

Transcript of Oral History by Bernd Geels

Interviewee/Interviewer: Bernd Geels

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Abstract: In this monologue, Bernd Geels discusses how the COVID-19 pandemic affected his family and household. He shares some of the challenges that resulted from the pandemic such as meeting people in an online environment after moving to the Boston metro area from Cape Cod.

Bernd Geels 0:02

Good evening, my name is Bernd Christian Geels. I am once again recording on Tuesday, October 6. It is now shortly after 10 o'clock Eastern Daylight Time. And this is the third segment of my contribution to the COVID-19 Oral History Project. This section is focused specifically on community. I'm sorry, this section is focused specifically on family and household. This section has five questions noted on the Oral History Project website, and I will answer them in the order that they are listed. The first question is how has COVID-19 affected you and/or your family's day to day activities? Well, for me, my day to day activities are focused very much on my own survival right now. As I noted in a previous contribution, I have wrangled with some health challenges of my own this year that were not focused on the COVID-19 crisis. And now that we are facing this challenge here in this country, I find that some of my existing health concerns have been stressed. And it does cause me anxiety and worry, because for one thing, it is not clear when this current crisis is going to end. I have done an extensive amount of study of trauma throughout my life history and my most recent years. And I have conducted such study because of my past history of experiencing significant trauma when I was growing up in the state of Texas. And my understanding of the research on trauma is that it is generally easier for people to bear the psychological stress of a traumatic experience when they have some sense that the trauma is going to end one day. One of my favorite movies that I have watched more than once is the movie *Castaway* with Helen Hunt and Tom Hanks. And in that movie, Tom Hanks portrayed a character who was a FedEx engineer who was unexpectedly marooned in the South Pacific after his plane crashed in that part of the world due to a mechanical mishap, I believe it was. He lives on an island for over four years with no contact- contact with another living human being. And it's only after the amazing luck of having a piece of garbage washed ashore that he transforms that trash into a sail that helps him to escape the island and eventually be discovered by humanity and be rescued. So why am I sharing that story? I'm sharing that story because there are a number of issues that I'm having right now. And one is the challenge of living with the trauma of an event, this pandemic, whose endpoint we still cannot clearly see. So just as Chuck Nolan, who was played by Tom Hanks in this movie, had a very difficult time wondering if he would ever get off the island, so do we here in the year 2020, find ourselves wondering when we are going to get off the islands of our own self-imposed isolation and one day rejoin humanity in all of its vibrance as it existed before this crushing pandemic. So, in answer to the first question, I can say that my day to day activities are very much focused on my own survival, and managing the stress and concern that I have about how much longer this pandemic is going to go on. So my daily activities are pretty much organized around focusing on my daily survival, meeting my basic obligations, and doing my best to maintain faith and hope in a better tomorrow, which is quite challenging for me now, due to our current political moment in this country, where the

majority party that rules the United States Senate is instead of attending to the needs of millions of American citizens, it's spending its time focused on ramming on to the Supreme Court another person to take the seat of Ruth Bader Ginsburg, our illustrious Supreme Court Justice who passed away last year- not last year, last month in September at the age of 87. The next question in this section is how are you managing day to day activities in your household? Well, I'm managing them as best as I think that I can. So I focus on trying to do my very best to take care of my health and my basic needs. And not to worry too much about how I'm going to meet those basic needs in the midst of having multiple stresses, including stress due to institutions that are supposedly supposed to be reliable, that are not responding in a timely way. So I am managing my day to day activities by doing my best to meet my basic needs, reaching out to my friends and family for moral support, and taking some time each day to relax and do deep breathing and other stress relieving exercises and activities, so that I can maintain my focus and my sense of hopefulness during this challenging time. The next question is, has the COVID-19 outbreak affected how you associate and communicate with friends and family, and in what ways? Yes, it has very much affected how I associate and communicate with friends and family. I do not really have any significant friends where I now live. I relocated here to the Boston metro area earlier this year, just about a month ago, after living on Cape Cod previously. I relocated from Cape Cod because I did not find that I had sufficient healthcare resources, professional opportunities, or social life by continuing to reside on Cape Cod. So I moved. And I moved in the middle of a pandemic, which was pretty scary. But I felt that I had to move because I needed to have more opportunities and more resources than what I was able to find on Cape Cod. So the outbreak has dramatically impacted my means and frequency of associating with friends and family because I have literally relocated myself in pursuit of a larger pool of potential friends and family here in the Boston metro area. And my hope and great prayer is that eventually, hopefully by the spring, we are going to find our way through this difficult time, and I will be able to make new friends doing things other than meeting people over Zoom and on- online, online dating apps. Because right now for people, like myself, who are single we are sadly, fairly much relegated to online forms of communication as a means of protecting ourselves from the COVID-19 Coronavirus. The next question noted here is what have been the biggest challenges that you have faced during the COVID-19 outbreak. I've faced several challenges. One of the challenges I've faced during the outbreak is sustaining the belief that one day life is going to become much better finally, because prior to this pandemic, I was already dealing with a different major set of challenges, which were very much related to my health, which I was not able to find proper health care for on Cape Cod. So I have been dealing with a number of challenges over the last couple of years. And when the pandemic came along, it just augmented distress of what I was already dealing with. So the biggest challenge that I have faced during the COVID-19 outbreak is sustaining my hope. It is sustaining my belief that one day, life is going to truly improve, and it's going to stay sustainably improved, not just that it will improve for time, but that it will improve for a consistent, lengthy period of time. And so the biggest challenge for me these days, honestly, is sustaining the hope, which is the foundation upon which I live my life each day and do everything that I need to do to sustain myself physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. In addition to actually sustaining my hope in a better future, I have also found it very challenging to deal with the many institutions that we supposedly are supposed to rely upon for our most basic needs. For example, I sought out unemployment benefits last month after I moved from Cape Cod to the Boston metro area. And I have dutifully completed the online application for benefits on a weekly basis. And I have not received a timely reply from the agency in the last

five weeks. I realize that many of these agencies, including the Massachusetts Department of Unemployment Systems are quite likely overwhelmed with the demand for their services at this time, but sadly, that does not in any way diminish my particular needs. So in addition to trying to maintain hope during this time of hardship, I am also seeking to maintain my patience, which these days is quite challenging to maintain. Finally, the last question in the sequence is, what have you, your family, and friends done for recreation during COVID-19? So, for recreation, I have tried to get outside as much as I can. As I noted in an earlier bit of content, there is a lovely set of parks close to where I live, I enjoy going to those parks. And right now before the weather becomes too cold, and before the first snow falls, I am enjoying those parks and trying to get outside and get exercise as much as I can as that gives me both exercise that I need as well as reminds me that the world hasn't completely stopped, that there are still other humans out there. And that one day, hopefully we will all be able to do basic things like shake each other's hands, give each other's hugs, kiss one another, and love one another in a much more tender, intimate way than we're allowed to do right now. So that concludes this third portion of my contribution to the COVID-19 Oral History Project. Thank you for listening. I will plan to provide more content to this history project. And I appreciate you listening. Thank you.