

Transcript of Interview with Gary Lato by Marcus Shilts

Interviewer: Marcus Shilts

Interviewee: Gary Lato

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Location (Interviewee): Stanley, Wisconsin

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Transcriber: Marcus Shilts

Abstract: This interview is done with Gary Lato who is 69 years old and has lived in Stanley, Wisconsin his whole life and he is a retired mailman of 34 years. Here I discuss with him how COVID has affected those around him in his community as well as how it has affected him. Primarily I am getting his thoughts on the entire issue, since he says he lives a mostly hermit lifestyle. During the interview he spoke as an observer to all these things going on in the community and what he is noticing from his perspective. From Gary's point of view as an older member of the community, he sees all this as something that is going to pass and just run its course. He also touches on how most in his area in the country are mainly just staying out of it and going about their lives as normal and not worrying about it in general. He also goes on to note how this is affecting people in a big way, due to there being restrictions on many aspects of life. He ends the interview with his own spiritual view, that if you have spiritual views may agree or disagree with.

Marcus Shilts 0:01

Today's date is April 23. And the time is, let's see, 7:25 P.M. So thank you for having me. And so can you give me your name and some basic information?

Gary Lato 0:15

Name is Garius Lato. I lived in Wisconsin, West Central Wisconsin, most of-, all of my life, and grew up on a farm. And back then, it was a lifestyle, and it was a good upbringing. I worked in the post office for 34 years, currently retired and enjoying the good life. Kinda in a nutshell, married, six kids. And, anyway..

Marcus Shilts 0:52

Going on pretty strong, then.

Gary Lato 0:55

So far.

Marcus Shilts 0:56

So far, yes. All right. So, you know, you lived in Stanley for most of your life. So you know, what would you say things have changed from, you know, then to how COVID is now?

Gary Lato 1:10

Well, the farming lifestyle, back then, growing up, everybody, all the farmers got around and helped each other, you know, harvesting, planting, whatever you had needs was just a good community. And growing up with a bigger family, the closeness back then, now everything seems distant, I don't know, kinda on your own type stuff. But back, back in the olden days, it was kind of real nice sense of community and stuff. People caring and helping each other. So a little different today.

Marcus Shilts 2:00

And well actually we'll be touching on that too, with the whole, you know, sense of community and bringing things together. So we'll put a pin in that; we'll get to that soon.

Gary Lato 2:08

Yeah. All right.

Marcus Shilts 2:09

So when you first learned of COVID, what were some of your initial thoughts on it?

Gary Lato 2:18

Well, I leaned to the conspiracy side, didn't think much of it, couldn't really grasp it all, but just the fact that it literally shut down the whole world. And I call it, "the fear of COVID," just kind of took over, and I don't know, couldn't wrap- couldn't get my head around it.

Marcus Shilts 2:45

And now that we're well into a year into it, how would you say, have your thoughts changed on that, have things been kinda the same?

Gary Lato 2:54

Well, we live in a small town territory, and it seems like it hasn't broken out here full-fledged. So I still lean to the fact that it's not real. And that's not true because I know people are dying, but it hasn't hit close to anybody I know. So it seems like it's out there, so to speak.

Marcus Shilts 3:30

And you know, with all these, you know, emergencies, with all these changes, any, as you said, you've realized that, you know, you're not seeing as much, you know, in the community, much people like, you know, as compared to back then, are those concerns have arisen from COVID? Like, do you have other concerns too, that have come from that?

Gary Lato 3:50

With the COVID issue and that?

Marcus Shilts 3:53

Yep.

Gary Lato 3:57

Not strictly COVID, but things seem to be oh, with technology and all this stuff, more of a distant relationships and technology minded, and COVID certainly has enhanced it because I, they said social distancing and all this, and so my lifestyle with COVID is almost turning to the hermit side almost. I mean, I'm not much of a social animal. But anyway, the separateness and stuff has kind of hit me, you know, whatever.

Marcus Shilts 4:46

And you know, that again, you know, being out in the country a lot now you're seeing, you know, you still see some of the farmers out there doing their thing, so you're able to, and with them, are you seeing much change with the farmers and whatnot?

Gary Lato 5:00

No, we're in a Mennonite community, and they stick to their business and don't, don't seem to get involved in that social squabbling, to throw in a word, that... anyway, you know just go on with business so to speak and deal with what comes up against us.

Marcus Shilts 5:30

And you know you're retired, you said so, have you noticed any big changes in your day to day activities and obviously you're not doing the mail work anymore so you're not quite as exposed but you know, you like to golf. You have your golf clubs here, you like to go fishing. Have you noticed any, like lack of, you know, golf partners or fishing partners at all?

Gary Lato 5:51

That hasn't changed a lot. Like I said, I've got a few friends that we're going to stick together no matter what. And that's, so my lifestyle really hasn't changed. But that's again because where I live, kind of out in the country in a small town, and I'm not much of a, like I said, a social animal.

Marcus Shilts 6:17

All right, but you know what, the few times you know, you've been to the bigger town Eau Claire, are the, I mean I imagine that's quite different from how it is here in Stanley, right?

Gary Laro 6:27

Yeah. Well, the mask thing, and I'm not a big proponent for that. I still can't grasp the fact that a little mask is going to stop a major pandemic. I mean, I get what the so-called experts out there are saying, but I just can't grasp the fact that... anyway.

Marcus Shilts 6:56

Yeah. And uh, you know, with the COVID and whatnot and its effects, you know, it does have more you know, we have seen, according to the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, we do see actually, you know, more of an effect on the elderly, you know, in your age group. Does that have any concerns like, with you and your friends too, you know, you have, you know, your golf buddies and whatnot. Fabric concern you guys at all like concerning...

Gary Lato 7:21

No, the group I hang with we're, again, on the older side, and, and my Dad, used to say "Well, you gotta die from something," so I guess, I am secure in my future. If this gets me, it gets me; that's kind of my mindset, and the gang that I hang around with.

Marcus Shilts 7:49

And, you know, with this mentality to, have you like, you know, go to church every Sunday and whatnot. So you're really involved in that how, like, how has that affected like, you know, your churches, you know, it's you know, about 40 was it?

Gary Lato 8:02

40 to 50. Yeah.

Marcus Shilts 8:03

How has that affected the church community because, you know, we saw during the flu pandemic in 1918, we saw churches shut down for a while and you know, we we're slowly getting back to that with you know, the vaccine and some you know, herd immunity, just people more or less being done with it. Um, how, how is your, how's your church been handling that and whatnot?

Gary Lato 8:25

Well, we, I guess we're gonna meet, even when it was going on we went virtual a couple of weeks in a row and finally we just said well, "God is God, and we're going to kind of trust in Him." So the faith side, we just decided, well, God can, God can handle us and keep us wherever this stands. I mean, but that's kinda... so our church kept gathering. We were not dumb and, I mean, we did our distancing and, and still managed to worship the Lord and meet.

Marcus Shilts 9:08

Things worked out still.

Gary Lato 9:10

Yeah, nobody, praise the Lord in our congregation, nobody has literally been attacked majorly by COVID. So however that works.

Marcus Shilts 9:26

In the church community and also, also curious like, you know, family wise, too, have you noticed any changes like when the family, I recall, you know, Tana, she wasn't really prone on showing up to Easter and all the other things.

Gary Lato 9:39

My one daughter, yeah, her one of her kids is a doctor, and she was adamant that you should probably, you know, go by the protocols set in place. So yeah, they decided to keep apart from the family, but I said I got six kids. And I said, come what may, we're gonna meet.

Marcus Shilts 10:09

And again, that worked out too as well?

Gary Lato 10:11

It did. Yeah. And that day we get together, but so called big events we gathered and, and nothing really, no setbacks.

Marcus Shilts 10:24

All right.

Gary Lato 10:25

And I know there's a lot of families out there where they can say that, but again, for us. So that leaves me with the fact that... I still can't grasp the totality of what's been going on for the last year.

Marcus Shilts 10:41

And, you know, that's, you know, that's also a concern to some people, because we see in, within Wisconsin, since, you know, again, according to the Wisconsin Department of Health Services we see, since COVID started, there have been 654,000 cases. And again, we're, you know, we're seeing, you know, but with this, we're only, we've seen about 6,725 have died. And, you know, that's still quite a bit of people. And, you know, I said it has more effect on the elderly. And with that, um, we see, there were never any concerns there like, when we were hearing about that, you know, the family just kinda know, nothing behind that?

Gary Lato 11:22

No. For me personally? No, I just, again, just didn't let it bother me, I just, uh "que sera" so to speak, you know, I don't know how else to say.

Marcus Shilts 11:47

And, you know, kind of going off, you know, at Tana not showing up having, you know, we're seeing a lot more separation. How do you, how do you think this has affected people, like, you know, both mental and in physical health, you know, this whole, along with COVID and the shutdowns because I know that you're saying, you know, we go back to that sense of community, people are always among each other and whatnot, you know, but now they're being you know, we're seeing mandates by the governor, you know, by Tony Evers out of federal setting, you know, we're seeing people, you know, have to be separate. And how do you think that's affected people?

Gary Lato 12:20

Oh profoundly. I mean, from total to what the experts say to total-, I wouldn't say outright denial, but just, you know, you, you get the pendulum swinging from left to right, all the way. I mean, every... what do you want to say?

Marcus Shilts 12:55

Every aspect?

Gary Lato 12:56

Yeah, every aspect of the human condition. I mean, from total denial to total, you know...

Marcus Shilts 13:06

With COVID, you know, we're seeing a lot of the, you know, these riots and whatnot, you know, I'm not gonna, I don't want to touch on that, but we're seeing a lot more unrest. Do you think that might have had any, something to do with it?

Gary Lato 13:19

So here's my little, so this COVID, then the mandating and protocols-

Marcus Shilts 13:27

People not being able to go to work, too.

Gary Lato 13:29

Right. So the fear of it, it just puts you in an invisible prison, so to speak, like you're

just like, you're in prison, you're, again, there's no bars or whatever like that, but just as seemingly, we can't do this, can't do that, which you can't I mean, a lot of places. So. Oh, yeah. Really affecting the human condition. so to speak.

Marcus Shilts 14:04

Yeah. And you know, with, you know, and I kind of want also to go back you know, you were a mailman for 35 years. So, you know, how do you think that might affect like, you know, because we're seeing, they're kind of bringing things back like the mail services, you know, your experience, expertise. How would you say that's probably affected like, the like, where you used to work? Do you think that's had a big effect on, do you still keep in contact with some of your coworkers that they still work there?

Gary Lato 14:32

There's one in particular that still works where I was, otherwise my core group is retired, but again, each person has different little views going, so no, I've kind of lost contact with my coworkers and stuff like that. But anyway, each person has their... has their deal.

Marcus Shilts 15:08

You're saying, you have been kind of a bit more secluded and whatnot to kind of keep things cut off but you're obviously still keeping mildly informed. What's been your like main source of information on all this?

Gary Lato 15:22

Well I've cut myself down to a half hour of the news so the less, the less... I'm not much of a news person, so the less you hear about all the so called turmoil out there, I guess the less that I let it bother me.

Marcus Shilts 15:48

I'm actually going to kind of come off that, I'm uh, you know, you're, you only watch a half hour, but have you, how do you feel the news is handling all this, you know, turmoil as you say, how do you think they're, reporting on it?

Gary Lato 16:03

Testy question. I don't like it because it seems to be all, they hype it up; "they" meaning the so called news people out there, and it just tends to get me riled, so I guess they could be more...

Marcus Shilts 16:27

Spread out?

Gary Lato 16:29

Subdued, I don't know what, what term to throw out there.

Marcus Shilts 16:34

Because we're kind of seeing, you know, when you look at the news, you're seeing you know, we're constantly seeing like a counter and all that like, you know, how many cases, how many deaths whatnot and with all this civil unrest, do you feel like they should, how they're handling that there is, they're riling it up, so to say?

Gary Lato 16:53

Which yes, they should keep you up to date on where the flare ups and stuff like that, but I don't know how to fix that. To be more... "sedate"? Is that a word?

Marcus Shilts 17:14

More toned down?

Gary Lato 17:16

Yeah.

Marcus Shilts 17:18

Doom and gloom so to say

Gary Lato 17:19

Yes, because again, it just gets you riled.

Marcus Shilts 17:26

All right. And, you know, with you know, and seeing how things are being handled, you know, how do you feel at the state government? Or, you know, with the mask mandate on, how do you think they've handled that, in your personal opinion? You kind of touched on it, you know, with the mask being a little...eh.

Gary Lato 17:46

Agree, we got to do something. But here's this mass pandemic. And the "powers that be" have to come up with something, but it just seems... too little against something so big.

Marcus Shilts 18:15

Do you feel that COVID is kinda, you know, it's kind of brought out some different sides to think you know, how, as you say, it's kind of seeing a lot of the human condition like you're seeing, you believe that we're, are we seeing more like, let me say like more upheaval?

Gary Lato 18:34

Well, again, you're seeing from the old gray outrages to total compliance, I mean, with, with the experts and what they suggest, but the variance between total almost a fight attitude against the, against do it, or else, you know, are you endangering many people So, anyway, the peer pressure aspect and all that...

Marcus Shilts 19:14

With things coming back, so to say, we're seeing a lot more now, we're seeing bars open back up, we're seeing restaurants being, you know, how do you feel about them, you know, things kind of returning to some sense of normalcy?

Gary Lato 19:27

I say, go for it. I mean, this COVID's gonna run its course. Open up and live life again, been too long.

Marcus Shilts 19:49

You think this will have any lasting effects on you know, everything, like the social distancing being more, you know, you're trying to be more safe from, you know, contracting diseases such as COVID and any other variants. Do you see that carrying over in any sense?

Gary Lato 20:07

Oh, I see it carrying on for maybe several years. Some people are just, well, this is definitely going to be in our well, like with this interview, it's gonna be in our core. It's gonna be in our core as long as we're alive. I mean, "remember 2020 and when COVID hit?" So I don't think it's gonna totally go away.

Marcus Shilts 20:35

And just wrapping up from this, I guess, how do you think that all this whole year and three months of COVID. How will this affect you in the long run? Like, you're gonna look back at this and, you know, with fondness or kind of look back at it with some...eh. What something you'll really take away from this?

Gary Lato 21:00

Disdain, that's not a good word. But no, again, I can't wrap all around it. I'm just like, many people just wish it would go away. And, say my lifestyle before this, you know, I'm not a total hermit, but my life really didn't change a lot. I mean, it stayed pretty much the same. So it hasn't impacted me in a great deal, but travel is still going to be a hurt. Well, anyway, just deal with it.

Marcus Shilts 21:48

Alright, and with that, you know, I think that's it. Thank you very much for the interview, Mr. Lato, and hopefully this all does clear over.

Gary Lato 21:56

I do have a little PS. So my, just one of my things I want to get out. Like what with the vaccinations. I currently don't think I'm going to get one. I go by my dad. He says, "Well, if it ain't broke, don't fix it." So that's my mantra there. Just one little thing I've come up with this whole COVID thing. The other one is kinda that you don't hear a whole lot about it. But since the so-called experts haven't found the origin of this, where this all started from, you know, they, I always thought they should be able to pin this down, how it came about. But I've got a spiritual aspect. In, in the Bible, it talks about when God tried to get the attention of his people when they were totally going bad. He threw out some pretty big warning signs. So it comes into my mind once in a while, the spiritual aspect, maybe this is a thing from God Himself. "Hey, remember me? I'm still God. And I want to get your attention." So that comes to my mind wants to know while and so however that fits. That's kind of it.

Marcus Shilts 23:39

All right. Thank you very much.

Gary Lato 23:41

You're welcome, sir.