

# **Transcript of Interview with Craig Zehms by Sam Zehms**

**Interviewee:** Craig Zehms

**Interviewer:** Sam Zehms

**Date:** 11/13/2020

**Location (Interviewee):** New Jersey

**Location (Interviewer):** N/A

**Transcribed by:** Bryan Paintiff

**Abstract:** The interviewee, Craig Zehms, discusses how the pandemic and lockdown has affected people's day to day lives and his initial reactions to the pandemic, stating how he believed that only the tip of the iceberg had been hit as far as severity goes. Craig then elaborates on his day to day living in Jersey city and his heavy involvement in the community and how important contact with others is. Craig then dives into employment issues overall and then into his own experience and how a new job in real estate has been during the pandemic. Craig then talks about the importance of discipline during isolation and the challenges with keeping in contact with family and friends. At timestamp 00:37:11 Craig gives a very human example of sharing during the pandemic. Towards the end, politics are discussed that include Craig's opinion that the federal government should have had a specific unified plan instead of having States figure it out and how he was lucky that New Jersey came up with good policy and that most of the populous followed said policy. Lastly, Craig concludes with how important family and friends are and how sharing experiences can make the hard times easier.

**Sam Zehms 00:03**

This recording is being conducted on November 13 2020. It is approximately 3:17pm Central Time, both interviewer and interviewee are participating via zoom from their respective homes. In New Jersey, there were a total of 19 new deaths due to COVID 19, bringing the total to 16,495 deaths. There were also 3492 new cases reported bringing the total to 268,787 cases in New Jersey. Nationally, there were a total of 1172 deaths due to COVID 19, bringing the total to 242,861 deaths. There were also 163,402 newly confirmed cases, bringing the total to 10,637,418, COVID 19 cases in the United States. So what is your name? And do you mind sharing some demographic information for the study?

**Craig Zehms 01:09**

Not at all. My name is Craig Zehms. And I live in Jersey City, New Jersey. I am of German and French origin and I'm 68 years old.

**Sam Zehms 01:22**

Where... What is it like to live in Jersey City? You know, how densely populated is it you know, what is public transport, like that kind of thing? Anything you like?

**Craig Zehms 01:35**

Well, Jersey City is the second largest city in the state. It is approximately 250,000 people and it has a landmass of about 21 square miles. It is considered as of this year, the most diverse city in the United States. So it's an exciting place to live because of that because it reflects itself by the restaurants by the shops by the people that you meet at the park as a very friendly family friendly town too we have a pretty proactive government here in the state and certainly in Jersey City, public transport the PATH train, which is like a subway train, which goes into Manhattan, and then at some point is above ground here in New Jersey and goes to several cities in New Jersey. It connects with a subway system in Manhattan. It also connects with a light rail here in Jersey City and the light rail goes from Jersey City to Hoboken, north and south to Bejan. And we also have public transportation in buses, too.

**Sam Zehms 02:49**

Are there any other places? Do you have any other places of residence and what is it like to live there?

**Craig Zehms 02:55**

I have a small house out in dingmans Ferry Pennsylvania, which is about an hour and a half from Jersey City. It's just across the Delaware River. It's a small town, there's not even a town center. There's about 7300 people in the town area that are considered members of that community. In contrast, 86% of them are white. And it is not a diverse community. The backgrounds are basically German, Italian. And I know I'm not sure what the other one is. But it's a very, very conservative area. In the state. There is no public transportation. There are bus services that go between the towns, but there is nothing that really makes it easier for people to get from place to place unless they have a car so everybody has a car. They're conservative Jersey City is very liberal.

**Sam Zehms 04:02**

Thank you. So since you spend most of your time in Jersey City,

**Craig Zehms 04:09**

right.

**Sam Zehms 04:10**

And so what is one of the primary things you do on a day to day basis in Jersey City?

**Craig Zehms 04:18**

Well, I've been a real estate agent now for a little bit over a year so I go to the office at least five days a week which is only three blocks from the house and set up appointments do a lot of research for for people. I have become involved as a volunteer with Van Horse Park Association, and the park is half a

block from my apartment. I was elected to the board of directors in December, and I am a new board member for the barrel mansion, which is four blocks from my house. I also am in charge of volunteers for Vanderhorst Park. We have a farmers market on Saturdays from eight until two And so I have because of COVID guidelines in the health department, we have to monitor it with volunteers to make sure that everybody is socially distancing wearing a mask on not bring it bringing a dog or an animal into the Farmers Market area. People have been very, very wonderful about obeying all of these, these rules. And it's a way of just becoming involved in the community. I also live on a very, very friendly Street, and no close to 40 people by name on my one street alone. So it's, it's a nice, I'm live in a historic part of town and a part of town where people have been for a very long time. So there's a lot of local history in this neighborhood.

**Sam Zehms 05:51**

And so other than, you know, having to change farmers market to adapt to COVID-19, how else has COVID-19 affected your day to day activities?

**Craig Zehms 06:05**

Well, it makes you very aware of the things that you need to do in order to leave the house, you've got to be wearing a mask, you've got to be conscious of social distancing. I allow a little bit extra time. I also find that people are even more friendly at this at this point. So I always allow for an extra 10 minutes if I am heading to the past station, if I need to get into New York City, which doesn't happen very often anymore. But I know that if I'm crossing the park, which I am doing every single day that I will run into one or two people that that I know, it makes you much more conscious of any public place that you're in, like the grocery store, for instance, or if you have to go to Home Depot, or anything or the drugstore, for instance, you're just really aware of your own personal space and not infringing on someone else's. And you're also aware of people that are not paying any attention to the guidelines, and leaving enough distance between you and them. Luckily here, they're very respectful of that. But not always.

**Sam Zehms 07:15**

And, you know, when all of this started, you know, COVID-19, when you first learned about it, what were your thoughts on it? And how have they changed over time?

**Craig Zehms 07:31**

Well, I think that like many people, I didn't understand how severe it was going to become. And I think part of that was, is that we weren't getting a lot of information early on from the federal government. And I think a lot of us myself, certainly felt that the government would be better prepared for something like this, since there had been a pandemic force that had been established, I think, at least during the Obama administration. The reality of it is I was working a part time job when this happened in March 18, was the last day of of work that was in New York City. And the idea of isolation, and having a lot of what many people consider their rights or liberties taken away from them. makes you very, very aware of how you need to change your life, in order to assist in getting this under control. That makes you

think, you know, it makes you think a lot it makes you not take things for granted that you might normally have taken for granted. And I know myself early on, the idea of going to the grocery store was frightening. I mean, you were worried about touching things. I was wearing gloves when I went to the grocery store. And I know a lot of people who were really thoroughly washing all their produce when they came home from the grocery store. I washed it but I wasn't putting it in a bleach solution. But I mean, it's rethinking the normal things of your life, because everything's been heightened. And you can't do everything the way that you used to do them.

**Sam Zehms 09:18**

So is that would you say? In terms of the issues that have concerned you most about COVID 19 pandemic? What were they and have they evolved over time? So at the beginning, perhaps you're more concerned about how contagious it was, or something and perhaps later on change to something else?

**Craig Zehms 09:51**

Well, I think that a couple of things. I think one of the things certainly for the people in my neighborhood, was when we were mirroring New York and the salute to the medical workers at seven o'clock every night. And I kind of became the musical director for all of that. So every night at seven on the stoop, there I was banging a pot that my mother used to make oatmeal in an old wooden spoon. And we had everything from assemble to school bells. Badly played bugle guitars, tambourines, a gong every, I mean, some days, we had 12 people that showed up some days, we had no 30 people that showed up on the street, on their Stoops. And also, on my blog, we have two doctors and two nurses. So it was something that brought the ceremony that the ritual of doing this, not only honored them, but I think it brought everybody closer. And this is a very special bloc of lovely people to start out with. It may I think it made everybody realize that this is something that's larger than all of us. And while a lot of people get caught up in what they think their rights might be, I think that the better word to use is responsibility, the responsibility that we have to our fellow citizens, whether they're in our own community, or in our country, or around the world to have to follow as many guidelines as possible. It you know, it makes it makes you do a lot of thinking it makes you value things in a slightly different way. It makes you prioritize differently. It affects your daily life. As far as some days, it's hard to motivate yourself. In other days, it's not you're restricted in the way that you exercise, I used to go to the gym three times a week, well, I don't go to the gym. So you take walks, and you find you, you you're recreating your life on a, you know, in many, many ways. And there's very, I think, the frustrating thing, and the scary thing for a lot of people is that you're not in control of very much. And that's that's kind of a substantial adjustment to make no matter how old you are.

**Sam Zehms 12:22**

So the lack of control is arguably one of the most concerning parts of this pandemic, you would say?

**Craig Zehms 12:31**

I think so Sam. And you know, also, I think one of the reasons that I've enjoyed so much volunteering at the farmers market is that it is its own ritual. We started later this year, because of COVID. We have very strict guidelines established by the Health Department, and they send someone every Saturday to check up on us. But it's it's a community effort. And it's it's a sign of normalcy, we had to cancel the summer film series, we had to cancel the Halloween party for all the kids, we had to cancel most everything that the park does, which is a very active park. But it also brought people together on a regular basis. And this is a neighborhood with lots of families in it. And I like nothing better than walking across the park and having some little kid go hey, Craig, because, you know, he met me standing at the entrance for the farmers market. And I chatted with him and his parents and, you know, me, I chat with everybody. And it's finding those those things that are rarer now that you can focus on and, and understand in a very, very basic way how important they are and how they unite us and how they keep us moving forward. I think,

**Sam Zehms** 13:49

you know, to focus more on the employment side of all of this, how I remember you mentioned March 18, you'd had the part time job. So how, in terms of how it's changed your employment status, and in what ways so that a part that part time job then was definitely a part of that change?

**Craig Zehms** 14:18

Yeah, um, I was working a job for a company that a friend of mine is an executive at, at and doing that through the holidays. And then and as I was because real estate is new for me as I was building a real estate career. I mean, that affects you financially. Certainly, it also affects you as far as a purpose as far as a place to go four or five days a week. I was eligible for unemployment and one of the things that many governments did, state governments is they furloughed a lot of their staff. So from the day that I filed my unemployment claim, to the day that it became activated was five months. And I know lots of people who have had that exact same issue. And the only reason I was able to get mine activated in five months was that one of the women that I worked with that the real estate agencies husband, works for the unemployment office, and he was able to get my papers to someone there that could actually assist. Now, this didn't after he got them, it was still another like six week process. And I didn't know my friend's husband worked for the unemployment office at the at the time when I first met her at work. But that's I mean, you know, you know, in a larger sense, when people are furloughed, or have lost their jobs, because the business has closed if it's temporary or permanently. They're in many cases at, you know, at the mercy of the social service network, which is challenging. And if you are not a legal immigrant, that's a huge challenge. There is not a network for an awful lot of people, our local food pantry at the church, right next to the barrel mansion, is they've, I think they have quintupled their outreach on a weekly basis to people that need to it's, it's, you know, you want to support your local businesses. Yet, when you are being more careful with money, you are being more careful with money. And so you're not supporting them in the way that you would have before COVID started. And because there's nothing about this, that's finite. We don't know what the next three months or six months or years going to bring. It makes many people, myself included, more careful with how they're spending their

money. And certainly what and certainly what they're doing. If we knew there was going to be a miracle cure, in two months, people might spend more money right now. But you know, I'm in New York City, a third of the restaurants have closed their working limited hours. Here in Jersey City, and there's a lot of boarded up stores and and restaurants. It's it's affected everybody. And I don't think that we've I think this is the tip of the iceberg. I think it's going to get a lot worse before it gets better. I hate to say that, but I think that's going to happen.

**Sam Zehms** 17:41

And in terms of your I mean, in terms of how your job personally, is going now. In what ways has it changed has always has all of this changed your job

**Craig Zehms** 18:00

changed my job a lot because well initially. Real estate is a non essential industry. And the how you build your career in real estate is by meeting with people personally, I staging open houses by showing properties, whether rentals or for sale, in person. And we couldn't do that for a lot of months. We couldn't even get into some places to shoot, you know, a visual record of them. So you are really very, very challenged in how you can do your job that has relaxed a lot. Now we're worried with this surge that's coming up if that's going to have to be pulled back. Once again, I don't know it makes you reinvent everything, basically.

**Sam Zehms** 18:58

So So have you has it affected the hours you've worked and the kinds of properties people are looking for in your and the locations. In your experience.

**Craig Zehms** 19:09

It hasn't so much influenced the hours. Because in real estate, you have to be very, very flexible. Some people want to see things during the day. Many people most people want to see things on the weekend. But not always. A lot of people want to see something at night. So it's it can be definitely a 24/7 job. What's happened here specifically in this area is that there's been a double migration. You've heard all about what's happening in New York City with people leaving New York City and Brooklyn. And I would say about 90% of the people that I've been showing rentals to are from New York and Brooklyn. They have after all of these years realized that if they just come across the Hudson River, which takes them less than 10 minutes, they will get more for their money, they'll get a larger space for their money and they will pay less rent and they will have a lot to choose from. Currently, we have three times as many rentals available as normal. What's also happened is not only people in New York, but people here in Jersey City, who have families, not just who have families, but lot of them out a family have decided, well, I don't need to live in, you know, this urban environment, I can move 20 minutes or 30 minutes out into a really sweet town, where there's a better school system, I can own a house with a yard that my kids can play in. And so there's been a migration out there. So it's been really, really fascinating there are getting worse for houses in some of these smaller communities because they don't have enough houses

available to sell. And it has certainly affected rental properties. Here we have three times as many as normal. So it's a renters paradise. Basically, I rented an apartment to a couple a couple of weeks ago. The it was originally listed at 2650 for two bedroom apartment with a deck and it rented for 2250. And there's a one that I rented a while back, and it was a rent, I think it was a rental originally \$2,500 And that rented for like 2150. And I'm dealing with a couple of other rent rentals right now where there's nowhere that they're they're going to get the rent that you know, the landlord has declared and the landlord's most of them are pretty smart. So there is that and that's affecting the industry. In Manhattan, there's over 16,000 empty apartments. And they're also negotiating back there. As a landlord, you'd rather have someone paying some rent than not anybody. There so in in my industry that has affected things. And you know, I was an actor for many years. And I have a lot of actor friends and director friends. Well, that is, you know, as far as live performance, that's dried up. So a lot of those people have given up their apartments move back home moved in with friends. Yeah, it's it's it's kind of a seismic change in in the larger industry.

**Sam Zehms 22:17**

is so you mentioned the two different migrations that you've observed. Did this? You know, has that did it? I mean, it changed throughout the course of the pandemic? Was there a did one come before the other? Or in your experience? Or was it more they're kind of both happened at the same time? Or how was it? How did you How do you think it changed throughout the pandemic? If it did at all?

**Craig Zehms 22:49**

Well, I think there was certainly a delay as people were acclimating themselves to the seriousness of the situation. As soon as classes became virtual, at all levels, you know, elementary, through high school through college, that changed a lot. As jobs became virtual jobs from home, that changed a lot. You know, from New Jersey, whether it's here baon, Hoboken, it's an easy commute into Manhattan. Well, people weren't having to commute into Manhattan, or maybe only having to commute one or two days a week. So all of a sudden, they could examine not only where they needed to be as far as their relationship to their workplace, but where they could be now because their work, the idea of the work place has has changed. And I think a lot of these changes will remain. I think it's a big a big change in that. And I and what I will say is that I'm not sure that there was a specific timeframe as this happened. But I will say as people have, in a way gotten used to this new environment, they have been more focused in how they're dealing with where they want to be. When someone comes to look at an apartment when I'm showing apartments. They're serious. They're not just the person that has nothing better to do on a Saturday or Sunday when I'm trying to sell a house or a condo, same way, they have a list of things they're looking for. So you're not wasting your time and they're not wasting their time. And I mean, that's, that's good. Who knew that real estate particularly in this area would be kind of a hot commodity right now, but it is.

**Sam Zehms 24:47**

You mentioned before that you have friends in the acting community who, were affected by the COVID 19 pandemic. You know, in terms of employment? Would you mind talking a little bit more about that, and perhaps other friends you have that were affected by the pandemic?

**Craig Zehms 25:18**

Sure. Well, my friend Bill, who, you know, is director and he directs theatre, specifically, all over the country. And in New York City. He also writes and produce his corporate entertainments for big companies. That's a very lucrative business. Well, since no one's gathering in large groups anymore, for the most part, but let's not get political. They'll be good. But you know, that's just completely dried up for him. And he gave up his apartment in New York at the end of June. And his husband moved lives in Long Island, and he moved out there. And he can do lots of things of course, online. And, and all of that means working on some project, but the actual working to create something at the moment aspect of the job has ended. You know, a couple of friends I know were working, we're in Broadway shows, well, those shows closed, and the earliest Broadway is going to be opening is going to be maybe some things going back into rehearsal. Next summer, and then perhaps opening, literally in another year. But who knows, certain shows may never reopen again. And a lot of people in the industry, support themselves between theater gigs, working in restaurants, or working retail. Well, when those jobs don't exist anymore, either. Your option and your unemployment benefits aren't extended, your option is move back home, move in with friends, get out of an expensive city. It's not less expensive. Just because we're having COVID. It's in New York is just as expensive as it's always been. What do you find out, Shockingly, is how connected everything is. It's not one, one simple thing that is affected, it's a lot of different things that are affected. And I know that people are creating things that that they're, you know, they're performing online, and all of that. So there there is, there is a forum for performers, not necessarily a paid forum for perform for for performers. I don't think it's made people that I know want to just give up. But it's made them rethink where they need to be right now. And I was I say, 100% of every hopeful that that things will come back. It's just when and then in what form?

**Sam Zehms 28:18**

So do you what, what concerns? If you have concerns do you have about the effects of COVID-19 on your employment and the economy more broadly?

**Craig Zehms 28:40**

I think that in order to boost the economy, the federal government is going to have to be more involved. I think there's a disconnect between a lot of our representatives in Congress, as far as what's really going on in their districts, and how badly affected people are going to be and as I mentioned earlier, I think we've just seen the tip of the iceberg. I don't know I've always been a survivor, but I'm not a kid anymore. And I I just wonder how things are going to ultimately roll out. I mean, I'm, you know, selling places to people that have a certain amount of money to spend at the moment. And there's a lot of wealthy people out there. And I'm renting places to people that are still employed, even though most of them are working virtually. So I don't think my job is going I don't think my job is going to end. It's



changing though, and that's not necessarily that's not necessarily a negative thing. I am worried about some people People whose jobs ended and are very talented people I'm talking about in the arts and are finding it difficult to find employment. I think a lot of people when they're finding employment are not finding employment at the rate of pay that they once had. And don't have the kind of, maybe job security that they want to once had either. I think that it's pressed many, many buttons, I mean, people are socially distanced from one another, not just six feet, but a lot of people live rather isolated lives to start out with, I'm lucky I don't. But you know, how, how is this affected me personally, even though I have, I'm surrounded by some really great people, you know, you can't avoid being lonely. Sometimes you can't, because you can't control your life and a lot of aspects and you suffer bouts of depression, because you see what's happening. My health is great. But you see what's happening to a lot of people, and how isolated they are. And if they've got a family member in the hospital, or they have a family member in the hospital and dying, and they can't be there. We've all seen a lot on the news where you can't continue to process it anymore. Because it's just so upsetting. I think, you know, it's a challenge to motivate yourself. Some days, I am really good at self motivation. And there are other days where it's just really hard to get going. And some days, my time management is wonderful. And there are the days when it's like, you know, you're happy you brush your teeth. I mean, I used to do better than that. But it's there's not I think there's a there's a consistency to the inconsistency. Because days blend into one another weeks blend into another all of a sudden, here we are in the middle of November. And we're all looking at ourselves, like how do we get to November? Now we're reinventing the holidays, as far as not being able to be with our families and the people that we love and finding something that's special to compensate for that. I know it's a really it's, there's there's too many buttons being pressed in too short of a time. Yeah.

**Sam Zehms 32:22**

So how has the COVID outbreak affected how you associate with your friends and communicate with them and your family? In what ways?

**Craig Zehms 32:37**

Well, I mean, I never was much of a person on Facebook, and I, you know, go to Facebook in the morning. It's I've connected with some, you know, high school and college friends that I haven't seen, most I've seen since those days, but some I haven't. And people have interesting posts. And I think that there's certainly a community of shared feelings that is supportive. That way, I spend much more time texting and emailing and I have certainly spent more time on the phone. I've sent more cards than I normally send. I reach out more I mean, I can be very happy being by myself. But I've reached out a lot more to people I've reached out to people I haven't talked to in ages. I am very proactive on the block here by saying hey, it's nice out tonight. Anybody want to meet on the stoop? Socially distance and perhaps have a beverage you can fill in the blank on the beverage sample. But it, it it's made me do a better job of, of reaching out and not because it's more important, because we all we don't know when we're going to be, you know, when are we going to be able to travel safely, really safely? When are we going to be able, you know, to hug people that we love. I mean, it's just when you think of it, it's just

idiotically crazy. And it's, it's kind of on I guess I could choose to be more isolated. People said, Well, how come you don't spend more time out in the country, your little place out there and while it's beautiful, and I love it, and I do get out there every once in a while I know that I this would have been 100 times more difficult if I was out there by myself. I would have had a real tough time with that.

**Sam Zehms 34:35**

So then, perhaps what would have in terms of the biggest challenge you faced during this outbreak, would you I know he mentioned isolation, a separation from others. And you know, even how you know affecting employment, that kind of thing. What would you classify as the biggest challenge, or challenges you faced during this outbreak?

**Craig Zehms 35:07**

I think one of the challenges is is not letting the current situation define your future. A challenge is setting realistic goals. A challenge is not buying into this very amorphous time where, as I just said, days blend into one another of making sure I'm pretty disciplined as a person, but making sure that I take that walk that I, you know, I create some time, that's just for me, I started taking a creative writing course last April, which is one of the best things I've ever done. So that there's and creating things in your life that are things that you're looking forward to doing. And I but that's, that's a challenge. Some days, you just feel very, very unmotivated, and are looking for that, that glimmer of hope. And one of the things that's kept me sane as doing some of this volunteering, because I realized I'm not in the same. I'm not in that boat by myself as a lot of people in you know, in this boat. It's I think it's really hard to be disciplined, though in this environment. And and to think and to be future oriented.

**Sam Zehms 36:35**

In terms of how this outbreak has affected your community you know, anything from as you mentioned, the arts community, to your to the farmers market to the your street and everybody that your neighbors. How would you say it has affected them if there is, if there's anything else you'd like to add to that?

**Craig Zehms 37:10**

I think for the most part, it's brought people together in a different way. I think that you see, more open acts of kindness. I think people are. And I live with a bunch of very generous people, but are sharing and not just not, you know, physical things, but are sharing or being more available. One of my favorite stories is one night after we were banging our pots. My one of my neighbors Margaret, who lives across the street, who is still working as a therapist at the age of 87. Thank you very much. She was raised in England and has been in the United States for over 30 years. She owns her townhouse. And her tenants upstairs young couple and Kristen is a nurse and she's been she was assigned to one of the COVID wards in New York City. And after we were done banging airpots one night, Margaret said I have an announcement to make. And this was about two months into it. And we thought, oh my god, she's going to tell us that someone's died or someone's gotten sick that we all know. And so we gathered round, and she said, I have a presentation to make. And she told us the story of her mother, who drove an

ambulance during the Second World War in London. And the nurses in London in the at the time were mostly women. And they were called Sister nurses. They weren't Catholic, but they were called Sister nurses and they had uniforms that they wore, and they had a belt buckle a silver belt buckle with like angels on it. And she hit she she started been sorting through things lately and she she held up this belt buckle and she told the story. And she said there's someone here that I think should have this belt buckle now and Margaret very fashionable when she was younger from the pictures I've seen used to you know, like wear it on a belt with a black dress and stuff like very elegant. And and she said Kristen, I would like you to have this. And she said you're on the frontlines every single day. You know dealing with really really sick people and I think my mother would have loved knowing that you have this now. I'm near tears now telling you this and there wasn't a dry eye in the house. It was like one of the simply most beautiful things. Here's this very very old lady. Understanding the significance what is the symbolized and wanting to give it to someone else and to and to honor her and Kristen God bless her who's a delight is old enough She's in her, probably mid-thirty's and she's old enough to like, she got it. I mean, she really got it, she really understood it and how resonant that was, as did the rest of us. And it's, it's things like that. That make everything and just the memory of having that happened, make everything more doable. More possible. More, more human. Yeah. Thats a true story.

**Sam Zehms 40:36**

So with this togetherness, or, you know, bringing actually people in a way closer together and you know, being more available for one another, that you mentioned. How else have people been responding to the pandemic? And in terms of differences between the Poconos and Jersey City?

**Craig Zehms 41:07**

Well, I think get the response that I've seen, at least in the people that I know out in the Poconos, who are friends, they've been very generous, and they've been good about following procedures and all of that. The contrast between there and here is that that's a very conservative area, although my friends are out there. And here, it's very, very liberal. Oh, when I was looking at the questions, I thought, Well, my gosh, there's not a there's not a huge amount of difference. People out there are required to wear masks if they go into a restaurant or into a store. And people are pretty good about, you know, well, they won't let you in unless you're wearing a mask, but people have been pretty good about, about all of that you do get just because of basically the profile of a lot of the more conservative people that live out there, you have that whole thing about my rights are being taken away from me. And then there's that whole kind of thing. That's not an issue here. I think it's because it's such a diverse city and very liberal city, and people are living close to one another and are coming in contact with one another more frequently than people live out in the country who are living in more isolated existence. I... And I really, yeah, it's, it's, it's confusing, because well, there's a whole different thought process going on. Don't think there's a huge amount of difference in the way people are running, running their lives in a lot of people out there, if they're working outside, they don't have to wear a mask, you know, if they have, if they're in a construction or something like that they don't, they don't have that, as a, as far as I know, is as a rule these days.

**Sam Zehms 43:06**

So then the difference you would say, is primarily not so much action based but more attitude.

**Craig Zehms 43:16**

Yeah, and I think people out there tend to be more in a way independent. And I think in Jersey City, it's let's like work together. And it's I mean, it's two very different political parties. It's much more democratic here. This is a democratic state, Pennsylvania, in the area that my house is, is very, very Republican and very conservative Republican. And I think too Sam, you know, people's reaction to all of this and how they carry themselves, has a lot to do as if they know someone who has come down with it, or has died from it. Their response is different than just seeing something on the news. If it's if it's personal to them, then then there's a big similarity between how people react.

**Sam Zehms 44:07**

so have people around you then change their opinions, day to day activities, relationships, in response to the pandemic in Jersey City, and then how would that compare to your knowledge in the Poconos?

**Craig Zehms 44:33**

I think I think people have had no choice but to change change here in Jersey City. It's the a lot of people. You are your social interactions are more frequent, because you are not driving a car to get many places most people are walking. And do you have very strict guidelines enforced here? Out in the country you're in the country And it's it's a different ballgame. People have changed the way they run their daily life because of these guidelines. And I think, you know, no matter where you are, you're, you're tired of having to do this. I mean, nobody wants to wear a mask. When I'm doing an open house, I'm there for three hours, but I'm setting up beforehand, you know, it's four or five hours wearing a mask, and who wants to breathe your own breath for that amount of time? You know, I mean, it we, when I'm at the office, I have to wear a mask all the time here at home I don't, but it's, it's, it's all of the all the things that are other levels of complication on how you how you do things. I mean, you don't go to movies anymore, you don't do this, you don't go hey and say, Hey, let's go someplace for coffee. Well, you can if the weather's nice, and you're sitting outside, but you're not sitting inside. So I think is affected people in many ways, because our routines have been affected and when you're in a routine of this is what you do on this day of the week, and you go meet so and so for coffee on Saturdays after the farmers market? Well, maybe no, you don't anymore, because of all of these other guidelines here. You're you're adjusting. And, you know, most people I know have adjusted because they understand that it's a responsibility for the greater good. Not always easy, and it can make you grumpy some days because you just you want it to be easier.

**Sam Zehms 46:33**

In terms of self isolation and flattening the curve, you know, two key ideas that have emerged during this pandemic. How have you, family friends community responded to their request to self isolate, and

flatten the curve. I know you mentioned, you know, socially distance on the stoop and new protocols at the farmers market. How else have they responded to these ideas?

**Craig Zehms 47:15**

Well I think in law, I mean, think in lots of ways, many people know that you're going to be outside you'd better be wearing a mask. You. People plan things differently. They think things through differently. I think they don't act impulsively as they as they might have done. And one of my neighbors who was a doctor early on, came down with COVID. She had the gastrointestinal version, and she was only sick for about four days. But her her partner because he has some on some of his own physical issues, he got an apartment somewhere else because he didn't want to be he's got diabetes. He didn't want to because his [immune] system was compromised. So he didn't want to have to be affected by that. And she has a daughter. And her daughter moved back from Chile with her husband. And so they isolated for two weeks people have been very good about isolating and quarantining. I don't know of anyone who hasn't I know of. And I honestly I know of people who have gotten you to come down with it. I know of four friends who have come down with it. And all were very sick, that didn't have to be didn't have to be hospitalized.

**Sam Zehms 48:49**

So what are what are your other experiences in responding to the sicknesses of your these, these friends that, you know, did come down with Corona virus?

**Craig Zehms 49:11**

Well, you know, it's it's because none of them, two are in Connecticut. Friends of mine, who are a couple and one in New York City. I couldn't be around them because of their quarantining. And so it just makes you you know, send an email or send texts or you know, communicate that way. It's long distance communication, which is really, really frustrating. You can't go to the store. I mean, if anyone in the neighborhood needs to have something those of us who have cars will always go hey, I'll pick something up for you. It makes you aware once again, of part of the challenge of this disease is that with the isolation and the quarantine People are fighting this very much by themselves. And I would think that that would be really difficult to do. We press a lot of buttons, and be very scary, very frightening. You feel helpless in a lot of, in a lot of ways, despite all the guidelines and everything, you also can't put yourself in an unsafe situation, because that's not going to solve anything.

**Sam Zehms 50:32**

And looking at the government, their response to this pandemic, how have the municipal leaders and the government officials in your community responded to the outbreak.

**Craig Zehms 50:50**

well, we have a pretty progressive government here in Jersey City, the mayor is in a second term. These well liked the City Council is very diverse and very, very active. So they stepped up to the plate right

away. And they were mirrored by the mayor and Hoboken, which is kind of our sister city. The all the community, you know, groups associations became very, very involved early on. And one of the good things about living here is is that the tri state area, which is New York, Connecticut, and New Jersey, is all very interconnected. It's interconnected with public transportation, with businesses, and those three governors met early on very frequently, in because there was so much travel in between the states to try to come up with sensible policies that would that would work not only in their individual state, but in all three states. And so I've, I'm living in a place where it's been very, very proactive as far as protecting people's health, making some really tough decisions about closing businesses and restaurants, limiting transportation, you are required to wear a mask on the subway in New York City, or you will be fined. And I think the fine is, I think it's maybe 50 bucks. But there are people out there writing tickets for that. I mean, they've gotten very, very serious. And I had to go into town today for a doctor's appointment. I was in there yesterday, too. And everybody on the on my subway train was wearing a mask. Now the subways aren't remotely as crowded as they used to be. But you see that on the PATH train, too. I mean, part of it's through legislation, and part of it is that people just get it now. And I mean, I it's, yeah, I'm glad I'm glad I'm living where I am, where it's been supported by the larger community in the most part, because they realized that this is what they have to do now. And these are the standards that the government has put into place in the cities I put into place.

**Sam Zehms 53:00**

And if I may ask, you know, there was an initiative in Jersey City, where you could request that the government was willing to provide masks upon request. And, you know, provide resources, other resources to businesses. Do you think that was your opinion of that, do you think it was? Good response? Is there anything else you wish they'd done?

**Craig Zehms 53:38**

I think it was a good response. I know, they told they was talking about mailing masks out. And if they did, I didn't get one. But I live only three blocks from City Hall. And they've been very proactive as far as initially providing masks. I believe hand sanitizer as well. There have been places where you can go and pick up, you know, free boxes of gloves and things like that. So the social service organizations have also stepped up to make it easier because initially, it was really hard to get those supplies, they ran out there. People were buying them all they were, they weren't at the drugstore anymore, or at the grocery store. They have instituted I mean, an outdoor eating plan for downtown Jersey City was basically for all of Jersey cities. So but it's at a reduced capacity. They I think are doing a good job of respecting the business community. But understanding that literally the health of the populace is more important than that, trying to find a balance so that places aren't closing.

**Sam Zehms 54:46**

And comparing this, these government officials to the state and federal leaders How would you say that they are responding to the this situation differently?

**Craig Zehms 55:04**

Well, I think the federal federal government has done a pretty bad job. pretty abysmal. And not just because of my politics. I think that they've made a lot of missteps. And I think that there has not been a coordinated federal response. I think a lot of stuff needs to come from the federal government, and there has to be standard for all states, not letting each state make up their own standards. Luckily, I live in a state, which has really good standards into place. And I think that's been frustrating, because people are, are hearing a lot of different things. When you have a president who likes to hear the sound of his own voice, as annoying as that may be, you know, give in to all sorts of crazy theories about this disease. There's some people that buy into that. And that's the last thing that we needed. Now. This is science and medically based it bottom line, and people I think, need to understand that. I think that with a new administration, there'll be a better effort in coordinating things and making sure that supplies are made. And I'm sure a lot of them will be made in the United States, which is a good thing for businesses, and that it will pick things will work together and make more sense. So it's not them versus us this versus that, that it will be everybody's in this together. And hopefully, businesses will benefit from having to produce these things. And they will be supplied at all of these hospitals that are completely overwhelmed right now, by more patients than they know what to do with.

**Sam Zehms 56:50**

And how, how is this entire experience for you? How has it transformed the way you think about your family and your friends and your community? And what ways?

**Craig Zehms 57:04**

Well, I'm, you know, I, I'm always been a family guy. I love my family. And they put up with me, and my sense of humor. But it and I have, like the best friends in the world. And I I think that it and I don't take and I never take that for granted. But I think this, because we've not been able to visit people, we've not been able to be in the same room with people, we've not been able to hug them. As I said earlier, we've not been able to act in the way that we're used to acting with people it has made us value, the times that we have and look forward to the times that we will in, in the future, it's about I don't know, it's it makes you, you realize that no matter how old you are, we all have an opportunity to build bridges, we all have an opportunity to reach out and we all have an opportunity to celebrate one another's differences. And this is certainly a time to be doing that. And it's a time not to be putting ourselves first it's a time to be literally, it sounds like a bad movie of the week. But you know, opening our hearts and finding the kindness within us. And being being able to help in whatever way that we can, in order to all of us get through this. And I think many people will be stronger, be a stronger person in a lot of ways because of having come through this. I'm hoping and perhaps a more open minded person and perhaps all sorts of good qualities that one might not have had to experience a lot of in the past. I don't know, I just want to be with my family. You might know some of them. I'm not sure.

**Sam Zehms 59:09**

Is there anything else you'd like to add today? Anything else that we didn't cover that you'd like to talk about?

**Craig Zehms 59:16**

Um, I don't think I don't think so. We've pretty we've we've covered, we've covered a lot of we've covered a lot of bases. I think you know what I think one of the important things is and thank you for all these great questions, because quite honestly, it made me do a lot of thinking. And I think it's not only thinking, for me, it always helps to write stuff down but then it also helps to share because we're not in this. We're not in this alone. We're in this together and if we can share our experiences, I think that it makes it something that is slightly easier to navigate.

**Sam Zehms 59:50**

Well, thank you very much for participating in this interview today. You're welcome. and I will be sure to send all of the, you know, the transcript and the recording to you as soon as everything is done so you can look it over and information on where you can access this.

**Craig Zehms 1:00:13**

Good. Thanks. And I'll send you that. I'll send you the paperwork.

**Sam Zehms 1:00:17**

All right, thank you very much.

**Craig Zehms 1:00:18**

All right Sam.