

Interview: Journal of the Plague Year: An Archive of Covid19

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Interviewer: Avraham Shaver (AS)

Narrator: Adina Gefen (AG)

Transcript

00:03-01:25

Avraham Shaver (AS): Hello everybody, my name is Avi Shaver. I'm interviewing here Adina Gefen. This interview is taking place here on Zoom. The date today is January 4th, in the year 2022. The relationship between us is that we are simply friends. And um Adina, you have submitted the consent form, signed to me, which I have in my files, so thank you very much. I'm just going to explain a brief overview of what this is as well as what this is for. So this is to understand the effect that COVID19 has had on society so to speak, so understanding how it has played a role in you know, day to day life, relationships, friendships, medically if anything related to that. And so yeah this is going to be submitted to what is called JOPTY which stands for Journal of the Plague Year, which is a giant plethora of collection, collections of these interviews, available for anyone who wants to see them, based on peoples' recollections of COVID. So Adina is going to be interviewing from Far Rockaway, New York. I am currently interviewing from London, Ontario, Canada. Does that sound all fair and appropriate to you?

01:26-27

Adina Gefen (AG): Yeah, sounds good.

01:29-01:42

AS: Okay sounds good. So starting with the first question. What do you recall about the start of all this virus, pandemic? Do you remember when you first heard about it? What did you think about it immediately?

01:43-02:22

AG: So, originally, I was thinking it wasn't much of anything. Kind of brushing it away. It only sort of hit home when I heard of somebody in Yonkers, I believe, Yonkers New York who had caught it and he went to the hospital and became a major news story was really the point when I realized, okay maybe this is something we should be worried about. But even when I work at a school as a teacher and even when the school was kinda like oh bring your books home students, yknow, we're over break and then we'll see what happens afterwards, I was just like okay whatever, we'll probably be back in two weeks. Did not think the whole country, whole city would be shut down at all.

02:23-02:35

AS: And is different than how you see it now? Did you expect something different? I mean, you said you expected to be back to normal within two weeks, why do you think things have turned out the way that they have?

02:36-03:33

AG: I think it is a combination of it being a disease we knew nothing about, having to deal with that and the science behind that, and also just what ended up happening in terms of the deaths and sick people and the amount that how quickly everything spread probably was what kind of snowballed it into continuing until today. Although I think that maybe yknow, it depends on different government policies too and how people react and yknow the location of everyone. In terms of if you're in a small rural town versus like a city, it might be impacting you differently. So I live in a city so New York. So I think we are much more condensed and much more heavily populated than other areas.

03:34-03:42

AS: Makes sense. So how does this compare to any other health crises you may have lived through or personally in the past, if you have gone through any?

03:43-04:11

AG: I mean, I believe there was the SARS virus and there was ebola and zika. Those just seemed more far off. Like we heard a little about it and worried a little about it but it was more kind of like out of sight out of mind. Not that we weren't worried about it, it was just yknow, not so much so in your backyard.

04:12-04:19

AS: Mhm. Okay. Uh huh. What does a typical day look like for you right now? And how is that different from how it used to be or how it was before?

0:420-05:47

AG: So, a typical day now is now is going to work, I teach at a school, so they're all masked up. You have to get temperature readings in the morning. We walk in the door. We have face shields around our desks. Oh, rather the students have face shields around their desks for eating lunch. Instead of switching classrooms, because in middle school, instead of switching classrooms by subject, the students stay in their own room all day, they don't even go to the cafeteria for lunch. There is also, in the teacher's office or lounge, they have separate desks for each teacher and there's like dividers like separating each desk as well. A lot of, a lot of hand sanitizers placed in, like one hand sanitizer every classroom, one or two. And there's also one in the hallway, by the bathroom as well. What else? Also a lot about quarantining and a lot of focus on vaccinations as well. Teachers were required to be vaccinated, I think by December in my school and that's, I think that's basically my regular day in terms of COVID anyways. Compared to? Oh I was supposed to compare it to previously?

05:48-05:49

AS: Yeah, if you...

05:50-06:35

AG: Yeah, so, I worked in schools in terms of before COVID, it was very much a free for all in terms of hygiene in general I would think, if you think back compared to today. So yeah of course, go wash your hands in the bathroom, but we weren't exactly hovering over students to see if they were washing their hands as we showed them. There was no hand sanitizers anywhere, no masking, no discussion of six feet apart, three feet apart, you know how many students are in a classroom? How are we going to seat them? That kind of thing. You know it was just, it was also a lot more group, student group learning, so students used to be in pairs or threes or fours. Now they're by themselves in rows, individually, so there's much less group work as well.

06:36-06:45

AS: Makes a lot of sense. Some people do really well with group work and some people do well individually. Depends on the person.

06:46-06:48

AG: Right

06:49-06:55

AS: Are you spending more or less time outside the home? Inside? Are you spending more outside, more time inside?

06:56-06:59

AG: Now, or in general?

07:00-07:01

AS: Now

07:02-07:22

AG: Now I probably spend about half and half. Half my days out of the house and half my days in the house. Because it a regular job, so you don't really have... Well the year before I was on Zoom so I was in my house most of the time but now I'm more out and about. Yknow driving and teaching.

07:23-07:42

AS: That makes sense. What would you say life is like for you in terms of getting supplies like getting groceries, medications or necessary yknow items because you know at the very beginning everyone was like buy toilet paper, and like hoarding all the sanitizer and stuff like that?

07:42-9:14

AG: There's actually been another toilet paper shortage recently though. You couldn't get toilet paper right away, um like a few weeks ago. We had to like wait to get our favorite brands, till this one came in stock. Think it was towards the beginning of the omicron variant but yeah not the same although when you go into the pharmacies, a lot of things are off the shelves. In terms of like regular products, just like a lot of empty shelves. Not sure if that's because of COVID or because of supply chain issues or because I've heard there's been a lot of theft too so I'm not sure what the factor is there too. Sometimes there will be random things that you can't find like, like oh for example at my school we didn't have any ink, any toner at all for like a month. So it was a bit of a problem and these toners only come from one company so for the one two printers we had or whatever so it was a bit of an issue. It was around two months ago that happened. So we had to do everything, print at home or just keep everything on the computer, that kind of thing in terms of like supply issues, but nowhere near the level that was. It's more like random things now, less things for households like less necessities.

09:14-09:32

AS: Okay so we'll shift gears a little bit about that, from that, understand, what are you doing in your spare time? Has that changed at all? Anything you're doing differently with your hobbies or something like that?

09:32-10:47

AG: Nothing, nothing, I mean more recently, I kind of sort of went back to normal, regular,, got with my friends today, I go shopping occasionally, you know for clothes, shoes. It depends where I am, if I'm in the city, then there will be more restrictive I think in terms of masking, in terms of distancing, or if I'm at work versus where I am closer to Nassau County so things are like more opened up. Things are more lax in Nassau County than in Queens County for example. So it depends, I think it's pretty much back to normal compared to what it was, like sitting for days at home, months really, primarily. We used to go out once a week for like groceries and whatever, run errands and now it's basically back to normal although there is some shut downs, like my local library shut down for two weeks last week and then a different one closed like today so it's like open and shut a little bit though nothing's shut down as completely as it did in the beginning of the pandemic.

10:48-10:57

AS: Is there anything you like miss about maybe life before? Or anything you're just like ugh I want to be able to be doing this but I can't because it's COVID?

10:58-11:30

AG: I think first thing would probably be like more entertainment like Broadway shows are fun to go once in a while they've basically shut down until recently. I haven't really done any travel at all like anything international or like where I had to fly a plane. I have not been on a plane

since January 2020. That's where I'm staying, kind of been curtailed. I've gone on like small trips but like driving distance more.

11:31-11:38

AS: Makes sense. What is the mood like amongst your family, friends or coworkers?

11:39-12:27

AG: My coworkers are very nervous about the new variant. They're like very worried about coming back into the building again. Yesterday we went back into the building, but they all have to get a negative PCR test to come in which is very hard because of the backlog in testing. Different hours and online and stuff like that. By me it was much quicker. Four hours and you get called back. Got to go home. And that sort of thing, they're a lot more about I think a lot more nervous there, the majority of them. Probably like eighty or ninety percent are like much more nervous than my family is. Because a lot of my family, they already got COVID or think they're going to get it over in school.

12:28-12:36

AS: And how do you think the, you answered it, I'm just understanding my comment...

12:37-12:38

AG: What?

12:38-12:39

AS: How do you think they are responding to it? You already said

12:40-12:41

AG: That I'm responding to it?

12:42-12:48

AS: No. You answered it. You responded to it. I mean, if you want to explain yourself, it's fine.

12:49-15:35

AG: Oh okay. For me, I mean now you're saying? So I was a little bit nervous about it but when I started hearing it was a lighter version of it, it made me feel better even though it's more contagious. I actually was asked this question. Because I finally got COVID through the Omicron variant. I'm not sure, the lab didn't tell me what variant it was even though I asked. But it did not seem as, at least for me, I have asthma so it did not seem at all light, to me. It felt like 10 days of being sick. I got sick I would say the date was well when I started feeling symptoms, I don't know when I actually got the virus but I got sick about December 16th, and then I started getting better until the 27th of December. So it was a pretty long haul and I didn't have to go to the hospital at all, but it was like low-mid grade fevers, like 102, a little over 102. But it was like a lot of like up and down with the fever. And then just extreme exhaustion and a lot of coughing, a

lot of like my heart rate was going up, my pulse was going very high too. So it was much like, much less, much more than everyone else was saying I think. Like, everyone was saying it was a common cold, so I'm not sure which variant I got, but that was interesting too, and then my father got it as well, he got it first then I got it and then my mom also got it, but they had different, totally different reactions, too. So we ended up getting antibody mono-clonal antibody treatment, but the ones we got did not do anything for me or my mom but it helped my dad. So I don't know which variant he got, I think, I don't know for sure the science behind it but certain antibodies work better against different variants, so I don't even know if I had omicron or not but it didn't, I definitely didn't feel any different, I probably felt worse after the antibody infusions, and even now I still get out-of-breath a lot and I get a lot of coughing still. Not as bad, it's slowly getting better, it's not as worse as bad as it was, but it's still present.

15:36-15:42

AS: It's interesting they don't tell you which variant you get but I guess if you got it, you got it, it doesn't really make a difference.

15:43-15:44

AG: Yeah. I'm not sure why.

15:45-16:04

AS: You have it. Okay. So how do you think your coworkers are feeling about the work that you've been doing in response to it because you've been doing. Like, do they think your school is doing enough, too little?

16:05-16:49

AG: There are probably like half and half. Some coworkers feel like they shouldn't be forced to get the vaccination especially in the purview of schools or government, but they still do it because yknow they want their job. And then the rest are like we should add more restrictions, we shouldn't be coming in, we should be going remote, which was a decision actually made by my school after we came in like one day on Monday, yesterday, to hand out laptops and then we're going remote till January 18th. Yeah. Due to the Omicron variant, at least that's what they're saying, not sure if it's actually going to stay that way, or just in general.

16:50-16:57

AS: Gotcha. Okay. How do you feel that your work is doing? Do you think they're doing the right thing? Do you think they're going too far?

16:58

AG: In terms of going remote?

16:59-17:01

AS: Or just in general. Well, I mean we could talk about...work first.

17:01-18:08

AG: I think that more recently they're going a bit too far because omicron started and...so only two classes, I forgot to say, two classes, shut down, right before break and students started break on December 15th. So like let's say Monday, December 13th, two classes got shut down and one teacher that was we don't know who it is, but one teacher, also had COVID. Now, at that point, I think they should have shut the school down a little earlier, for winter break. Once, so school just opened it up again on the 3rd, over two weeks of vacation, for the students, and I think that as long as everyone is, has a negative COVID test, coming in, then, they bring that proof of negative COVID then they should be able to have school, the kids who have positive, obviously would stay home, regardless, but they would somewhat double check. I think that's a better way of dealing with it, kind of like test to stay program I've been hearing about.

18:09-18:17

AS: Interesting. Okay. And what do you think is like affecting your attitudes like towards that?

18:18

AG: Towards the school? Or?

18:19-18:33

AS: Towards the school, or just in general. The school, the government, like do you feel like, it's just agitation? Do you feel like it's just oh my gosh I can't believe like oh my gosh, I can't believe this is happening, are you like okay I respect it, even with...

18:35-19:22

AG: I mean I don't happen to agree with it, but I'll respect it. I think it just depends on also how big the school is, because our school is pretty small, it's only 350 students, it's not like it's 1000 kids and like 200 like teachers, it's a small school, not the department of education, it's its own private charter school, public charter school rather, so it's a little bit different, and also the public schools didn't shut down, so I don't know, it's interesting that according to the department of education, usually they do, and in general, in terms of like my COVID reaction, probably the combination of peer pressure, you know, like peer societal and basing that information on family and the news and all that kind of sources. So I would assume.

19:23-19:43

AS: No, that makes a lot of sense. You know, so, let's take a step back, and how do you think like other people are perceiving what you guys are doing. Whether that be parents, or I know you said you said you're not really in the Department of Education, does anyone commend you guys, criticize you guys for what you're doing.

19:44-20:36

AG: I haven't heard any kind of criticism. I've heard more criticism in the fact that the teachers had to come in yesterday, like while they, like there were a few teachers who posted on our, like

private messaging app, like why should we come in if we're closing for the variant. Why should we be coming in? And occupy the space even though there are no students there, they're worried about variants regardless. So there was that. There was those teachers who didn't go far enough like in a sense were criticism, but everyone else was just, like, jumped right on the bandwagon, getting into remote teaching, at they seemed to, they didn't visibly tell me they were against it, or for it, they were just following the school's lead, I think.

20:37-20:58

AS: Interesting. So let's talk a little bit about vaccination. You know, does that play, I mean you said that some people, were anti-vax, and in that sense, would you say that the vaccination has changed your life just like specifically in any way? You could talk about work, outings with friends, lists.

20:59-22:49

AG: Vaccination, I got it like, last April, March-April time-ish. That would be like 2020...2021 rather, and like I was, most of my friends did not get it then, I got it primarily because I hadn't gotten COVID at all and I was worried it was my asthma, and I wasn't interested in getting sick and I was worried I was going to have a bigger reaction than most people my age. That's why I got it, and also my mom was getting it around the same time, so was kind of like, get it together, and so for me, it wasn't such a big deal, about any kind of restrictions on vaccination status, because I had it way earlier than a lot of other people. I think other people got it later maybe because they changed their mind, or just because they were planning on getting it later, or because their jobs and restrictions came along with not getting it. I know for example, my brother-in-law got the vaccination only because he couldn't get into businesses and restaurants and whatnot in New York City, even though he lives in New Jersey, where it's a little bit less, restricted in terms of vaccination status, I believe, he goes to the city a lot, and he likes to go you know out there and to museums and things so he just got the J and J vaccine, which is one dose, and then he was able to do what he wants to do in terms of you know entertainment and whatnot. It's like there's two sides to the coin, people getting it anyway and people just getting it to or for jobs, to have access.

22:50-22:55

AS: Has it changed your view on the pandemic as a whole?

22:56

AG: What do you mean?

22:57-22:58

AS: What was that, sorry?

22:59

AG: What do you mean by that?

23:00-23:22

AS: So, like, you know, people you meet are very antagonistic towards vaccination. Do you think that's like where people are like you should get vaccinated, like very pushing forward, for vaccine, in many ways, or pushing against the vaccine, do you think that's shifted any way you've viewed the pandemic in any capacity?

23:23-25:15

AG: So I think that probably vaccinations have become very politicized, both on like a personal level, in terms of like peers, I think that, it tends to be more like, people more right wing don't get vaccinated than the left wing do, in terms of their like political leanings, and affiliations, although I think statistically that it's not necessarily true, it slightly leans more left, but I don't think many Republicans have gotten vaccinated. I don't know the numbers so I could be making this up. Although I think it has kind of become this hot button issue, people just like to scream about, talk about, basically talk in circles about, because they have their own opinion, they're not really going to change many peoples' opinions, especially if they go about it with an attitude of like you should be doing x, no one likes, people generally don't like told what to do, so you know it depends on how you word it, or I think it also better coming from a personal source, then someone from a news pundit or political source, like a personal, or even like a friend, or family member, or maybe like your own personal physician. What I think what would have been better would have been originally when giving out the vaccine, I think it would have been better, if it came from the doctors, from their own personal doctors themselves, just what I was thinking a while ago because if you happen to go to your doctor for a regular well-checkup, and then he's like, oh I recommend x vaccine, it's a lot more, you already know, have a relationship with that doctor, so it's a lot more of a simple yes or no, based my doctor told me what to do. Then the big vaccine clinics were good as well, then they could have been more spread out better with personal physicians as well.

25:15-25:39

AS: Is there anything you wanted to ask, or talk about, how it's affecting you in general, or any close relatives that have had close calls, basically to use this time to talk about anything else, that you think would be pertinent to this project?

25:40-27:42

AG: I had a few relatives, like my father got very sick originally, like in March of 2020, he didn't have to go to the hospital, but he was very close, he had like, EMTs called to the house, so it was like very scary in terms of that, like, he did recover, also in terms of like I live near a hospital so like a small community hospital, but a 10-15 minute walk away from my house, even if in terms of like seeing, the constant ambulances and the constant sirens, in the beginning of the pandemic was very hard, and you also saw like freezer trucks full of people who had passed away unfortunately from the pandemic too, so like rolling by our house for months. And then, I have a distant cousin who died from COVID, and I didn't know him personally, but he was my grandfather's first cousin, so there was that example, and then there was (sorry), also, a kind of

like a very well known doctor in my community, he was an eye doctor, he did a lot of things for people in the community, he was like a very well known man and he died also, it was like just kind of shocking because it was more towards like the end of the first wave, or second of the pandemic but he just caught it at like a wedding and he died and he was only like 60 years old. Like it kind of made it feel like it was getting closer to home I would say. There was also a few, a few, like parents of like my former students in my high school, their parents died from COVID as well, but that was bad, but a little bit more removed, only because I don't know them, as well as I know these people. So...

27:43-27:46

AS: Interesting. Still a big deal.

27:47

AG: Yeah, definitely.

27:50-28:24

AS: Okay well then, those are my 10 questions. Really thank you for you for coming, this was really helpful. So I'll basically transcribe this and as soon as I do, I'll send you the transcript, and also send you the recording, you can edit it to your liking, and decide what you want to be in there, what you don't want to be in there, and yeah. I'll go through and after you submit what you want in it, I'll clean it up and submit to the journal.

28:25-27

AG: Okay, sounds great. Thank you.

28:28-28:34

AS: No, thank you so much Adina. This was really a pleasure and have a great rest of your night.

28:35-28:36

AG: You're welcome.

END