

Transcript of Interview with Edward Lehew and Jeannie Lehew by Amanda Lehew

Interviewees: Edward Lehew and Jeannie Lehew

Interviewer: Amanda Lehew

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Location (Interviewees): Independence, Kentucky

Location (Interviewer): Coldspring, Kentucky

Transcriber: Amanda Lehew

Abstract:

Edward Lehew and Jeannie Lehew both grew up in Newport, Kentucky. The two married in 1953 and had three children. They have remained in Northern Kentucky all their lives. Currently, the two live in Independence, Kentucky in a house they designed in 2003. Edward, sometimes referred to as Hank, worked at Cincinnati Milacron as a machinist and security guard until he retired in 1987 after 37 years, while Jeannie worked at the Cincinnati Telephone Company as an operator until she retired to be a stay at home mother. Jeannie is a crafty woman who has spent years making blankets and teddy bears for patients at the Hospice Care of Saint Elizabeth and clothing for children in many countries of Africa. The two have witnessed the Great Depression, WWII, the Korean War, Vietnam, multiple natural disasters, and tragedies of life. These days the couple spends time watching T.V. in their sunroom and cherishing the many years they have spent on this Earth.

Interview Note:

My name is Amanda Lehew and I interviewed Edward and Jeannie Lehew, who are my paternal grandparents, by recording our conversation by telephone on March 30, 2020. This interview is part of a project with the University of Cincinnati's Public History program which will contribute real life experiences to an archive during the coronavirus crisis in the United States.

Automated Voice: This call is now being recorded.

Amanda Lehew (AL): Hello. Can you both hear me?

Edward Lehew (EL): Yeah.

Jennie Lehew (JL): We can hear you fine honey.

AL: Oh, perfect. All right. Well, with everything going on and our world right now it's a little hectic and I think we're all seeing something none of the generations currently living have experienced. And I was wondering what you guys, what do you know about the coronavirus?

JL: Well, I know they say it started in China and it's spread rapidly. Very contagious. I know they were working on a vaccine, but the funding was cut off in 2016. I don't if Grandpa knows anything different. [laughs]

EL: No, I just know you are supposed to keep your distance.

AL: That's right.

EL: Cause these idiots...

JL: Okay.

AL: Do you have a fear of catching the coronavirus?

JL: Well, actually we've been staying in so was just talking to him before, I, we haven't been all out this whole month except to run over to Kroger's and pick up our groceries.

AL: Yeah, that's definitely a different way to live.

EL: We have been wiping stuff off and everything.

JL: Yeah. Even the mail.

AL: Good.

JL: When I get the mail in I, you know, wipe everything off I use gloves to then go down and pick it up.

AL: Yeah. That's, that's good. It's definitely scary times. It's different. Do you feel like you are—pre—currently preparing for the virus or—have—were you already prepared?

JL: Well, I've always, you know, stocked up on items. I have plenty of things. I—I can, we could live for six months without even going out for groceries. [laughs] I have so much stocked up except for like milk and eggs, something like that.

EL: We don't have quite that much, but we got a lot.

JL: Yeah. [laughs]

AL: Do you think, you said you've always—pre—like had always stocked up on groceries. Do you know when you began doing that?

JL: I've always been doing that ever since we were married. I've always—I couldn't afford to get a lot then, but when they have sales and I had the money I'd always stock up.

AL: How long have you two been married?

JL: Uh, let's see. Since...

EL: 67 years.

JL: It'll be 67 years in April.

AL: Wow! That's—that's—amazing.

JL: Long time. Yeah.

AL: Uh huh! Do you think there, maybe, did you get this from maybe one of your parents as to why you stocked up on things or is there an experience in your life that happened that caused you to do this? Or does it just the incentive of sales?

JL: Well, I think, you know, our parents grew up—I mean—they were in the during the depression and I remember my mom saying that they ate a lot of rice. They couldn't afford anything else. And things like that, you know, I guess that rubbed off on me.

EL: Yeah. I was born in 30, in through the great depression. So, we were used to people being poor and not having much.

AL: All right. How do you think this pandemic will change society?

JL: Oh, my goodness. I hope it changes the people that, you know—that—they'll think more about their finances. [laughs] For one thing there's an awful lot of people getting laid off. And in fact, I heard this on the news 1700 people were laid off over in Cincinnati [Ohio] at city hall, the workers in that tonight.

EL: And I hope that people when they go to vote for people vote for people that they think can do a good job instead of just being...

JL: Out for their selves.

EL: Out for their selves.

AL: Yeah, definitely. I agree with that. Definitely. For sure. Is there anyone in your immediate family who's been laid off due to the coronavirus?

JL: No, not due to the coronavirus.

EL: Well, Steve [Lehew] was laid off.

JL: Well our son, but I don't think it's...

EL: I think...

JL: Business has been going down ever since Trump...

EL: Manufacturing...

JL: Trump got in.

EL: Yeah, Manufacturing...

JL: To tell you the truth they haven't sold any machines. The only work he was doing was going around fixing machines in different states and that—that—you know, but no, no new machines were bought.

EL: Yeah. When they put it, when you put it in the tariffs on steel and aluminum and that manufacturing jobs were really hurt.

AL: Okay. So, you think that your son Steve being laid off relates to the current presidential administration and not the virus?

JL: Yeah.

EL: Yes.

JL: Oh yeah, definitely.

EL: Definitely.

AL: Okay, interesting. Okay, well since I've asked you how do you think it will change society, what do you think will remain the same?

JL: I don't know I can't answer that. Just hopefully...What were you going to say Hank [Edward Lehw]?

EL: I just hope that when people vote they think more about who they're voting for and look into their past.

AL: Do you think—do you have enough faith in humanity that they would do that?

EL: I don't know, I...

JL: Any more you have to wonder.

EL: Well...

JL: You know, it's just what you see. [laughs]

EL: I'm just going to say this for a little bit, we just saw on the news this church in Louisiana packed with people and they're not making very good decisions. I mean packed!

JL: And after—in—Mardi Gras and all those people and there are so many cases of coronavirus down there wouldn't you think they would stay home! You know most of the churches around here that I knew of, you know—they don't—nobody goes anymore.

AL: That's good. I was just watching—we're in Kentucky and I don't know if you've been watching the governor, Andy Beshear, give his speech every day at five o'clock, but I was watching it today, and he actually was getting on some churches. I think he said it was Robinson County, about them not closing. And apparently his grandfather was the minister of one of these churches and he was telling the Kentucky citizens how disappointed he was. And...

EL: Yes, we finally got a governor with some brains.

JL: Well, it'll never recover if people don't do what they're supposed to do and stay away from one another. And you know, I mean, that's what causes it to...

EL: Well, I think...

JL: Go ahead...

EL: I think people were used to having the president run around saying it's a hoax and it was brought up by the news and that, and they've heard this so much that—they—if he would have been saying the right thing people would have been prepared for what happened, but running around calling it a hoax and blaming the news and that...I think he brought it on! It would of hit, but if we would have been prepared it wouldn't be as bad.

JL: I don't think Amanda wants us to be political.

AL: Oh no...

EL: That's not being political.

AL: I want you—sure—yeah—I want you to say what you're feeling and what you're thinking and any—I mean—yeah—I want you to say exactly that if that's what you're feeling and you believe, I think it's very important.

EL: Mmm hmm.

JL: Okay.

EL: Well that's not being political it means somebody should be doing the right thing and thinking before they say stupid things.

AL: So you think that if we had different president we could have prepared for the pandemic differently or been prepared for it differently?

EL: Yes I...

JL: Oh, yeah, definitely.

EL: Definitely. Well, I don't want to go into more on him, but could for hours. [AL laughs]

JL: Yeah. How much time do you have? [laughs]

AL: [laughs] You were talking about people experiencing financial loss—or like—I guess the government or Kentucky government experiencing financial losses, or people not being able to recover from that, do you think that our current government, be it Kentucky's government or federal government, do you think they can come up with other plans to help alleviate those issues for businesses and individuals?

EL: Oh, I think eventually they will recover, but it'll be slow. I just hope that Congress does a good job—and—and don't just go work for yourself. Work for the people.

AL: Yeah. I think that's definitely what we always want. I asked that question cause you both mentioned about preparation and that you learn these things or acquire this idea from the great depression and as I know part of like the great depression was the FDR New Deal and I was just kind of thinking do you think there is going to be something like that that's going to come after the pandemic.

EL: Oh no, I don't think it's going to get that bad. But I do think that if they do the right thing, I think everything will work out. But you got to have people that are doing the right thing.

JL: Use common sense.

EL: Yeah.

AL: Do you think—so—we can all agree that, you know, social distancing right now is, you know, how one of the ways we're handling the virus, do you think corporations are doing the right thing currently?

EL: Well I think they should of—they should of—been preparing in the beginning, and it wouldn't have been as bad as it is right now, but it will get over. But it's going to have to have people that do the right thing.

AL: Okay. What about—we'll start with grandma. Jeannie, [laughs] what other crises have you experienced in your life?

JL: Well, one of the most—I guess—devastating was when our little 21 month old—I think I told you about her Amanda—granddaughter died. She was—had meningitis and then three months later my father died and then three months later my grandmother died and then I guess about four months later, Karen [Swope], the baby's mother was in a bad accident and she had a car ran into her and she had her teeth knocked out—it was—you know, hurt. But it seemed like I walked around in a daze wondering, you know—what next—what was gonna happen next?

AL: How did you handle that? Like, how did you get through that?

JL: Well, at the time I was working, and I just got up and went to work and just took one day at a time. That's all you can do.

AL: Yeah. You mentioned your granddaughter died of meningitis. That is a disease that there's currently, and I don't know, probably ever will be a vaccine for so while it's not as—I guess common now for children to get it, it still happens. If they were to come out with a vaccine for the coronavirus do you think everyone should be required to get it?

JL: Oh yes. Oh my gosh, yes.

AL: Are there...

JL: Don't you?

AL: Oh yeah, for sure. Do you think—do you have no quarrels with anyone getting a vaccine that was created in a short period of time?

JL: You mean for the coronavirus?

AL: Yes.

JL: Oh no, I think, you know, they wouldn't—I'd have faith in the, you know, the scientists and all that it was safe, you know, to have it.

AL: Good. Are there any other...

JL: What do you think?

AL: Crises your life that have jumped out? What do I think? I—I definitely think that we should be required to get it, for sure, even if there is a chance that the long term effects—I think if we can, you know, save people from dying I think that's the most important thing.

JL: Yeah.

AL: Have you experienced any other crises in your life that stick out to you? Rather they be personal or political or maybe of a war?

JL: Well, several things, but there's nothing that was bad as that, and, you know that happening.

AL: For sure. Yeah. I can't—

JL: [inaudible]

AL: Yeah, I can't imagine.

JL: All of that happening within...

AL: Right.

JL: You know, within six, seven months.

AL: Did that cause you any anxiety?

JL: Oh yeah. [laughs] Yeah.

AL: Did you have any fears that could possibly like—that—anxiety make you feel like you were next kind of thing?

JL: No, but I just kept thinking what's going to happen next? Because it just seemed like every, you know, every other month [laughs] it seemed like there was something bad happening and after Karen was in that accident, you know, I thought, oh gosh, what's next? You know, but everything settled down after a while, but it's something you'll never.

AL: Definitely. All right. Edward, what about you? [Jeannie laughing] How has there been any crisis in your life that you've experienced?

EL: Yes. My mother died when I was nine months old. My brother and sister and I went to live with my grandmother who had six children of her own. My father was an alcoholic and wouldn't pay her any money, and then the 30s—the most—women could not go to court and get money from men. Back then they, and then—and when—in 1936 my grandfather had to go to the hospital for a hernia operation and died during operation. And I'm sure it was a foul up. And then when he died my grandmother only got a small pension. She couldn't take care of us. So about a year and a half later when I was about between eight and nine years old I had to go live with my father who was an alcoholic and his girlfriend and I lived with him until I graduated from high school and then joined the army. And it's no fun living with an alcoholic.

AL: I definitely can imagine that, man, considering where I'm social distancing right now, how do you think, since you've been in a situation before, how do you think kids who are currently living with parents who are alcoholics are getting by right now?

EL: Well, alcoholics they care nothing about their drinking. My father was not only an alcoholic he gambled all of his money on the races, but alcoholics never change.

AL: Do you—so currently with the coronavirus in the state of Kentucky they are keeping open liquor stores and alcohol is considered a life sustaining essential. Do you agree with that?

EL: Oh, I agree. I think people that smoke and drink their life expectancies going to be not as long and all these young ones that were vaping, they're in trouble too if they get that because

they've already damaged their lungs. You should always think of your health before you do anything. Jeannie and I have never smoked in our life.

AL: Do you agree with the Kentucky governor keeping liquor stores open as life-sustaining?

EL: Well, they're going to get their drink one way or another. So—you're—you're not going to stop it. You're not going to stop it. People that want to drink are gonna drink. They'll get it one way or another because if the liquor stores aren't open there'll be places where they can go and buy it. Believe me. That happened during prohibition when there were no liquor stores.

AL: Yeah. Do you think that might be one of the reasons why they're keeping it open and that they know it's just a losing battle?

EL: Oh, it's a losing battle if you try to keep him from getting it.

AL: Okay. You mentioned that you went to live with your grandmother after your mother died and so with you and your siblings plus her six children, how do you think single mothers are handling being stuck at home and with, you know, not being able to go anywhere. You have kids that, you know want to go to places and you have to go to the grocery store and they, you know, they're telling you just come by yourself to the grocery store. How do you think single mothers are handling this situation?

EL: Well, I feel sorry for women that are alone with children it's going to be hard. And I blame most of the problems on the men, not the women.

AL: Are there other crises in your life that stick out to you that you've experienced?

EL: No, but that was enough.

AL: Right No, definitely for sure! That was a lot. Do you remember either one of you, do you have any memories of the great depression since you were young children growing up during that time?

EL: Oh, the kids that lived on my street they were lucky, because they got something to eat—once a—once a day. And when I was in grade school they gave us a bean sandwich for lunch. During in the 30s, we got a bean sandwich. It was baked beans on bread. And that was your lunch. Although—we always—when I lived with my grandmother, we always had food cause my grandfather worked. Not everybody was out of work. But there were people, the kids that I played with that their parents didn't work and they had a really hard time!

JL: And also, one of his grandma's sons, his uncle, he had a grocery store.

EL: Yeah, he had grocery...

JL: So he would give him enough groceries. Give her enough groceries.

EL: Yeah. There used to be a lot, a lot of small grocery stores, a lot where it was just one person run it back in those days.

AL: Right.

EL: And they—they—had the public works that built roads, built parks in that and a lot of them worked for the government back then and would send money home to some of the people and where Wilder [Kentucky] is now, that was all hobo camps from hobos that rode the rails. My brother and I used to go and talk to them all the time.

AL: Interesting.

JL: Yeah. One thing I do remember is there used to be a hobo or a bum, we called him a bum [AL laughs] would come through our—the back door—the porch and want to know if he could have some food and my grandma was living with us then and she'd always fix him a meal and—I can—I was just a little kid, but I can still seem sitting there eating his—and sitting on the steps—eating his meal and then she—you wouldn't seem for maybe two weeks and then he come back and they asked for another meal. I guess he went around the different houses.

EL: There were so many of them amount of work that they'd ride the rails...

AL: Right.

EL: From places.

AL: It's actually what hobo means a train rider.

EL: If you want to learn a lot about the depression watch...there's a movie. What is that, member that one? That one with, Oh...

JL: I don't remember.

EL: I'll—oh, I can't think of it with Henry Fonda and...

JL: Oh yeah, that...They were Okies. Yeah.

EL: Yeah, the...

JL: Yeah.

EL: Yeah, yeah, about how they went to California to try to pick...

JL: It was *The Grapes of Wrath*.

EL: *The Grapes of Wrath!*

AL: Oh yeah!

EL: If you ever get a chance to see that you should see that. There's two movies that you should always see, it's is *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Inherit the Wind*.

AL: Okay.

JL: But I think I was born like just a bit when the depression was getting over.

EL: Yeah.

JL: I don't really remember...

EL: See...

JL: Know what I was told.

EL: I was three and a half years older than Jeannie. So, I can see I was around five and six and seven along were the people on our street we're really, really poor.

AL: I just—I—it makes me think that the great depression—like—I know you said you don't think the economy is going to get that bad...

EL: No.

AL: But it's just this, it is going, you know, it is affecting people's lives right now, especially because there are people who were forced to leave work, and so I think there are some connections between—maybe—not to the extent of the financial burden, but I think there is definitely some connections to what is happening now to then.

EL: Yeah.

AL: So, it's interesting. So, grandma, since you said you kinda grew up, I guess maybe more memories after the great depression, do you remember, and grandpa, I guess you were obviously there too, how was that economic boom where people were getting jobs and, you know, just getting back to life. Do you remember any—do you have any—memories from that time? And did you see—maybe—the people on your street who were poor kind of go up in the world at all?

EL: Well—it just—gradually, things got better and better, and better. But, it took time—and—but I do remember, you know, the people being so poor back in the 30s, it was really, really, really...

JL: Yeah I had a friend that lived across the street and they had nine children [AL laughs] and they were poor and I remember their mother would smear like a lard on their bread and they'd eat lard, you know, lard and bread.

EL: Yeah.

JL: That's what they'd have to eat.

EL: Yeah. Yeah. People—unless you're our age—what they have—like a—people losing jobs it's nothing like what it was in the 30s. Nothing!

AL: That's good.

JL: That's probably why I always—see—seeing my mom and you know, being so careful with—her with—the food and—and—her money and everything. That's probably why I always wanted to stock up on things and—and—I always—I worked and grandpa worked, but I always made it so that if something would happen to him, if he'd get laid off or I'd get laid off, I always made so if we—could we—didn't over spend. That we could live on one salary. And I know nowadays a lot of these younger ones both of them have to work, you know, they'll buy things and they have to work—but I always—I always made sure that if one of them, one of us couldn't work, we could always live on what the other one made—didn't overspend.

EL: No—we—we never bought anything we couldn't afford. Never!

AL: I think that's really good advice for anyone. I guess, do you have any final thoughts? Anything that I didn't ask—about—that you know about the coronavirus or you want to get off your chest about the coronavirus?

EL: No, I just think that it—could of—wouldn't be as bad—as it—when it was starting and they knew it was coming here and when it started coming—it a—made plans and—and—check the people coming into the country instead of just running around calling it a hoax it wouldn't have got this bad.

JL: And making sure they had the...

EL: Yes. Making...

JL: [inaudible]

EL: Making sure that they got the supplies they needed that the health people would of got their supplies. See when world War World II broke out Roosevelt had the—had the—automobile companies—within months making—within weeks even planning on making tanks and planes in that he got the country mobilized instead of running around acting like an idiot.

AL: I think that's a really good point. Do you know if—there was—there any laws or—I guess maybe—I don't know you call them, but like a team of people in the government whose job it was to, you know, do this kind of thing and the things for a pandemic?

EL: Well, see what real leaders do when emergencies come and they assemble the best minds they can get and get opinions from them—and—and work together instead of one person not paying attention to what health officials and other people say. That's the big difference.

AL: I think that's a really good point, cause I know right now one of the biggest issues is that hospitals don't have a test or they're not able to test everybody.

EL: Yeah.

JL: Yeah.

EL: Well—I don't—I can't think of anything else.

AL: Alright.

JL: Yeah, I can't either. I hope we helped you.

AL: Yup. I have a question for you Jeannie, cause I know you are actually doing something to help with the coronavirus. Would you tell me about—how—what you're doing to help and how that makes you feel?

JL: You mean making masks?

AL: Yes.

JL: Well Joann Fabric's—was—had the—they were—had the kits where you could get—they were giving them to—you—you could go out and get all the supplies—the—you know, the material and everything, but then they ran out. So, I wasn't able to get any. [laughs]

AL: Oh no!

JL: They didn't have any.

AL: Well, okay. Well and that makes a good point. They ran out of those and—do you know—you know, do you know why they ran out of those?

JL: Well—they had—I guess they had so many and they had, you know—all this—a lot of people and companies I guess donated the material and then they bagged it all up and got it already, but then there were so many people that when I called they were already out of the kits. So...

AL: Who are they—what are these kits for—like—who are they making these kits for? What are—like—these masks?

JL: Well, you know on one place I saw where the hospitals aren't accepting handmade mask, but then Aunt Patty [Nelson] said that Saint Elizabeth had—a—you know, on online, they sure had a

pattern and told you how you could do it. So, she made one and it was—I know you don't know much about sewing, Amanda [Lehew], but, there was—two pieces of material, the front and the back, and then the inside they were supposed to put flannel, and we both said, well—if there's three—you know, if there's three layers of material, how would they be able to breathe? But anyway, she made a couple and she gave them to Amy [Swope], because Amy might—you know, Amy's off now but then she might—have to go someplace, you know, cause she's a nurse practitioner and they must've called her and asked her how many feet warmers and how many different things that she already had. So, she's assuming that she'll probably have to go somewhere. So, at least she can use some of those masks, but that's all I know. You know, I'm willing to make them, but since they, you know, ran out of the kits...Maybe they'll get more. They might make more, you know, of...

AL: So, Saint Elizabeth is a hospital—sorry, Saint Elizabeth is a hospital and so—they're the ones who need the mask and it's in such demand that even kits for the public to help are also gone.

JL: Yeah. But I think most of the kits, the—just—people—the—you know, your average person is supposed to wear them. I don't think—there—the hospital can wear those, you know.

AL: Okay.

JL: I don't think they're the right kind. I think—if—it's like Rachel [Dickman] said it's—a certain kind of material that they're made out of. So...But—I—we couldn't understand how—the—it could be lined with flannel, because you know how that would be over your nose and mouth, that would be so thick. With three layers of...

AL: Oh, yeah!

JL: ...material.

AL: I already feel like I can't breathe with a regular one on. [laughs]

JL: Yeah. Yeah. [laughs] [inaudible]

AL: How does that make you feel that hospitals are in need of their medical equipment?

JL: How does it make me feel?

AL: Yeah—what does that—what does that make you think about? Like thinking that hospitals—are—have such a lack of supplies that the public is, you know, chipping into help?

JL: Well—I—I feel like it's the government's fault that they didn't have all this...

EL: And the government...

JL: To begin with—to begin with.

EL: They have the power to get companies to make things if they want to use their power.

JL: And then—what—was it that the world health organization that offered—I don't know how many—hundreds of thousands of—what was it—masks?

EL: Masks...

JL: Yeah.

EL: And test kits...

JL: And the government refused.

EL: Turned them down.

JL: They said they didn't need them—Said they didn't need them. That was about...

AL: How do you...

JL: Six weeks ago, I guess.

AL: Why do you think they refused them?

JL: I have no idea!

EL: Because...

JL: The moron we got in the White House.

EL: Moron.

AL: Yeah. Yeah, I don't know if I have any more questions. I think you guys have talked a lot about that... Actually, I think grandma, you made a point about—or might, yeah—that they have the power to have companies make these items and grandpa actually mentioned that during—I believe you said—World War II that the president had the automobile companies...

EL: Oh, they switched over real quick and were manufacturing [inaudible]...

AL: Do you think... Oh, sorry...

EL: But we had a person—a—really leader back then.

AL: Okay.

JL: Well, Amanda, is Jake [Silbersack]...Is his company making, you know, hand sanitizers because I—I—saw were several companies like that switched—in—their equipment and can make hand sanitizer?

AL: No, because his company doesn't actually brew alcohol or make alcohol.

JL: Oh.

AL: They just distribute it.

EL: Yeah. They have to...

AL: So, since they just distribute it, they can't.

EL: Yeah, you have to have the alcohol.

AL: Right.

EL: Okay.

AL: Yeah, I think that was a really good interview and I learned a lot and I thank you so much for taking the time out of your day to talk to me about this.

EL: Okay.

JL: Well I hope it helps. You know, like we didn't use some stupid answers. [laughs]

AL: [laughs] I don't think you gave any students answers. I don't think that's possible.

JL: [laughs] Ahh, honey, well thank you.

AL: You're welcome. I'm going to end the recording now.

EL: [inaudible]

JL: Okay. Love you honey.