

Transcript of Interview with Christopher Hall by Ashley R. Tibollo

Interviewee: Christopher Hall

Interviewer: Ashley R. Tibollo

Date: 04/08/2021

Location (Interviewee): Williamsville, New York

Location (Interviewer):

Abstract: The interviewer describes his experience as a teacher with remote learning, how he viewed the pandemic when it first was in the news from China, how it affected his parenting and his daughter, how he feels New York State and the country have handled the pandemic, where he obtained his news on the pandemic, and his view of how people handled the pandemic.

Ashley R. Tibollo 0:02

We are recording. My name is Ashley Tibollo. I am here with Christopher Hall. The day is July 8, 2021. The time is 2:19pm. We are in Christopher Hall's house. So Chris, I want to briefly review the informed consent and deed of gift with you. This interview is for the COVID-19 oral history project which is associated with the Journal of the Plague Year: a COVID-19 Archive. The COVID-19 Oral History Project is a rapid response oral history focused on archiving the lived experience of the COVID-19 epidemic. We have designed this project so that the professional researchers and the broader 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 recording, demographic information, and the verbatim transcripts will be deposited in the Journal in the Journal of the Plague Year 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?

Christopher Hall 1:29

No.

Ashley R. Tibollo 1:30

Taking part in this study is voluntary, you may choose not to take part or you may leave this study at any time. Leaving the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. Your decision will not whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your current or future relations with the Indiana University IUPUI or the IUPUI Arts and Humanities Institute. Participating in this project means that your interview will be recorded in digital, video, and/or audio format and may be transcribed. The recordings and possible transcriptions of my interview, copies of any supplementary documents or additional photos that you wish to share and the informed consent and deed of gift may be deposited in the Journal of the Plague Year: a COVID-19 Archive in the Indiana University Library System and will be available to both researchers and the general public. Your name and other means of identification will not be confidential. Do you have any questions?

Christopher Hall 2:32

Nope.

Ashley R. Tibollo 2:33

Okay, can you verbally confirm that you have agreed that your interview will be made available to the general public?

Christopher Hall 2:41

Yes, I agree.

Ashley R. Tibollo 2:43

Okay, thank you. Alright, so to get started, can you please state your full name?

Christopher Hall 2:52

Christopher Allan Hall.

Ashley R. Tibollo 2:57

Okay, and where do you live?

Christopher Hall 3:00

I live in Williamsville, New York.

Ashley R. Tibollo 3:04

Okay, and what are the things primarily that you do on a day-to-day basis? For example, your job, your extracurricular activities, etc.

Christopher Hall 3:14

I'm a teacher, and I do handyman work on the side.

Ashley R. Tibollo 3:18

And what grade do you teach?

Christopher Hall 3:20

I teach at the secondary level special education.

Ashley R. Tibollo 3:23

Great. So let's start with the beginning of the pandemic. When you first learned about COVID-19, what were your thoughts about it and have your thoughts changed since then?

Christopher Hall 3:36

I guess initially, because I read a lot about it in the news, I felt like it was pretty far away being in China. And that's, you know, that they hopefully it wouldn't spread this way into the US. So it seemed kind of like one of those things, you know, that you just read about, you know, like other, you know, pandemics that they would say, oh, Ebola and all that other stuff. You know, it's coming your way and watch out. So I, you know, for me, it just seemed kind of surreal. So I didn't really think we'd have to deal with it. And then all of a sudden, the you know, the New York City started testing and even then it seemed far enough away that we that we might still be okay. And then they closed down all the schools one day, and then it started to feel more real when we all had to go into remote learning.

Ashley R. Tibollo 4:29

And talking about remote learning, you said you were a teacher, so that must have affected your job. So how, how did that affect your job?

Christopher Hall 4:39

Basically, it was less like teaching especially initially, you know, the first year of it, people were unprepared. Students weren't logging on and there was no accountability. They tried to improve upon that this year. But really, people were just kind of checking in periodically and you couldn't really fail, so the kids kind of caught wind of that and they really did absolutely nothing.

Ashley R. Tibollo 5:02

Were all your students remote? Did you have a hybrid model? What did that look like?

Christopher Hall 5:06

They were all remote the first year of the pandemic.

Ashley R. Tibollo 5:12

And how was it like teaching them for those who did actually log in?

Christopher Hall 5:18

For me, because of my position, I had one student, a special needs that, really working on a computer is not really effective, and her mom ended up having to really teach her. I gave her a bunch of materials and gave her a tutorial, like what we did, our daily activities and what we went through. And, you know, we would check in periodically that first year. With my other students, I had resource students. So my position really turned into making sure that they were getting their work done. So I'd be checking their grades and not teaching them as much as I would normally. It was tough to get them to even just do their day-to-day work, yet alone, like work on their study skills and things of that nature. So really I was just calling up, calling their parents, you know, and trying to get them to engage.

Ashley R. Tibollo 6:11

And how has COVID-19 affected your family life, your personal life?

Christopher Hall 6:19

My family and personal life's pretty much the same. We're pretty sedentary people. We don't, I don't like to leave the house anyway. So it really didn't change my life that much. I would only go out if I had to before, so I didn't really mind it so much. I guess it's kinda is one of those things where, you know, the times you do want to go out, it was, it felt odd. But overall, I feel like it kind of brought people, you know, maybe forced people to stay with their families more, which, in some cases, you know, people hate their families. So, yeah, that's probably bad. But, you know, we didn't really have any problems, because we're around each other all the time anyways.

Ashley R. Tibollo 6:56

Did you feel any particular stresses being a parent during the epidemic?

Christopher Hall 7:03

I think it's one of those things with like, this generation of, you try to do everything for your child and you feel guilty if you don't do anything, and I think that's maybe it was amplified. I don't think anything was really, you know, different per se, it was just like, you're like, oh, I you know, we're missing out and you're worried about, you know, worried about our daughter more, you know, being able to have friends and do things and have like a normal childhood. So you felt like kind of guilty, not being able to kind of give those things to them. And I, we tried our best to kind of make it a little bit normal. I don't think she noticed any difference either way.

Ashley R. Tibollo 7:42

And how has COVID, the COVID-19 outbreak affected your community?

Christopher Hall 7:47

I'm not really sure, I mean, it's hard to say. I don't think it's really changed the community that much. I don't really know, I feel like for some people, I mean, because COVID kind of overlapped with, you know, the election that it was kind of one of those things you're not really, you know, a lot of people are

divided politically and that kind of aligns along with COVID too, people vaccinated versus unvaccinated. So, alright, let's [unintelligible]

Ashley R. Tibollo 8:21

Um, how do you feel about the way people responded to the pandemic?

Christopher Hall 8:29

Um, it's, it's kind of a mixed bag like, some people, you know, obviously, still say it's fake, or, you know, overblown and all of that. And then I feel like other people from the other end, you know. I was probably more towards that other end, we're overly cautious, because we didn't really know like, what the actual percentages were, because they weren't doing any testing. So you didn't know if like, 20% of the population had it, or, you know, half a percent. And the numbers were actually a lot lower and probably way more cautious than we needed to be, you know, but we're now, our numbers are the same, or even a little higher, and we're taking a lot less precautions, so...

Ashley R. Tibollo 9:08

Well, have you or anybody, you know, gotten sick during the outbreak?

Christopher Hall 9:12

Um, I mean, I know some people I've worked with, like, there's a bunch of teachers who got it, so well, this year for teaching and the 2020-2021 school year, one of the teacher aides had it that was in my room, so and she gave it to the other teacher that she worked with and a bunch of the other teacher aides. So we had probably seven to ten staff members that contracted it, and I had to go get tested, but I didn't have it. I have my like, theory that I may have had it like really early on. But you know, because the timeframes we didn't know about, I didn't know, there was no testing. It would have been, you know, very, very early, but it definitely didn't seem like the flu, so I think I was maybe a little bit immune to it, and that's why I didn't get it.

Ashley R. Tibollo 9:56

And were those teachers okay?

Christopher Hall 9:58

Oh, yeah. Some of them still are kinda like, you know, they're older, so they kind of didn't breathe great before or after going up the stairs. But I think they're having a little more trouble even now after three flights of stairs. They sound very winded. But yeah, overall, the majority of them probably asymptomatic. It's just, you know, they ended up having to put the whole school, you know, into remote again, because there were so many teachers with it, and so many exposures or possible exposures.

Ashley R. Tibollo 10:26

And what have been your primary sources of news during the pandemic?

Christopher Hall 10:32

Most of the news would be from the internet, fairly by role. So CNN, NPR, local news, WIBB, but I feel like they didn't really keep that stuff updated. Every so often, I check, like Fox News just for fun, and I giggle, but, you know, so most of it would be from the internet. I read the news, like three or four times a day.

Ashley R. Tibollo 10:51

And do you have any thoughts on how local, state, or federal leaders responded or are responding to the crisis in different ways?

Christopher Hall 11:00

Yeah, I feel that New York State did fairly well, where other states are, you know, sticking their heads in the sand and, you know, trying to just pretend it would go away on its own, which, to some extent, I guess, in their minds it has. I feel like New York State responded fairly well. There was just a lot of back and forth. I feel like, you know, it's important that they have these standards, but then they kept on changing the standards, and nobody really knew what was what at any given time. But overall, I feel like New York State did pretty well at responding to it.

Ashley R. Tibollo 11:33

And what about the country in general?

Christopher Hall 11:36

The country is definitely a mess, you know, Republicans will probably have a lot less voters come the next election, because, you know, like, it became a political divide, whether it's to protect yourself or wear masks and to make it an issue and a lot of the other states the Midwestern, southern states, you know, didn't do well, fare well with it. And considering that their population's lower and that they're farther removed from like, the original epicenter that they shouldn't have gotten hit as hard as they did. But they definitely, definitely didn't do well in their response.

Ashley R. Tibollo 12:09

And has your experience with this whole pandemic transformed in any way, how you think about your family, or friends, or the community in which you live?

Christopher Hall 12:19

Um, yeah, I mean, especially initially, you see everyone do like panic shopping and worrying about, and then you really come to realize that there are people out there that will do the right thing and there are people who'll do what's right for themselves, like all the panic shopping and people running out, and then you're worried about well, you know, will there be enough for our family? And, you know, people start to, their circles get smaller, their social circles definitely get smaller, and they only worry about their family and then themselves, and, you know, the people in their household, you know, comes first. And you definitely see that kind of survival of the fittest mentality kind of manifest, as, you know, you know, even just over toilet paper, people go crazy for. So I couldn't imagine if people were short on food, you know, in reality what would happen, you know, that would probably be mass chaos in the U.S. as a result.

Ashley R. Tibollo 13:14

And how does this pandemic compare to other big events that have happened in your lifetime?

Christopher Hall 13:21

Um, it was more widespread, but I feel like it was not as immediate like, I didn't have anyone who died, that was close to me. There are some people, you know, who may have contracted it, some people, you know, that I knew had had it, but it didn't seem as severe for, for me as it was for other people. Like, I do realize that a lot of other people, it definitely was a way bigger issue when you have like, a close family member die. I didn't have that, so I feel like it was probably less traumatic for me, you know, it wasn't really that bad. We didn't have to, like deal without anything, or really it just changed our, you know, our socialization patterns is all.

Ashley R. Tibollo 14:05

And final question is knowing what you know now, what do you think that individuals, communities, or governments need to keep in mind for the future?

Christopher Hall 14:16

Definitely a quicker response and to treat things, you know, like they're real, like, especially when China said, you know, if China's saying this virus is bad, I feel like, there should have been an absolute complete lockdown on the entire country. I mean, we aren't an island, but our borders are probably, you know, quarantine-, or we'd be able to quarantine enough to keep most of the people out. The fact that business drives America, all those guys coming in and out of the country for, for months on end, and there was no stop to it. I feel like they could have, you know, definitely lessened the blow, and then we would have been able to have a vaccine before, you know, 600,000 people, you know, died if countries would take it a little more serious. So hopefully, you know, the next time it happens, but in 100 years, everyone will forget. You know, I'm sure that the exact same thing will happen again.

Ashley R. Tibollo 15:09

Yeah, well, hopefully not. But um, on that dire prediction, we'll end our interview. Thank you very much for your time and your contribution to the archive.