think that the media blew the situation out of proportion?

RE: No, I didn't necessarily get that sense. I paid attention to several different media outlets and I never got the sense that anybody was exaggerating about its severity or, you know, the damage it could do to humanity as a whole [chuckles].

WH: And, how has your perception changed over this year?

RE: Concerning the virus itself?

WH: Yes.

RE: I guess it's just sort of changed, sort of, parallel with the information that's come out about it. You know, at first, it sounded like, you know—as an example, at first, we were asked to wear masks to protect each other, not necessarily ourselves; now we know that it protects ourselves as well. We were told the kids weren't really susceptible to it, now we know maybe they are. Yeah I don't know, I'd say in general, it's probably just changed as the scientific information is updated. I try—

WH: Okay.

RE: —I try to just let the experts be my guide.

WH: Okay. And before COVID-19, what would you say an average day for you was like?

RE: Oh, let's see, I would get up really early, because I have a young daughter that wakes up really early. I get up and get her ready, get my other daughter up and ready, and get them off to school, get myself off to school. Go to school, pick up—you know, pick up my youngest daughter, school, and then help the kids with their homework in the afternoon, do my homework in the evening. Try to see friends and family as much as humanly possible. That's the thing, social interaction is incredibly important to me. So I tried to cram all of that in that I possibly could. So, that's gone [chuckles].

WH: And while you were going to school, were you also working?

RE: No, honestly, I was going to school because I had sustained a career ending injury. So, I was trying to get into a new career. So, my full-time job was just being a dad.

WH: Okay, yeah. And since the pandemic has reached the United States, what has your average day turned into?

RE: Well, it—we don't leave the house very often at all, unless we're just, kind of, taking a walk around the neighborhood or something like—Still get up very early [chuckles]. Get the kids ready for their Zoom meetings, and I spend the first half of my day kind of supplementing what

their teachers are trying to provide them virtually on there—I—both of my kids are sort of sat next to each other at desks and I sort of stand in between them and jump in-between to help out: you know, tech problems or academic problems that they need help with. So I spend the first half of my day kind of being a teacher to two kids in two different grades.

WH: Is there any—

RE: Making lunch—

WH: I'm sorry, go ahead.

RE: Oh, I was just gonna say, I just [unclear] make them lunch and get them moving on their homework and then, you know, spend the afternoon trying to get outside or do something physical with the kids, so that we're all as exercised as possible [chuckles].

WH: With those Zoom meetings for your children, do you find any of the school policies to be odd or over the top?

RE: No, I don't think so. I don't really know, with a lot of detail, how other districts are doing it. So, I don't have any real, kind of, basis of comparison, but I haven't really run into any issues where I question the wisdom that the district was making their decisions based on. Like, I don't know. [chuckles] Not really, but I'm also brand new to this man, like I said, this isn't—I don't have anything to compare it to. But everything seems reasonable to me. I mean, I feel like they're doing whatever they can to keep our kids as safe as possible, online. And, if anything, I wish that they would kind of push them a little harder academically.

WH: Well intuition goes a long way on that kind of judgment so, that's good, that you feel pretty good about that. My next question here is, how has the pandemic affected the different family and community groups that you are a part of?

RE: God, it would almost—it's almost all but disappeared. To be honest, when we moved here to Wisconsin from California, part of the reasoning was my wife had a lot of family here, and we were just going to be here for one year, while she did her internship to finish up her PhD. But then I had the career ending injury, and we needed the family help that we had here. So we decided to stay. We—you know, we had lots of family that helped out during my surgeries, and we had a family member that just had a surgery, and we're trying to help her as much as possible, but we can't get over there to physically help her. You know, we have these huge, huge family gatherings for Thanksgiving, and Christmas, and Easter. We've missed all of those this year. We typically go out and kind of help out on the family farm, you know, a few times a month; we're not even doing that right now, because even that puts us in proximity that's not comfortable for the other people involved, you know, there's health issues and—So we've avoided all, you know, all friends and family essentially. It's me and my wife, and my two kids, in terms of physical contact we have with people.

WH: Has there been an increase in any virtual meetings with your family over, like, the holidays?

RE: Yeah, I'd say a little bit. Yeah, mostly letting family get to see the kids. Yeah, there's definitely been an uptick in that over the last couple months. I've definitely been having more phone calls and FaceTime meetings with friends of mine than I ever have before as well. So yeah, I think that's, you know—we're kind of doing what we can in that regard, just to keep our connections with people.

WH: Do you play many video games?

RE: I have not in a very long time, ever since I was given a guitar.—

WH: Okay.

RE: —That was literally like, almost exactly the day when I stopped playing video games, and just—any free time, I play guitar now.

WH: Okay, for sure. And if you could name one concern, what would be your number one concern right now, regarding the COVID-19 pandemic?

RE: Oh man, that's an easy one. I'm very, very worried about my kids. I know that—there—oh gosh, one of them just turned six yesterday, I almost said five—They're six and eight now, and I know that, for their cognitive development, like, this is such an important part of that development. You know, in terms of their age—but the experiences that they have at school: learning how to interact with other—with their peers, learning how to interact with authority, learning how to take instruction from authority. Just these kind of little—these, just kind of soft, behavioral things that really can only be learned in-person. I'm so worried that, not just for my own kids, but for this whole generation, man. Like, I just think that they're going to grow up not having these really important building blocks. This crucial stage of their cognitive development, I really—I mean, we won't know for decades, what the real impact of this is, I think. You know, because we're gonna have to wait for these kids to grow up and become adults to really know, but that's my biggest concern, is that there's a whole generation of kids that are getting really short-changed right now, and we don't know how that's going to affect society as a whole, for a long time.

WH: Do you think that's a consequence of any pandemic, or is it unique to this one?

RE: Well, I could see how it could be a consequence to any pandemic. But again, this is, kind of, the first one I've ever lived through, this is certainly the first one I've ever considered what's the impact on children, or an entire generation of children. I could see how it could be kind of a more broader thing than just this particular pandemic, but, just, I guess I don't know for sure. Because like I said, this pandemic seems like it—start over with that one—It always seemed like that was something that happened somewhere else, and you know, in these other places where the cultures are different, and the approaches to things are different. I can't pretend to know how those communities are specifically affected, in comparison to how ours is. But yeah, I could see how it would be just—I mean, anytime you gotta stay away from people, there's going to be a consequence, right? So yeah I don't—

WH: Yeah, for—

RE: —I guess I don't really know for sure.

WH: Okay, but you give an interesting insight there. Do you think that—with swine flu, we didn't have the technology, like Zoom or Collaborate Ultra, to have virtual classes. Do you think that our technology plays an impact in this set of intangibles that our children are missing out on.

RE: Absolutely. I absolutely do. I'm happy to have this stuff. I never even heard about it, you know. I knew of FaceTime as a way to kind of talk to your folks or whatever every now and then, but I never knew about these actual, like, legit, kind of virtual meeting spaces, and I'm so happy they're here. Because yeah, like I said, if my kids' only interaction with education was me, it makes me really scared to think about what the outcome would be if they couldn't at least somewhat connect with their teachers. Yeah, I think this stuff is—this is the moment for it, you know. I know there's winners and losers with all this stuff, and I think that Zoom is a winner right now [chuckles].

WH: That's interesting. Yeah, you see it as a net gain, even though there are certain intangibles, like the listening to authority or interacting with others that they're still not receiving. Do you think that those intangibles can be brought into the virtual world at some point or another?

RE: I suppose it's possible. I mean, having this stuff is certainly well [sic] better than not having it. But yeah, I think some of those intangibles, I'm not seeing it personally. You know, I have two daughters, and one of them has already been in in-person school for a few years, so she's sort of already knew it, and she's adjusting to this a lot better than my kindergartener, who went through 4K, and halfway through 4K, had to start virtual learning. I mean, what—how do you tell a four- or five-year-old, “No, you need to sit and pay attention to the screen, and you know, like, there—they don't have that—they don't have the practice in place to do it, so the kids that are starting out this way, I think it's going to take a lot longer for that, to be able to be implemented. I think that it's possible, I don't think it's going to be a result of an intentional effort somebody makes though. I think it's just going to be a sort of, cultural shift that takes place over time. I don't think there's any, one, you know, piece of software, or one event, or one set of instructions that's going to just sort of, set it up and make it all possible.

WH: Yeah, absolutely, that's very interesting. So, you also mentioned that you, yourself, were going to school before the pandemic. So before COVID-19, what did your average school day, or semester look like?

RE: Well, I was doing three classes, nine credits. I mean, initially it was just sort of like—I'm sure this goes for anybody you know—you get up, you do what you gotta do to get out of the house, you get there, get in class, you know. Ideally, for me, it would be a bigger class where I got to interact with people, and yeah, I, personally, would take as much opportunity as I could to stay after class, if I could, and interact with the instructor or other students. To sort of, dig in this a little deeper, into the subject matter, or maybe something interesting that I thought of, based on what we had talked about. Yeah, I'd come home, I would often run by—you know, run ideas that

I had by my wife, and we'd—she's—my wife really, really, really likes academics of all kinds, so she would just pick my brain about what I learned in school and how I thought it would apply to my life or what I study. Then I do my homework, and, you know, wake up the next day, rinse, repeat, you know. School is kind of new for me, too. So, I was only into my third semester when all this kind of went down. Well, I had tried online classes for that second semester. Just because, trying to do all this, and raise the two kids, was trickier than I wanted it to be. But in the end, virtual learning did not work for me at all, so I went back to in-person exclusively. Yep, so I don't know what—once we had to go virtual, once Dane County mandated that we couldn't show up at school anymore, and everything went virtual, my grades went on the skids, like, I failed a class, which doesn't feel good. Yeah, I don't know, and now I'm not doing it at all. I'm putting it on hold until my kids go back to school. Because their—to me, their education is far more important than mine is right now.

WH: Okay, and what are you going to school—what were you going to school for?

RE: I had—I was accepted into the radiography program, so I was going to be an X-ray tech.

WH: And where was this?

RE: At the Madison Area—[muttering to self] M-A-T—Madison Area Technical College.

WH: Okay, and if I heard you correctly, you said that you were planning on being an X-ray tech—

RE: Yes.

WH: [stumbling] So, did you—I'm sorry—

RE: No you're alright.

WH: —With the X-ray tech, with the pandemic, does that make you reconsider your career choice—future career choice?

RE: I haven't come to a conclusion on that yet. I have definitely thought about it, and there's a half of me that said, “No way, man. Stay out of any of those scenarios,” especially like an X-ray tech; you're going to be in ultra-confined places with people, you know, you'll be physically contacting people, and depending on the part of their body that you will be imaging, you may have to literally put your face right in their face. So that seems really scary, and there's part of me that wants to run far away from that, but the other—there's another part of me that feels like, it's not the most helpful thing to society, but anyway, that the health care system, as a whole, can kind of, be bolstered, I think, could be helpful, right? So, there's a part of me that wants to continue on and do that, because I also don't believe that this is the last pandemic we're going to have to face. Yeah, I definitely consider that I would be in harm's way if I continue down that path, but I haven't decided whether or not that's a deterrent for me.

WH: Absolutely. And so, now I want to talk about economy and a little bit of politics. So, do you have any concerns regarding the pandemic's impact on our economy?

RE: I mean, obviously it's hurt the entire global economy, that is concerning. I—We talked a little bit earlier about how I feel like money is more important in, you know, in the eyes of policymakers. That's never been on fuller display. I really do think that the idea that our economy should just—shouldn't take a hit over stuff like this, is completely ludicrous to me. I mean, it's a pandemic, everything's going to be affected. I think, rather than trying to avoid our economy being affected, we should—I'm worried that there's not a lot of focus on what happens next. There's too much focus on what's happening now and trying to put a band-aid over it, you know. I think that a lot of that might have had to do with the fact that there was an election going on right in the middle of all this, and, you know, as a society, we have this really silly habit of blaming our policymakers for everything, and not taking any personal responsibility. Yeah, I don't know, I—it's sucks that the economy is hurting, but it's—it is what it is, and we can't wish it away. So, I would like to see a little more action and sacrifice, and just, willingness to admit, “Yes, this is going to hurt for a while.” You know, even when it's gone, the economy, if this is all done properly, I think the economy will still hurt when it's all gone, for a while, because we have to spend so much to keep people afloat. You know, I mean, if you look in other countries, where they seem to be weathering this economic storm better than we are, I mean, what are the governments doing? They paid people to stay home, you know. They seem to be in a much better place to make a recovery than we are going to be.

WH: Yeah, some long-term foresight could go a long ways at giving us the best recovery.

RE: Absolutely.

WH: So, you mentioned that we had an election. We have—we recently had an election, with Joe Biden becoming the president-elect, do you think his administration will be more, or less effective at controlling the spread, or do you think it's already out of his hands?

RE: I think that's really hard to say. I think largely it's, sort of out of his hands now, you know. He's inheriting a complete mess. That's not to say that I think if he was in charge when all this came to pass, that he would have—certainly he wouldn't have magically made it go away or anything like that. I do think that the actions and inactions of the previous administration have certainly made it next an impossibility for him to have an immediate impact. It's going to take a long time for this stuff to play out, I think. Like I said, I don't trust that everything would have been as okay as humanly possible. I think he would have done better, I do think that. So, I think—I don't think there's much he's going to be able to do now, you know. You can start to do the right thing, but this far into it, you know, we're already so many steps behind.

WH: Yeah, absolutely. So in Wisconsin, the Tavern League, a coalition of bars and restaurants, has been heavily involved with the state legislature—

RE: Mhmm.

WH: —In repealing state-ordered public health mandates. Do you feel that restaurants have—and small businesses, have a right to remain open and fight health orders—?

RE: Absolutely not. —Sorry, couldn't let you finish your question [laughs], I feel very strongly about this.

WH: I was going to say, did they have a right to remain open, and fight health orders that pose a great risk of bankruptcy to them?

RE: No, no, I'm sorry, you started a business, it's inherently risky. I feel bad, I'm not trying to be cold or callous about it, but to me, the bottom line is, if my kids can't go to school, I don't think you should be able to sit down and have a beer in public. Sorry, that's just—what—I mean, where are our priorities at? And I don't say that as an argument to get our kids back in school. No, I'm sorry, that—it's becoming pretty clear that some of the major spreaders of this virus, currently, especially in Wisconsin, are bars and restaurants. So, I can't think of any business where you could openly harm an entire society and use your economics as a justification to do so and get away with it. I, just, like, I can't—I don't see that as a legitimate argument when my kids can't go to school.—

WH: Absolutely—

RE: You know, I'm—there will be more bars and restaurants that close and open. I mean, you know, if one closes, another will open in its place when the time is right. But if we can't get this under control, then well, what's the point? What is the point? So yeah, I'm sorry if people are hurting economically, but it's not going to go away if people keep insisting that their right to make a living, trumps our right to be safe, it just doesn't make sense to me. So, absolutely not, I am—I'm a major opponent of the Tavern League in general. I think that—I think they're bad for Wisconsin.

WH: And my last question, before we leave politics, is, do you think that the pandemic has had a decisive impact on the election.

RE: No, unfortunately—Well, I don't know if I should say, unfortunately, or fortunately. I don't think it did. I think we were already divided enough as a nation. I think it was going to be what it was going to be, whether this happened or not. If it did have an impact—I mean, I guess that I should consider the fact that possibly it did—even though I don't necessarily think so—if it did, I think the impact it had was the current administration shot itself in the foot.

WH: Yeah.

RE: They maybe—they might have been able to squeak through a, you know, a win. But I think they turned enough people off with their inaction, and it—as grim as this sounds, and I know it's maybe not a lot—enough to have swayed the election, but I mean, if you look at the majority of people that have perished or gotten sick from this thing, it would tend to be people that might have voted for Trump, honestly. And that's not to say one, you know, one political persuasion is safer, healthier, or anything like that. It just—it's just the way it worked, you know. When

wearing a mask became a political stance, the people that were against mask-wearing were inevitably the people that were going to get sick more often, you know. So, I don't think it necessarily did, but there—I guess there's—I have to consider the possibility that Trump may have alienated or, unfortunately, killed some of his own potential voters.

WH: Absolutely, maybe a little bit of a minor influence, but there were certainly other factors that played into the election.

RE: Yeah—

WH: So—

RE: —I think we were already so entrenched in our differences that it wouldn't have made too much of a difference.

WH: So that was my last politics question, so now I want to talk about family and mental health.

RE: Mhmm.

WH: So, has the pandemic brought about any new ritual routines in your family?

RE: Well—I mean, I guess—kind of, like, I'm—we try to minimize our contact with the outside world, so right now, I'm kind of the only one in the family that goes to the store and stuff like that; I used to take my kids with me. You know, like, I just thought it was a good idea to have them out in public, as often as possible. These are, you know, those intangibles that we talked about earlier. Just learning how to be in public and learning how—becoming familiarized with the public, they don't get that at all anymore, so I'm the only one that does that. But I think, other than that, I mean, we just, you know, we had to cancel a few trips and stuff like that we were going to take, but I don't think we've developed any rituals—other than, the second we walk back into the house, even if we're just out in the yard, it's like, you'll go straight to the sink and wash your hands [laughs]. I'd say that's the biggest change for us, other than just not seeing friends and family in person, is—my kids have been brilliant about it, man, they remind me all the time, “Don't forget to wash your hands Dad!” You know, so—

WH: That's great.

RE: Yeah.

WH: So, now my next question is, do you or any family members suffer from a mental disorder? Mood, anxiety, personality.

RE: I certainly do. I've been diagnosed clinically with moderate depression, and anxiety. Yeah, [chuckles] it's gotten harder to manage for sure, through all this, for me. My kids, it's sort of hard to say yet, they're so young. And my wife, I'd say my wife kind of generally gets more of the, you know, the standard ups and downs at this point in her life. But she's a psychologist, so she is dealing with people—she works at the VA, and she's dealing with people with severe—a variety

of severe issues, and her work has gotten much harder throughout all this, because people do seem to be so affected by it. So yeah, her work has become more difficult, so her stress levels have gone up; and we're all here in the house, she works from home. Ninety-eight percent of her time right now, she's locked up in an office, you know, doing much like what we're doing right now. So yeah, we have to be quiet here, because being a psychologist requires privacy and a sense that the—her patient on the other end is not being heard by anyone else, you know, I mean. So, I don't know, we all have to kind of stay quiet and in this one little corner of the house, and so yeah, my kids get a little—they get cabin fever really easy because of that. Yeah for sure, my anxiety and depression has just gotten a lot worse throughout all this, because part of how I dealt with my anxiety—well, not the anxiety, but part of how I dealt with my depression, a lot, was just getting myself around other people. You know, that was my, you know, my kind of anti-depressant, is being around other people. So yeah, now that that's not happening, I'm feeling it, [chuckling] for sure, and my whole family's feeling it, when I feel it, you know. Especially, especially when we're all cooped up together like this. There's no way to hide it—I mean, it's not like I tried to hide it ever anyway, but when you're wearing it all over your face all the time, it rubs off on other people. So if I'm having a real bad day or a real bad stretch of days, then that unfortunately kind of means that my family is too.

WH: So before the pandemic, did you actively go to a doctor to seek treatment for depression?

RE: Off and on—

WH: More often than not?

RE: —Yeah, off and on—

WH: Oh, off and on?

RE: Yeah, I've had to change counselors, a few times, just because our insurance changed, and they wouldn't cover them and—yeah, it's kind of tricky to find one that works for you, you know, so when I was—when I lost the one that works for me because our insurance changed it took me a long time to find another psychologist that worked for me; kind of still trying to work that out, to be honest with you, and doing it virtually is certainly harder. I mean, I guess I'm doing okay now but yeah, I would say anywhere from weekly to monthly, I was trying to sit down and talk it out with somebody.

WH: So now that appointments with therapists and other mental health professionals have moved primarily online, have you found yourself more frequently, or less frequently seeking out professional care?

RE: I'm sticking to it. I wouldn't say more frequently than before, but before, it was like, “I don't want to go to that appointment tomorrow. I'm gonna call and cancel or whatever.” And now I'm like, every week, come on man, let's do it. So yeah, I want it to be a more consistent thing in my life right now.

WH: Absolutely. Okay, so my last topic here is regarding George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter protests. So May 25, [2020], George Floyd was tragically slain by a police officer in Minneapolis, Minnesota. This prompted severe public backlash against police forces nationwide and included many public protests. What was your response to the death of George Floyd?

RE: Unfortunately, I just had that sort of like, [blows Raspberry] “Typical, here we go again,” feeling. It just—it's too common man, it's sad and it—I found myself being very, very frank with my children about this. I hope not to their detriment, but I'm—I don't want them to grow up tiptoeing around this subject anymore, man. I think that's part of why this keeps happening. It's because people don't want to talk it out. They don't want to admit when maybe their perception of something was wrong. So that was my—that was my real thought initially, was, “[blows Raspberry] typical.” You know—I mean, I hate to pigeonhole all law enforcement like that, but you know, when they just want to stick up for each other and keep each other out of trouble, it's kind of hard not to.

WH: And were there any protests in Madison?

RE: There were, there were.

WH: Did you participate?

RE: I didn't—actually really wanted to, and the thing that kept me from doing so was my children—I mean, they didn't tell me not to but—I have no problem, myself, going out and maybe even getting myself arrested. Having to explain to my kids why I wasn't home last night, that's a different story. Contracting covid throughout all this, was a huge factor as to why I didn't. I don't know, I just—I didn't feel like, I don't know, it's funny, now that we're talking about it, I really wish I would have. I don't know, just at the time it—felt like—there was—there wasn't a ton that I could do, so I didn't want to take the risk to my family. But now—you know, like I said, now that we're talking about it, I really kind of wish I would have reconsidered. Yeah, I don't know. The unknowns, at the time, were so daunting. I mean, you never knew—I kind of had Charlottesville, and in the back of my mind, you know. I was worried that maybe somebody would drive a car through a crowd or do something stupid or—you know what I mean? Like, I felt like the risk was just higher than I was comfortable with. But, saying that out loud makes me feel like that wasn't an appropriate response.

WH: Now before I move on to my next question, was there anything else that you wanted to say about the protests in Madison, in general?

RE: I have mixed feelings about it. One thing that makes me feel good about it, other than the fact that anytime people go out and speak up against injustice, like that—I mean, I'm always touched by that, and I was happy that my community did that. I was not very happy with the property destruction—but not in the more general sense, like what most people would say—where most of the property was destroyed here in Madison, was a part of town that tends to be kind of the most liberal, and the most accepting. It happens to be right next to the Capitol building, so that would probably explain some of why that was—But the response from the businesses, I thought, was really amazing. They cleaned up, you know, they did their thing, but

instead of putting new glass up, they put, you know, plywood boards over the glass and let the community paint murals that represented the struggle on it. So now when you drive through that part of town, you still see that there had been protests, and that property was damaged. But the community, rather than trying to just mop it up, put up more of a reminder—I think I—Every time I drive through that part of town, I'm kind of touched by that, you know, because I know that it's probably in the best interest for a property owner to put a new window up, you know, but instead—and I don't know if it was because they thought this might happen again, so let's not spend the money yet or whatever—but the fact that they're letting local artists display things that represent the struggle, yeah, I like that.

WH: And finally, do you think that the circumstances surrounding the pandemic justified—would have justified a decrease in participation in these protests?

RE: Oh that's tricky man, because I want to say yes, right? Because, we talked about earlier how, like, it's not the right of a business to stay in business if they're harming other people. And so yeah, part of me thinks, yeah, if nobody showed up, that's completely justified. But, my kind of own, personal feeling on it is, the people who the protests were intended to support, frankly, have just been stepped on for so long, that I understood why people wanted to come out and risk public safety, to try to get their voice heard. So yeah, I'm really torn on that question, man, because I don't want to be hypocritical. But—

WH: Yeah—

RE: —I have to, acknowledge that the struggle of black and brown people in our country, just has—it's gone largely ignored, you know, and so that, this just happened to be the moment. And I think that the reason why it went off so much more than it did this time around is probably because the pandemic. You know, people are already hurting and uncertain, and then a lot of them didn't have jobs to go to now, because, you know, their job was shut down, or they're working from home or whatever. So it makes sense that it seems to have a bigger impact this time around. So yeah, I don't know. I certainly would have not faulted people for staying home, you know. Like myself, I stayed at home for those very reasons, because of the pandemic. So, I don't know—I guess—that's a long way to say [chuckles] to say that I think people would have been fine to stay at home.

WH: Yeah, and it is—

RE: —But I'm proud of them. I'm proud of them for showing up. Gotta get that in there.

WH: Definitely a difficult question to end tonight. We talked—we managed to talk about quite a few things, but there were some things that certainly did not get mentioned; was there anything else that you'd like to add to the interview before we end today?

RE: Oh man, I—yeah, I guess, I've had my faith in humanity both restored and shaken through all this, and I just wish that, as a species, we could be less selfish. If we would all just do the right thing, we could all be in a much better place. So just—just stop being selfish everybody. That's my [chuckles] that's my two cents.

WH: All right Thad, well, thank you so much for the interview.

RE: Of course, thank you.

WH: I hope you have a great rest of your night.

RE: Thanks, you too.