

Interviewee: Scott Campbell  
Interviewer: Kristy A. Smith  
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Location (Interviewee): Pelham, Alabama  
Location (Interviewer): Pelham, Alabama  
Transcriber: Kristy A. Smith

Abstract:

Scott Campbell was born in Panama to military parents. He and his family moved to Colorado when he was young, living close to his father's family, where his interest in a sort of do-it-yourself lifestyle was awakened. After high school, he moved to central Alabama, working several retail jobs before landing his job at FIS Financial Solutions. After buying his own property, he began gardening and doing a bit of homesteading on his own in Alabama. Scott now spends his days editing financial programs and his down time taking care of various projects and plants around his home.

Kristy Smith 0:02

Okay, we're recording, and it's getting it. Okay. All right. My name is Kristy Smith and I'm here with Scott Campbell in his home in Central Alabama. It is [Scott's phone pings as he receives a message] December 1 2020, and the time is 10:50am. Okay, first I want to briefly review the informed consent and deed of gift document that you have signed. This interview is for the COVID-19 oral history project which is associated with the Journal of the Plague Year of COVID-19 archive. The COVID-19 Oral History Project is a rapid response oral history focused on archiving the life experiences of the COVID-19 epidemic. We have designed this project so that the professional researchers and the broad public can create and upload their oral histories to our open access and open source database. This study will help us collect narratives and understandings about COVID-19 as well as help us better understand the impacts of the pandemic over time. The recordings demographic information, and the verbatim transcripts will be deposited in the Journal of the plague year, a COVID-19 archive, and the Indiana University Library System for the use of researchers and the general public. Do you have any questions about the project that I can answer?

Scott Campbell 1:31

I do not.

KS 1:33

And in addition to your signed document will you offer verbal confirmation that you understand and agree to these terms?

SC 1:40

I understand and agree.

KS 1:42

Alright, so let's get started. You're a bit of a halfway homesteader, tell me about growing up, is that

what got you first interested in homesteading?

SC 1:55

Yeah, um, I grew up, kind of in the mountains in Colorado. And we had quite a bit of kind of farm animals and stuff going on we had rabbits and chickens and pigs and horses. Didn't get too much into cows, nothing bovine, a little harder to take care of but the other stuff. You know, we did a lot of that around here.

KS 2:22

So some small livestock and a little bit of gardening.

SC 2:26

Yeah. My mother was more into the gardening side of it, it's a little hard to grow stuff up on the mountain, but she was able to, you know, have some success.

KS 2:37

There's some hardier plants that grow with less, less uh

SC 2:41

water

KS 2:42

Less perfect conditions. So, once you had your own space, how did you start homesteading?

SC 2:50

Um, I started with chickens, a little easier to take care of, um, don't require as much space. Then I started with some container gardening as well. I didn't want to worry too much about tilling the soil, my thought would be easier to control if it was in a container. I started doing bags, but I had some issues with squirrels and chipmunks and some birds, stealing my seeds. So I had to [laughs] so I had to put that on pause for a while, while I trap some animals.

KS 3:26

And so this is in Alabama, do you have more success with the climate as far as gardening?

SC 3:33

Uh, a lot more success, I don't have to worry so much about watering schedules, or, you know, soil content, the different nutrients and stuff like that it's a lot easier to get a hold of in Alabama.

KS 3:46

So, what all does your homesteading encompass? You've got gardening and some animals, do you do any carpentry? How do you keep your food?

SC 3:56

Um, so I do canning. . . uh some stuff, you can uh I got a big freezer for the animals in the winter. Uh I

have experimented some with dried fruit, um, dehydrating stuff uh curing meat uh

KS 4:12

Everybody loves jerky.

SC 4:14

Right, and uh, different salamis and stuff. Salami is a little harder to do though, it requires certain bacteria. That's a lot harder to cultivate than it is to just dry your meat out.

KS 4:27

So you do a lot of uh, a lot of food for yourself. Have you tried, um, any sort of water purification or gathering or anything with solar power, how does that all work for homesteading?

SC 4:39

Um, the best thing, uh I always prefer to have well water, have water rights to the property I'm on. Um, then you don't have to worry about it as much, you don't have to worry about your water getting shut off because the city's working on it, or anything contaminating your water.

KS 4:55

That's an excellent bonus.

SC 4:58

Um, solar panel I looked into solar when I first started getting into it but the cost barrier was a little high, at the time, and it was just uh more cost effective for me to stay on the city power. Uh, as it's the technology's gotten better though and more people are getting into it I'm noticing the cost go down so I'm keeping an eye on that for, um, a future project.

KS 5:20

All right. So, the things that you have a pretty good handle on, uh gardening and canning and freezing, uh was it successful at first? Did you have an easy time of it with your background or was there still some issues?

SC 5:34

Um, the gardening I've never had much of a green thumb. It's a lot harder for me to get plants of any size to grow. [laughs] My first few attempts at gardening produced fully mature plants that are about a quarter the size I was expecting them to be. I had a couple of watermelons that were about tennis ball sized

KS 5:58

[laughs]

SC 5:59

disappointing.

KS 6:00

Did you cut them open?

SC 6:01

Yeah I ate them anyways.

KS 6:02

Alright

SC 6:03

Uh, you know, a bite apiece.

KS 6:04

Waste not, right? [laughs]

SC 6:07

[laughs] My bountiful harvest.

KS 6:08

Okay, so what is a typical day for you before the coronavirus?

SC 6:14

Um, I still went to work in an office.

KS 6:16

Okay

SC 6:16

So I would have to I got up and uh dealt with most of the animals before heading into the office and then I get dressed and drive into the city umm. And then whatever if you know if it's in the summer or something, I still have enough daylight I can still get quite a few things done after work, kind of in the winter, uh it's a little harder, um got to wear a headlamp for most of my chores then.

KS 6:42

Yeah. After about five o'clock it's, uh, by the moonlight or your own light huh? Alright so let's go back to your job, what is your day job, what do you do when you go into the city?

SC 6:54

Um, I work for a financial tech firm. We make software, automation software for banks and that sort of thing and I test that software. Uhm, yeah I'm working for them for about 10 years.

KS 7:13

Alright. So your day job is high techie tech and your hobbies at home are very low techie tech, that's kind of ironic.

SC 7:22

Yeah, it gives me a good uh [laughs] yeah, it helps me divest from, from all the computer stuff I have to do throughout the day.

KS 7:30

No doubt.

KS 7:32

All right, so what, when you first heard about the coronavirus. What were your thoughts? Did you think it was gonna be-

SC 7:40

I thought it was gonna be -

KS 7:40

-a pandemic?

SC 7:40

Uh you know we've had a few things we've had the bird flu, we've had Ebola. I didn't think it was gonna be much more serious than any of those, um, you know at first people really weren't that concerned about it, nobody was taking that seriously until-

KS 7:55

It's kind of hard to fathom something like that.

SC 7:57

Yeah until everybody started getting it and freaking out.

KS 8:01

Did it hit your area pretty hard or is there, big mask enforcement?

SC 8:05

Um, where I live, is actually pretty remote but uh it definitely hit the area where I work pretty hard. All that, you know, they all enforce the masks and a lot of the restaurants, switched to takeout only, but um as far as where I live uh it's pretty remote and it seems like that area those sort of people they don't really take it too seriously, see a lot of people with no masks, you know even everybody's got the sign, but a lot of them they aren't worried about enforcing it so much.

KS 8:36

Yeah, I've seen that in a lot of places that would be considered more rural I feel like they think they're well enough apart from each other anyway. So you've been working from home, is that correct?

SC 8:48

Yeah, uh probably since this whole thing started I've been working pretty steadily uh remotely. Um, they haven't even talked about. . . We've talked some about going back to the office but not until next year sometime at the earliest.

KS 9:04

Okay. Have there been, what kind of issues have you experienced with working from home?

SC 9:09

Uh just like the um, you know, mainly. I think a lot of the same issues that a lot of people have had with the servers not being able to handle the traffic, everybody working remotely you got to go through a VPN, and they just weren't prepared for that. Um they weren't set up for it, so a lot of the stuff that we had issues with in the beginning, we've kind of ironed out those issues. Uh we're able to work more steadily some people still have connectivity issues. Some people, you know, depending on what we're doing if it's a conference or something they want you to get off the VPN because it'll bog it down. But, um, for the most part, they've kind of got it figured out, you know? We're so, we're almost more successful working remotely. So, I think they'll probably be more open to it in the future.

KS 10:01

That's kind of what uh the opposite of what I've been hearing about school it's been almost utter failures from almost everybody I've heard that trying to do school online now, when they haven't before especially the younger kids.

SC 10:12

Yeah.

KS 10:14

Everybody's trying to be on the internet.

SC 10:15

Maybe if they got paid for it [laughs].

KS 10:17

Maybe if they got paid for it. So I think March 14 was uh really the beginning of the quarantine in this this area in Central Alabama, uh Governor Ivey first announced the two weeks stay at home order. Did you think that it was only going to be two weeks or, you know, were you prepared for two weeks?

SC 10:38

I'm prepared for two weeks, most of the time. I thought it was going to kind of blow over the way most of the other stuff has done in the past. Um I think, you know, this, how bad it's all gotten is really kind of justified my interest in this lifestyle. [laughs]

KS 10:58

Absolutely I would love to be able to stay at home and have everything there all the time.

SC 11:00

Yeah, there's still some things I have to go out for you know I don't have, there's there's not a good way for me to produce the toilet paper or

KS 11:09

that was a big one

SC 11:10

certain tools, something like that.

KS 11:12

So, what is a typical day like for you now you don't have to have a commute to work, you can stay at home, almost all the time?

SC 11:21

So I mean I still get up in the morning, do my pre work chores, but, um, the biggest change now is uh I can do stuff during the day. I got some downtime, if it's slow. I'm waiting on a build to download or data to import, something like that or I need a ticket completed that, you know, somebody is not going to get to until after they finished lunch, and I have some availability to work on things that the progress would not be as. . . not be as far ahead. If I was having to do it after working outside of work hours,

KS 11:57

Right and not having a hour lunch break at the office I'm sure you've got a lot more time who takes an hour to eat lunch, honestly,

SC 12:04

Exactly. I can do it I can get a lot more accomplished at home with my hour lunch break than I can at the office.

KS 12:12

So, before they coronavirus have you- did you ever sell at a farmer's market or produce stand?

SC 12:21

No, I never like you know like I said I don't have much of a green thumb. Um, it's getting better. [laughs] My thumb is improving. But right now I don't have enough surplus to really justify going down there and setting up a booth to try and sell some like produce or goods or anything like that. Um maybe if this continues, and I develop a better system from being at home I can look at that as kind of a side hustle, but uh

KS 12:50

Instead of like a farmers market would it be legal in your area to have like your own little produce stand at the edge of your property maybe?

SC 12:58

I might could swing that, um, I haven't looked into it much. Uh most of my concerns about the legality of what I'm doing is what kind of animals I can keep certain, certain areas won't let you keep animals too big.

KS 13:10

That's fair. Could be, you know, some neighbors are particular about stuff.

SC 13:15

Yeah, they don't want cows next door.

KS 13:17

That's their loss, in my opinion. All right. Well, um, as far as being self sufficient. I know you've got a pretty good stock of your own food do you think that the grocery stores would have been uh a little less panicky have more people had so some sources of their own food and produce some frozen vegetables from last harvest and stuff like that?

SC 13:43

I think people probably would have been a lot more comfortable with it, there probably wouldn't have been as big a run on the grocery stores if people had some knowledge about canning down food or at least did it, you know, at least as a hobby, maybe they weren't expecting to have to rely on it but you know it'd be a nice to have for a lot of people. I know like my grandparents did a lot of canning. And, you know, we still went to the store but like the canned goods were, you know, an option.

KS 14:12

Yeah, no, it's super neat my grandmother uh taught me how to make jam and that was the first thing that I ever canned and it's, it's a neat hobby to have cool old school thing to be good at.

SC 14:22

Yeah. And, yeah, it's it is. I've had some, some issues with it. You know you don't get the seal quite right, things get botulism, but yeah that's for the most part if you pay attention, it's you can be pretty successful at it.

KS 14:39

Alright, um. Are there any resources that you particularly like or anything that you could suggest for anyone that wants to get started with a little bit of this?

SC 14:49

Um, I always found the Foxfire books, really interesting they're an old set of books on kind of Appalachian living things like how to farm how to forge metal how to, they got ones on making fiddles, instruments.

KS

That's fun.



SC

You can get the whole set I think I have an older set. My grandfather had an old set of the Foxfire books. Some are a bit tore up maybe missing some pages here and there, but for the most part they're pretty good resource. But besides that there's a lot of people have written a lot of books and there's a lot of people on the internet. There's a dude. What's he called? Primitive technology. He's an Australian guy and he kind of goes through and does everything from scratch from the ground up and they really just, it helps you see kind of what's possible. You know, you don't have to start your fires by hand, but, you know, at least you know you can

KS 15:47

Right? It's neat, watching some of those people think outside the box I mean, that's about making your own mountain fiddles that's. I like that old school knowledge, it seems. . . seems like more.

SC 16:01

Something handy to have when the world collapses.

KS 16:04

No doubt. Well, do you have any questions about the Journal of the Plague Year archive or anything you want to expand on or any questions about anything that we've discussed?

SC 16:17

Um, no, I'm just, you know, I'm real curious as to how people are going to adjust after this is all done. I wonder if it's gonna be a greater interest in being self-sufficient once things have kind of returned to normal.

KS 16:34

It's part of my hope for this interview is that, it'll be a little bit of an eye opener to the possibilities of being able to depend on just yourself for a little bit more than normal, like you said the toilet paper thing will probably almost always be an issue but

SC 16:50

Maybe you could have a local toilet paper maker, maybe you'd be a small community.

KS 16:54

He would be a good person to barter with for sure. Alright, well, Scott thank you so much for your time. I have been working on contributing to the Journal of the Plague Year for several weeks, and the interviews and stories that I've read from first responders, educators, homesteaders, and all kinds of people have just been eye opening and again, I want to thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to help me with my contribution. And my hope as well is that this interview will really, eye open some benefits to what homesteading can do for people.

SC 17:32

Alright, thank you.