Transcript of Interview with Ben Zakharov and Leia Hockstein by Each Other

Interviewer(s): Ben Zakharov and Leia Hockstein
Interviewee(s): Ben Zakharov and Leia Hockstein
Date: September 20, 2021
Location:

Abstract: Ben Zakharov and Leia Hockstein interview each other. Asking and answering questions about their experiences with the pandemic, family life, school life, and the social issues that go along with it.

Ben Zakharov 00:01
Hi, I'm Ben Zakharov, and it's September 20, 2021, 6:03pm. I consent to be interviewed.

Leia Hockstein 00:10
I'm Leia Hockstein, I also consent to be interviewed.

Ben Zakharov 00:16
Brilliant.

Leia Hockstein 00:18
Where were you when the stay at home orders were put in place?

Ben Zakharov 00:21
When the stay at home orders were enacted, I was at home. I was in my living room with my family. And we were watching the news, and sort of just seeing how it all played out. And, yeah, that's like, when it kind of hit that this was real and that we probably wouldn't be going back to school or work for a while. What about you?

Leia Hockstein 0:47
I was at school, and they piled my whole school into the auditorium, which we now know, does not work well with COVID.

Ben Zakharov 00:55
Probably a bad idea.

Leia Hockstein 00:56
And they said that we were closing school for the next two weeks and that we would be back after that for one week before spring break. And then everyone went home. And I called my parents and they said, "Yeah, you're not going back to school for the rest of the year."

Ben Zakharov 01:12
Nice.

Leia Hockstein 01:13

For sure.

Ben Zakharov 01:14
Wow.

Leia Hockstein 01:15
How did the pandemic affect your life and the people around you?

Ben Zakharov 01:20
My life, it kind of, you know, forced me to like be alone, like a lot of self-reflection, which didn't really have a choice, because it's what you do when you're alone. And it absolutely murdered my work ethic because school was entirely online. And for the first, like, for my junior year, which was when we first went online. The- There were no due dates on assignments, like there were, there were like somewhat due dates, but if you handed it in, after the due date, your teacher couldn't take late penalties on it. And the only incentive you had to hand in all your assignments on time, was if you handed in all of your assignments on time, then you would get two points added to your GPA, cause it is on a 100 point scale. So you'd get two points added to your GPA. So yeah, my junior year GPA was like a 95 or 96, which was 10 points higher than my freshman year. And yeah, so that absolutely. Just like, killed my work ethic. I forgot how to study I forgot how to learn. But I started cycling, which is a lot of fun. Started playing more tennis. And, yeah, what about you?

Leia Hockstein 2:50
COVID kind of blew up my life. Both of my parents are doctors. And so they would be at work before I woke up and still working by the time I went to bed. And I have a younger brother, so that meant I was helping him a lot because he's used to having a lot of help with homework and making dinner and that kind of thing. I also had online school, but only for junior year, and then senior year was in person. But because it's a lot easier, only 15 people would show up on a given day. So definitely limited social connection. And it like was very hard for my family because my parents did not know when we would return to normal. And then… did the pandemic worry you at first?

Ben Zakharov 3:42
At first, yes, well, actually, no, that's not true in the very, very beginning, no. It was definitely kind of spooky. Because our last day of school before, and we didn't know it was our last day of school, but it was our last day of school. And my friends and I just decided to go out one day after school, which we don't normally do. We normally do that on like Fridays, and this wasn't- I don't think it was a Friday, we decided to go out. And that evening, the governor issued a 50% capacity limit for restaurants. And so when we went to a restaurant, every restaurant was practically empty. And it was just really bizarre and kind of spooky. And yeah, it didn't really hit until sort of more information came out about the virus and more people were getting infected and it was spreading more rapidly. And [REDACTED], like [REDACTED] had cancer, [REDACTED] had a brain tumor. So basically my thinking for a year basically was that if they got COVID, they would die because there was no way that their bodies would take on what they took on and then about with COVID. And- and then it really hit when they ended up getting

COVID. And [REDACTED] ended up getting COVID. And I was the only person in my family who didn't get COVID.

Leia Hockstein 05:11
Did you have to isolate in your house?

Ben Zakharov 05:15
So we had to isolate in our house. So [REDACTED] tested positive. And then basically for like the entire month of December 2020, I was basically getting tested like, three, four times a week. And then about a week after she tested positive, [REDACTED] had tested positive. And like, we were in the like, testing room. Like in the doctor's office, and I got my test back, it was negative, [REDACTED] got her test back, it was negative. And then the doctor handed back the test to [REDACTED] said it was positive. And like, I just never felt that feeling before because [REDACTED] was feeling sick. But we thought it was just, you know, him coming down with something we didn't realize it was COVID. So when we heard it was COVID. That was like the first moment when I started thinking to myself, like, yeah, [REDACTED] might die. And then I was like, "Oh shit," because he [REDACTED]. So [REDACTED] might have COVID. And then, lo and behold, a week later, [REDACTED] had COVID. And I was somehow the only person who didn't get it. And I was in a car with [REDACTED] you know, I went with them every time they went to get tested, so I somehow didn't get it, which I'm very grateful for. But [REDACTED] ended up moving into my brother's room so she could isolate from [REDACTED]. And that room shares a wall with my room. So I had to, like, fall asleep every night to the sound of like, [REDACTED] just like coughing her guts out. And like, you know, like, hard to breathe and stuff. And it was just like, gut wrenching and awful. And, like, I had to go to school too. So I basically had to, like, you know, in our house, it was like, for like three weeks, just every man for himself. Like, we all had to like coordinate when we left our rooms because we couldn't interact. Every surface was wiped down. All the windows were open for airflow. So yeah, that was pretty crazy. And it was like in that moment that like, there was just a solid two weeks, where I thought [REDACTED] were gonna die, which kind of scary.

Leia Hockstein 07:24
Very lucky that everyone is okay.

Ben Zakharov 7:27
Yeah, yeah. And, you know, they both had pretty bad symptoms. So I'm like, you know, [REDACTED] was in my brother's room the whole day. So like, I would literally spend the whole day and like fall asleep to the sound of her coughing, which is awful. It's like seeing like a stray sick puppy on the side of the road. And there's nothing you can do about it because there was nothing I could do about it. There's nothing anybody could do about it. So it was awful. And like, in those weeks, was when it like really hit that like, this is-

Leia Hockstein 08:05
This is real.

Ben Zakharov 08:06

Like this is no longer. Like just something that happens to people who go out to parties, or are reckless, because we were incredibly safe. We like wiped down-

Leia Hockstein 08:19
So did we.

Ben Zakharov 08:19
Cloroxed all of our groceries. So the thought that this could happen was not really in our heads. And then it did. And we were like, "Okay, this is like, some scary shit."

Leia Hockstein 08:23
We had a similar response. But we were waiting for the day that we would get COVID. We, my parents had- were essential workers, were in and out of the house, and we changed clothes before coming in the door. But it was almost inevitable. And we didn't end up getting it. But at the beginning, I got home from school, and I was so excited. You know, school starts at 10, I don't have to wake up anymore. And it very quickly became apparent to me that that's not going to fly. And what can we do? Because you really can't do anything. But you got to do something, because now you have all this time. Yeah. Um, and then our next question is how do you feel about the national and global responses to the pandemic?

Ben Zakharov 09:22
National response — I think was awful. We were slow to respond. And in charge of our response was a pretty slow person. So that kind of- it was just very frustrating that, you know, person who's supposed to be a leader, although unsurprising but very frustrating, was not even challenging, just like straight up dismissing every single medical, professional, and medical, you know, government health organization's directives and advice and information and- then influenced, you know, ten's of millions of Americans to do the same thing. And it was just, like, very frustrating when like, we would want to go out to eat. And we would like, go to a restaurant and sit outside somewhere, and then a waiter would come over, and their mask would just be like, around their chin. And, you know, you can't- you can't engage or really say anything because it was public health at that point had been turned into like a political weapon. And so by engaging with somebody, you're then no longer attacking, you know, what choices they make that might influence the public's health, you're then now also attacking, you know, their established political beliefs and the, you know, the trends and beliefs of the political parties that they follow. And, you know, that normally goes hand in hand with their family's beliefs and their friends' beliefs often. And so you're challenging now, all of that by just telling somebody to pull their mask up. And it's all because of the leadership that we had. So that was kind of not- kind of extremely frustrating and annoying.

Leia Hockstein 11:36
Yeah, so you really touched on the political version of that question. I more noticed in terms of national response, you know, people had the option to ignore the pandemic, and make decisions that were not to the benefit of everyone's health. But there was also this rise to how can we help each other, and you see people making masks for each other, and people that are working so

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hard, you know, there were so many political movements at this time, there was a Black Lives Matter event and people that really wanted to come together because we were so isolated. And the people that weren't and seeing the two sides of that was really interesting and hard, because you can't do anything. And there is such a united front of the people that wouldn't wear a mask because it was an infringement on liberty. And we now know that that's scientifically wrong, that you can't do anything. We already touched on education. But how do you think that pandemic will shape you know, future schooling and future policy and honestly, our lives?

Ben Zakharov 12:43
Well, future schooling, I mean, it's just really brought online school, into the spotlight. And, you know, on center stage, and it's, you know, sort of, I think it's ingrained in a lot of people's minds that it's a suitable alternative for regular schooling. Which I think it's kind of unfortunate, and I don't think it's the case. And I don't think that, you know, hopefully, this trend dies down, because even though it's been happening for two years now, I'm hoping that most people see that there is zero substitute for in person learning. And I, I- yeah, I just hope that we don't accept or begin making the transition to, you know, incorporating more Zoom or online aspects of the classroom. And for our lives in general, I think people are just going to be more conscious of general public health, people are going to be more conscious of touching subway polls, and, you know, being near a person who coughs and stuff like that. And yeah, and just like, general trends in our daily lives, like, you know, we see a lot of restaurants that are no longer offering menus and just QR codes, which I think is, you know, from an environmental aspect, that's great. And for, like, from a digital revolution aspect, that's also great, because it's condensing and moving a lot of stuff into a more palatable and accessible format, which I like. So yeah, I think there was a lot of good and not as much bad that we'll see in the future.

Leia Hockstein 14:46
Yeah, I think there is, of course, good, but also COVID impacted everyone, but it also did kind of function on our poverty lines and people who lost their jobs and people who are now, if they didn't have access to a computer, they didn't have education at all, and there's just going to be a gap that's going to be really hard to come close because of COVID and inaccessibility to really, crucial resources, you know, a computer didn't used to be essential. And if everything goes online, it absolutely is and how do they catch up if you're already in a disadvantaged position? You know, unemployment runs out. And some people think it's a good thing because there is a lack of labor. But also, if someone doesn't have childcare, how are they going to be able to go into work? And unemployment running out? And I think that there's going to be it's going to create a gap in society that's going to take a long time to fix.

Ben Zakharov 15:50
Yeah. For sure. You know, the lack of labor's generally in bigger and wealthier cities where, like the soaring increases in property prices have made it so that you know, people want to work there, but they just can't afford to live there. So it's, you know, basically this positive feedback loop of, I can't afford to live here, but I can't live on a wage if I'm working somewhere else. And it's just- yeah, you just go down this like rabbit hole of-

Leia Hockstein 16:29
Absolutely.

Ben Zakharov 16:30
Just financial suffering. And that's something that the pandemic kind of exacerbated. Yeah.

[Background whispering, unintelligible.]

Ben Zakharov 16:40
Alright, Good-bye. [Good-bye is drawn out for several seconds.]