

Transcript of Oral History by Bernd Geels

Interviewee/Interviewer: Bernd Geels

Date: 10/06/2020

Location: Brookline, Massachusetts

Abstract: In this monologue, Bernd Geels shares his perspective on life during the COVID-19 pandemic. He discusses his fears and anxiety as in the beginning of the pandemic, he was hospitalized for an unrelated illness. Bernd talks about his frustrations with how the federal government has responded to COVID-19 and describes what he thinks the future will look like in this time.

Bernd Geels 0:03

Good evening. My name is Bernd Geels. I am speaking tonight on Tuesday, October 6, in the year 2020. It's about 9:30 in the evening, my time. As I said, my name is Bernd Geels. I was named after my German grandfather. My last name is a Dutch name, Geels. In its Dutch context, it's pronounced Gails. And as I said, today is Tuesday, October 6, I am participating in the COVID-19 Oral History Project. I am seeking to do this recording for my own benefit as well as to have a record in the event that I become sick with COVID at a later date. So one of the questions that is posed in the COVID-19 Oral History Project is what is your name and what are the primary things you do on a day to day basis? So currently, I have two different positions. I am currently working at a COVID-19 test site here in the metro Boston area. The site is operated for free to those who seek to get tested. It's a walk up testing site currently situated outdoors. And in the last couple of days, we have averaged, to my account, about 100 people each day during the four hour window that we make the site available. I also recently began working for a company that is providing educational video content production so that students who are seeking to continue their education without actually going to formal classrooms can do so with the help of companies such as this one. I also operate my own YouTube channel, which can be found under my name, Bernd Geels, last name is spelled G-E-E-L-S. As I've already noted, I live in the Boston metro area currently in the city of Brookline. One of the additional questions that I'm posed here is what is it like to live there? Well, currently, it's, I would say, subdued, the way it is in many parts of the country right now. I do still see other live humans when I go outside during the day, there is a beautiful network of parks close to where I live that I'm able to enjoy. So I do have the pleasure of going to those green spots and seeing people doing normal everyday things like walking their dogs, and jogging or walking, or just enjoying the beautiful sunshine of the day. So I am enjoying that. I am seeking to make some new friends as well as I am a recent-recently relocated to the Boston metro area after having lived on Cape Cod previously. The next question for the oral history project is when did you first learn about COVID-19? What were your thoughts about it? How have your thoughts changed since then? So I was one of a number of Americans who had the sad timing of experiencing learning about the COVID-19 pandemic coming to the United States of America while actually being in the hospital for an unrelated issue. I was hospitalized here in the state of Massachusetts earlier this year. And that hospitalization came about actually after I was hospitalized prior to that hospitalization at other locations here in the state of Massachusetts. I will not go into great detail in this particular recording regarding those circumstances. But suffice to say, as of the beginning of the pandemic here in the United States of America, I was hospitalized in the state of Massachusetts. I did have

a local friend who would come to visit me, and I do have other friends here in the state of Massachusetts. But it was a very difficult time for me when I learned about the pandemic because I became concerned about getting discharged from the hospital and finding resources that I needed for myself after- after I would be discharged. And I can still vividly remember in those days of March when it became clear that something serious was afoot that we were going to be in for probably quite a ride. And I remember those days of March after it became clear that the pandemic was spreading throughout this country that I possibly was going to end up staying in the hospital where I was longer than I had been expecting or hoping for. And that was a very anxiety provoking period of time. I can recall that I had many thoughts at the time, during those last two weeks of March, in which I worried that I was going to be stuck in the hospital for a lengthy period of time. I was hospitalized due to a preexisting medical condition. It's something that predated the COVID 19 pandemic. And it was something that was not actually really properly diagnosed until very recently in my life. And that recent diagnosis that also caused me a lot of sadness and upset. So, my thoughts about the pandemic at the time that it began were often marked by some worry and fear and anxiety. I also was very concerned that our current President Donald Trump would likely make the circumstances of the pandemic worse, as he had already been president of this country for over three years when the pandemic started. And in hindsight, it appeared that my fears were very much justified as after I was discharged from the hospital, I was able to learn much more about the evolution of the pandemic both overseas as well as within this country in the United States. So some of my initial thoughts were of fear and worry. My thoughts in the weeks and months since March have definitely shifted. Now I feel sad and frustrated, and very angry with the failure of our federal government to more effectively protect our citizenry. And I attribute a lot of that failure to the myopia, not only of President Trump but also to the Republican majority in the United States Senate who has done a very paltry job of providing sufficient resources to Americans to ensure that more Americans don't end up unemployed, homeless, hungry, destitute and full of despair to the point that they wish to kill themselves. So, as for now, in early October of 2020, my concerns regarding the pandemic remain. I am very concerned now, because as of today, it was announced that President Trump would not be supporting any additional negotiations regarding Coronavirus relief aid to the American people prior to the election, which is to be held exactly four weeks from today on Tuesday, November 3. This very much concerns me because the recovery, the economic recovery from the spring shutdowns is showing signs of slowing, as evidenced by the gradual decline in the improvement- the pace of the improvement of the economy. And the longer that the pandemic goes on without a sufficiently proportionate response to containing it and overcoming it, the more likely it is, in my considered opinion that we're going to have substantial economic damage that it's going to take many years to recover from. So, one more question that I would like to answer in this particular episode is what issues have most concerned you about the COVID 19 pandemic? Well, there are a number. To begin with, there is significant media coverage that I've seen that the economic recovery is basically exacerbating a pre existing vast amount of income inequality in this country. So there are certain types of professions, many of which are commonly held by low skilled individuals, people that have high school diplomas, maybe have some college education. There is evidence that a lot of people who are teenagers, young adults, and who have minimal levels of education are going to be some of the most hard hit individuals due to this pandemic. And those people who have minimal resources, minimal financial resources, minimal family resources, minimal educations, are going to be most likely some of the most vulnerable people that we will be faced with attempting to provide help

for in the coming months and even years. Another major concern that I have that I have articulated in my YouTube channel is how children are being treated during this pandemic. And on a related note, how our education system is fair and in this country. I'm very concerned about kids getting a sufficiently robust education to prepare them for the working world and for college. And I have done some tutoring recently that has all the more underscored for me how legitimate I feel my concern is regarding the education system and its functioning in this country. And then another issue that concerns me is how devastated city and state governments have been by this pandemic. A lot of jurisdictions have been faced with increased costs, due to any number of things whether it's trying to find sufficient personal protective equipment to ensure that their staff are able to protect themselves during this time of a pandemic. And there's also a major shortfall in the revenues that many cities and states are going to be dealing with due to decrease tax revenues, due to the loss of employment, due to even people leaving communities in large numbers once they become unemployed and decide to try to cast their lucks elsewhere. So there are a number of major issues that this pandemic was causing or exacerbating. And I have not seen the type of leadership at the federal level, that convinces me that the future isn't necessarily going to be that much better very soon, if at all. And if, by some measure of luck, or corruption, or genuine support, Donald Trump becomes president for another four years, I suspect that it will be very difficult for our economy to recover from the pandemic induced recession because it has been clear for a very long time now that Donald Trump has not taken the pandemic seriously in the time that he has been in office. So those are a number of the issues that I am very concerned about. And I pray for all of us Americans that we are going to find our way back to building consensus and learning how to care about one another more than we have seen in these past many months. So that is my contribution to the COVID-19 Oral History Project. I do plan to come back and answer more questions and create additional content to submit to the archive for this oral history project. Once again, my name is Berndt Geels. I am speaking on Tuesday, October 6 from Metro Boston, and it is now about 22 minutes before the hour of 10 o'clock in the evening. Thank you.