

## **Transcript of Interview with Cecilia Joseph by Kit Heintzman**

**Interviewee:** Cecilia Joseph

**Interviewer:** Kit Heintzman

**Date:** 02/02/2022

**Location (Interviewee):** Houston, Texas

**Location (Interviewer):**

**Transcribed By:** Angelica S Ramos

### **Some of the things we spoke about included:**

Having a disabled son (right side paralyzed) on dialysis, changing dialysis procedures from pre- to mid-pandemic; medical advocacy; new COVID protocols in the hospital. Mother passed away in March 2021, not being allowed in an emergency room, no one comforted her as she was passing. Opted not to have a memorial service, being in a large family where travel would have been necessary. The stress of new higher stakes decisions over everyday tasks, like going for groceries or going for a walk. Being a social family staying home; not visiting another son; being a hugger. No crowds at all, very few gatherings at all; safety boundaries when there are visitors... masking + vaccination. Decisions from head office about working from home; stopping outreach work in the community for safety. First hearing about the pandemic preparing for a fundraiser: Beat the Odds Scholarship for high schools seniors; 5 students chosen to receive the scholarship, Zoom celebration; those students different experiences of college moving online and not getting the experience of going to campus; homeless students. The upcoming cold snap, and the cold snap that happened in March [Feb?] 2021; losing electricity for ~4 days; risks of going to a shelter; strategies of staying warm. Universal healthcare. The decision to become vaccinated, and communication with family; comparisons with the flu shot, as well as mandatory vaccines. Hope and uplifting narratives. The apathy of others, hoaxers.

### **Kit Heintzman 00:03**

Hello.

### **Cecilia Joseph 00:08**

Hi, this is Cecilia Joseph. Today is Thursday, February 3 2022.

### **Kit Heintzman 00:16**

And what time is it? And where are you?

### **Cecilia Joseph 00:19**

I am in Houston, Texas, and it is approximately 3:33.

### **Kit Heintzman 00:26**

And do you consent to having this interview recorded, digitally uploaded and publicly released under a Creative Commons license attribution noncommercial sharealike?

**Cecilia Joseph 00:39**

Yes, I consent.

**Kit Heintzman 00:42**

Would you please start by just telling whoever might find themselves listening to this a little bit about yourself and the place that you're speaking from?

**Cecilia Joseph 00:51**

I live in Houston, Texas, I am a, I call myself a seasoned Saint because I'm 60 plus 65. Plus, live at home with my husband, who is disabled and my son, one of my sons is disabled. And I work for a nonprofit agency that does chipping children's and Medicaid advocacy.

**Kit Heintzman 01:19**

Would you start by telling me a story about what it's been like being in the pandemic for you. So like think think of a moment that's been very pandemic life.

**Cecilia Joseph 01:33**

The biggest issue I have with this pandemic is that I, my disabled son is on dialysis. And our biggest concern is going to the dialysis unit, if there is the problem, while he is on the chair, I am unable to comfort him or get the facts firsthand because I'm not allowed on the unit. Now that the pandemic is in full swing of the only other issue, one thing only other issue. The other issue I have seen is my mom passed away approximately March of 2021. And because of the pandemic, we were not allowed in emergency rooms. So once you know I sent her in an ambulance, I was not allowed, the doctors had to come out and talk to me in you know, outside of the hospital, which I found pretty disconcerting, because, you know, she was unable to speak, nobody could talk to if it was just something that I had never seen that no, no family member was allowed to come in. And comfort your, your your, you know, your, in this case, my parents as she was passing, but I saw a lot of that in the hospital. And that's a big concern for me. I mean, I know the protocol, I understand the protocol. But I think something needed to be done where, you know, isolate everybody or isolate the family, you know, the family member in the patient. I don't know what could have been done better other than having me to wait outside of the hospital in order, you know, to get wait for an update from the doctors.

**Kit Heintzman 03:34**

Thank you so much for sharing that. I'll start with a follow up question about your mother and then go back to your son on dialysis. Would you be willing to say something about how COVID impacted the grieving process associated with that?

**Cecilia Joseph 03:56**

Well, for one, it hindered, I guess swinging my mother to rest. Because we weren't, you know, I opted not to have a memorial service. Because of the pandemic. We have a very large family. I have five siblings and my siblings are not necessarily all in the state of Texas, so they will have to travel as well as my oldest son, but because of the pandemic, we chose not to have a memorial service because we did not want to jeopardize anyone getting COVID and we had a lot of people who would want to have attended. But every place that we checked, you know you could only have x number and just as immediate family exceeded the number of people that could be in one room

and to me that was a big concern for us. And we had to figure out another way to honor my mother as well as lay her to rest properly.

**Kit Heintzman 05:13**

Thinking back to what you had said about your son on dialysis, would you be able to sort of compare and contrast what a day of dialysis treatment would have looked like pre pandemic to what it looks like now?

**Cecilia Joseph 05:29**

Oh, yeah, pre pandemic, I can take him in I, because my son is right weakness, he only has use of one arm and you know, he walks with a limp, because he's the right side of his, his body is paralyzed. So generally, I would take him in to the dialysis unit, and, you know, get his chair ready and prepare him for dialysis. So all the texts would have to do was insert the needles and start the machine. I'm not one to hover over him, but I like to see the process, from start to finish, I like to make sure that they are following the proper protocol to insert the needles in him, because he only has use of one arm. And if that his fistula is not functioning properly, or they stick him in correctly, at least I'm there to watch the see the process. Now, that's not feasible. Right now you can, you know, they, they allow me to go into the waiting area. And, you know, you have to do the temperature check. And it's, you know, they ask proper protocol, you know, COVID questions, but I have to be, I guess I have to muster up the strength to allow him to be taken to the back. And he has to pretty much try to do these things for himself, which is difficult being like weakness, he can, you know, that means you're strapped down with the one arm and he has, you know, there's no other arm to assist him with the needs that he has, I'm assuming, and I'm hoping that the texts that are in charge of him are doing the proper protocols. It's like, I like to see them done.

**Kit Heintzman 07:36**

I'm curious, what is the term pandemic come to mean to you?

**Cecilia Joseph 07:42**

Stress, like the stress, stress, because you, you have to change your whole way of thinking, you have to change your whole way of being. It's not easy to just go to the store, I have to think about the times that I go to the grocery store, or do I just call it an order, and just go pick it up? The pandemic has pretty much made things I won't, I guess I can say difficult, because your whole way of thinking of being about like, it's different. And I'm thinking about others, who if they're not wearing the mask, how, you know, do I infringe on them if I step away from them, because they're not wearing a mask. Those are the types of things that I think about. And then I think about folks who may not have the resources that I do, in terms of making sure that my family is cookies protected. Because we stay in our bubble, we stay in our bubble because we choose to stay in our bubble, but it also limits what we can do. There's no more walking just to be walking in the park or in the mall. I pretty much have told my family that's not an option for us. Because I have people who whose immune systems are compromised. So it's just a change. It's stressful in terms of everything has been changed. And you have to have a new normal and the new normal is really not working for me.

**Kit Heintzman 09:25**

Tell me about I know that some of this was embedded within your answer before but tell me a bit more about this new normal urine.

**Cecilia Joseph 09:34**

Um, we're I'm we're very social. We like to have visitors we like to visit we'd like to go places we'd like to take trips. But all of that has changed. So our new normal is we have to figure out a way to stay home and find entertainment within our own household. If that means we're streaming movies, or we're, you know, watching old DVDs, or playing board games, either this is the new normal for us. Because we we'd like to go, you know, I have a son that's in Fort Worth, we can't miss it. It's difficult. So, you know, now we zoom, we do a lot of drills, through

**Kit Heintzman 10:29**

what was the day to day life looking like pre pandemic for you

**Cecilia Joseph 10:35**

work outside the house every day. And you know, that's, I like, that's what I like, like going to work. And like, being in a room full of people who have my same like, we do a lot, I do a lot of outreach. So I'm not in the community as much or not in the community at all right now. Because it's pretty much shut down. But pre pandemic, you know, we we went to work, came home, did whatever we needed to do. But now it's a matter of thinking of, wait a minute, do I go out today? How many days a week have already been out? How much Lysol do I need to spray before I come back in the home? It's just different. It's just different.

**Kit Heintzman 11:32**

To the extent that you're comfortable sharing and you've already mentioned this in relationship to your mother and your son, what have your own experiences with healthcare and healthcare infrastructure been like, again, in the pre pandemic world? Trade revenue. What have your experiences with healthcare and healthcare, healthcare infrastructure been like for you pre pandemic?

**Cecilia Joseph 11:56**

Well, pre pandemic, we went our normal, you know, we took care of our health the same way we went to the doctor when we needed to go, we did whatever we needed to do. My son was on dialysis three times a week. So I made sure he got there, and he was comfortable and all of that good stuff. Right now. It's now that we're in the throes of the pandemic. I'm very cautious of what I can and cannot do. Where I can and cannot go and how many days of the week I can work outside of the home.

**Kit Heintzman 12:37**

Do you remember when you first heard about the pandemic?

**Cecilia Joseph 12:43**

Oh, yes, we were. In the middle of our fundraiser, we were getting ready for our fundraiser in our office. When we got the notice that everything was the city was shutting down, and that we could no longer have a meet in groups. And it came top down from our office basically, our national office telling us to shut down everything and that I needed to transition people to home to work.

**Kit Heintzman 13:19**

Could you say a little bit about what it is that you do what you were fundraising for, and how that decision to shut down may have impacted things like services.

**Cecilia Joseph 13:31**

We we work uh, well, I work for nonprofits, that does chipping children's Medicaid, the fundraiser we were getting ready to do is what we call our beat the odds, which is a scholarship program for high school seniors who have overcome some odds, the from sexual abuse to abandoned mental homelessness to whatever. We had picked our five students who are going to receive our scholarship and we were in the process, or we had just finished the process of interviews and picking our top winners. When we got the notice. Basically what it ended up from us doing is not having to celebrate that celebrate them like we normally do. We normally have a luncheon with 300 plus people in the room. And we talk about their odds, we give them the scholarships. The community celebrates them. We were not able to do that. For that year. What we ended up doing was putting together as quickly as we possibly could a zoom type event, which to me did not celebrate them like we generally celebrate them we would take them in the pre pandemic we would take them to Macy's for a shopping spree. We took them to lunch and we talked about what it's like going to college College and being a first generation college student, we were meeting with them, you know, quite a bit. But with the pandemic, we did all of this either over the phone, or on a zoom call, which did not have the same effect, we did not have that one on one time, or that touchy feely time that we like to bestow upon our students before we send them away to college. And unfortunately, three of the five did not experience college the first year because the college went virtual. So we had to figure out a way to talk them into being online looking at college from a different perspective, because they did not get to go to the college campus. They only were able to do college courses, online and at home in there. And then we had to worry about, we had a couple that were homeless, where would they stay because they were banking on being at the university, and having that dorm room as their new home. So we were scrambling, we had to figure out, what do we do with these kids who don't have a home, but have gotten this full ride to college. And we were fortunate enough to find families who could house the two that we had up until they were able to go to the college campus the next year.

**Kit Heintzman 16:37**

You remember your early sort of thoughts about the pandemic and emotional responses? Repeat that again. Do you remember your sort of early emotional responses to the pandemic? Hit your radar? How do you feel what were you thinking?

**Cecilia Joseph 16:56**

Try not to panic. Everybody was panicking around us. You know, the legislators because it was an IT people were unsure what the summit, families were unsure of how they were going to survive. I was okay. Because I'm a planner, I don't necessarily plan for a pandemic. But my house is plan to head because I have people who are sick. So I plan ahead, just in case anything happens. So I will know that my son is taken care of or there's things in my house and my, my husband and I and my other sons are taken care of. I'm a planner. So I wasn't really worried. My concern was what does this mean, going forward? And my biggest concern was what does this mean, about my son's dialysis? Because that's that typical lifeline. And once the dialysis center informed me that they would just they had a different protocol and that they were going to make sure that he had dialysis, knowing the pandemic. I have no worries.

**Kit Heintzman 18:15**

Would you tell me a bit about some of the sort of non COVID related political issues that have been on your mind since 2020? Through present?

**Cecilia Joseph 18:32**

What the biggest is this cold snap that we are about to happen right now, that happened in March of last year? Hopefully this doesn't happen again. Because you you're not you don't have a I didn't have a backup plan when you don't have electricity. And you know, the first thing they said was we'll go to a shelter, but going to a shelter is not conducive for me because of my son being on dialysis. Because my son's in his hip space. Being in not in his own house was an issue for him. I just didn't feel that the political climate took it as seriously as we took it. We were without electricity for almost four days. And we you know, we had to come up with creative ways to stay warm. But I just don't think the government took that into consideration. Luckily for me, no one passed away in my household or in my immediate family from this from this cold snap. I just I just thought that I just think that our leadership just did not put into you know, didn't didn't Consider the families that could struggle. And we were all struggling. It didn't matter if you had money or you didn't have money, if you didn't have electricity for four days, and it was below 30, then we will all it really didn't matter. But that was my biggest issue. I really believe that because the leadership just did not take the cold snap as seriously as they should have.

**Kit Heintzman 20:34**

May I asked what were some of the creative ways you stayed warm?

**Cecilia Joseph 20:38**

We made everybody stay in the bed. They got up only when needed to get up when they needed to eat. I pretty much did not sleep at night because I was afraid that my son would not be able to sleep during the night. He likes the cold but I don't think he liked it that cold. But we pretty much stayed warm. If you know during the day, we drove around the city to want to check on other folks in the family to make sure they were okay. And you know, we had heat in the car. But once the night fail, is when things got pretty harried. And once once you state you know once they got in, got into their I call it their cocoon. They were fine.

**Kit Heintzman 21:31**

I would love to hear what the word health means to you.

**Cecilia Joseph 21:35**

Help a health

**Kit Heintzman 21:37**

health

**Cecilia Joseph 21:42**

What does health mean to me? Hmm. First of all, it means having insurance. Since everybody doesn't have it being able to either visit via via the telehealth or being out I haven't. We haven't been because nobody sees us. Except you're on a zoom call have you know the telehealth. But having access is most important to me.

**Kit Heintzman 22:19**

What are some of the things that you want for your health and the health of others around you?

**Cecilia Joseph 22:26**

I would like this country to have universal health care. Because I think everybody should have access to health care regardless of what their economic status is. And that's what I see most. That's what I see most people suffer is

that they can't go to a doctor, they they can't just go to the emergency room because they don't have any health care. They have no way of getting it. They don't qualify for this or they don't qualify for that.

**Kit Heintzman 23:04**

May I ask what the words safety means to you? What what the word safety means to you?

**Cecilia Joseph 23:14**

I didn't understand you

**Kit Heintzman 23:17**

may ask what the words safety means to you.

**Cecilia Joseph 23:21**

Oh, safety? Oh, safety. Just what is this? Taking care of family. Taking care of city taking care of state being able to do what I need to do be able to move around without fear of someone harming harming me or my family.

**Kit Heintzman 23:48**

Thinking about the sort of narrow context of COVID How long have you been determining what actions feel safe and what actions don't feel safe for you?

**Cecilia Joseph 24:03**

Actions that don't feel safe for large crowds. And I don't go in them. I don't go to the grocery store. After Well, let's put it this way. I go to the grocery store when they open. So if they open it six, I'm there at six. And I'm gone by seven. I don't do crowds at all. I don't do large meetings. I don't do very, very few gatherings of more than five people because I know I need to stay safe because I don't need to bring COVID into my house.

**Kit Heintzman 24:42**

Thinking about your household. How have you been talking about your needs and boundaries around safety with the people you live with?

**Cecilia Joseph 24:53**

We pretty much don't go out. My son My son is on dialysis only leaves the home when is in Brighton on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. She doesn't do doctor appointments unless they're a mandatory that we come in. With my husband, we limit the number of visits he has. And we pretty much or in our own home, we are in our own cocoon. We and those who do come in have to be masked. I do ask the question, Are you vaccinated? And I asked that all people who come in, you know, they either sanitize and wear masks upon entering my home, and it's only because of my son and my husband, who's, you know, whose health is compromised?

**Kit Heintzman 25:48**

I'd like to ask gently how you respond to people's answers to the question yes or no? Have you been vaccinated?

**Cecilia Joseph 25:58**

If they tell me no, then I tell them, they can't come in. And they have to respect that I will come outside and talk to you six feet away from me. But that's about all I'm going to give you. If you are not vaccinated, you are not

allowed to come into my home, you are not allowed to invade my space. And most people who know me know that I have a son, that's competence. immune system is compromised. My son has been on dialysis, or more than 10 years. So they are well aware that he is foremost in my psyche, he's, you know, he's the first person that I have to worry about. And I have no qualms about asking the person not to come into my home. And I'm don't have a problem with saying if you you know, even if you're vaccinated, I need you to be mad. And I don't have a problem spraying you would lie. So all of giving you hand sanitizer or offering you a mat

**Kit Heintzman 27:05**

I'd love to hear about what informed your decisions around vaccination.

**Cecilia Joseph 27:14**

Oh, we've just been vaccinated all of our life I have no, if the government says I'm supposed to be vaccinated, I'm gonna get vaccinated. I don't question what's in it. I don't question why I should. Because I'm in the middle of our the country's in the middle of a pandemic, and people are dying. I don't want that on my conscious. So meat for me in my household, we will you know, we will take the proper steps. If the government says you need to have this done. And this is what we do. My one of my youngest son, fought me tooth and nail about being vaccinated, but he altered it. And it was it didn't have anything to do with the COVID or whatever. It's just that he didn't want to have a shot. But he also knew that me is his mother. We have somebody in our household whose system is compromised, we have to be vaccinated is you know, it's not like the pneumonia shot or the flu shot where you have the option to do it or not do it. This was mandatory. If this was mandatory for us to do it, then we will get it done. But I had no qualms about taking the vaccine.

**Kit Heintzman 28:37**

If you're comfortable, and I really mean if like you really don't have to. Would you be willing to say more about what the conversations with your son who was resistant to vaccination look like?

**Cecilia Joseph 28:50**

Well, he didn't resist. He just said my shot. He does dumb. He just doesn't like needles. His mother doesn't like needles, either. But he also even though he's a grown up, because he's 27. He understand I understood that he didn't like shots because he's never liked shots, even when he was little. And I told him, it is not a problem that you don't like shots. It's not something that we can play with. I would rather you complain about taking a shot than being on a ventilator later. And once and people were dying and people that he knew who did not take the vaccine who would feel to get vaccinated. Got COVID Luckily for them, they did not pass away, but they were so sick. And then now they weren't you know, trying to figure out well, if you know this should have woulda coulda. We don't. I'm not going through that. This if you live in this house. This is the protocol that we will follow in This house. And in that included my immediate family that included my siblings. And all I made everybody do the same thing. We didn't balk at getting vaccinated when we were little. Why should you do that? Now?

**Kit Heintzman 30:18**

You've mentioned your husband a few times. And I'd like to ask if you have anything to say about what partnership has been like, during the pandemic?

**Cecilia Joseph 30:28**



Well, he's been ill. So he is a diabetic. And he has had a bout with pneumonia. So he's pretty much you know, just following my protocol, whatever I say do what he has to do. Because I'm the caregiver right now for him and, and our son.

**Kit Heintzman 30:53**

How are you feeling about the immediate future?

**Cecilia Joseph 30:59**

Um, I'm hopeful. I'm hopeful that enough folks will become vaccinated. And will this, this pandemic will ease up? But I am very hopeful

**Kit Heintzman 31:19**

what are some of the things that you want for a longer term future?

**Cecilia Joseph 31:27**

Um, to continue to be healthy, to continue to, for folks to understand the need for the vaccinations and understand that COVID is real. I do have some, I do know a lot of naysayers. Who don't think COVID is real. I think it's a government hoax. But I just need, I just want to be healthy, I want to be healthy and be able to go and enjoy my grandchildren. As they grew up, I don't want to have to always be afraid of the next pandemic around the corner.

**Kit Heintzman 32:11**

Do you think we at whatever collective we is, have learned anything from the pandemic?

**Cecilia Joseph 32:20**

Mmm hmm. I think some have lurch. And some are learning that everything is not a hoax. That when people you know, when you have this many people contracting the COVID. It's not something that we should play with that we need to pay attention. Quicker, you know, a lot faster than we did. I think a lot of people took for granted that, oh, this is it's not us, it's not going to be me, it's not going to affect anybody in my family, I'm not going to get COVID I think folks have to realize they need to see things with both eyes. And understand that COVID is real COVID is not something to play with. Because I've seen people on ventilators. And I've seen people not come off of the ventilator. And we had a lot of people that may not have been in your immediate circle. But a lot of people that and it didn't just affect the United States, it affects the world. And I think that's something folks need to pay attention to.

**Kit Heintzman 33:40**

You've mentioned extending care to people in your family. I'm wondering about what kinds of ways you've been taking care of yourself during the pandemic.

**Cecilia Joseph 33:53**

Well, I'm an avid reader. So I read a lot and I had to stop reading all about COVID I haven't stopped reading that and stop reading what other people see it. But I like to read, I don't garden, I don't garden I make a lot of crap. And I talk a lot to my friends who you know, we even though we have not been able to meet in and being in the same space with each other. We've learned how to take care of each other through zoom calls. I've taught my my Well my mother who passed away now but how to get on Zoom and call my son to talk to her great

grandchildren. So we you know, we come up with creative ways for all of us to be taken care of and to make sure that our headspace is good. I I love reading. So a good book, in a quiet corner will just sue me all day long.

**Kit Heintzman 34:57**

What have been some of the good books you've been reading?

**Cecilia Joseph 35:01**

Right now I'm into all things Sydney 48. Don't ask me why? Because I don't know. But I've been reading, rereading a lot of Maya Angelou. And what else? Have I been reading some James Baldwin? And it just depends on what's what's in my, what's on my shelf right now, what's something I haven't picked up in 10 years. And that's basically what I've done is just go back and reread some of the stuff that I hadn't read in here.

**Kit Heintzman 35:39**

May I ask how your relationship to touch has changed over the course of the pandemic?

**Cecilia Joseph 35:45**

To touch? Yes, it depends on my immediate cause. I love them to death, I will, I will hug you. But I will also spray you and give you some hand sanitizer before you. For other people, I don't we you know, we fist pump or we elbow pump, but we don't hook and I'm a hugger for by nature. So it's very difficult for me not to just walk up and hook folks that I haven't seen in a while.

**Kit Heintzman 36:28**

This is my second last question. And it's a bit funny. So we know we're in this moment where all of this biomedical research is happening, right? Like it has to be for us to understand the virus for us to create vaccines, all of this scientific work needs to be done. COVID is also a moment where all humans are impacted socially. And personally. I'm wondering what you think people in the humanities and the social sciences can be doing right now, to help us understand the human side of the pandemic?

**Cecilia Joseph 37:06**

They just need to talk about it. I think it I think they need to come out and say yes, it's real. Yes, you need to do this. Yes, you need to do that. No, you don't have to do that. But you can do this. It just needs to be talked about. They need to make sure the narrative and that the narrative stays the same. It needs to be uplifting, but we need to hear it from everybody. Everybody needs to talk about it.

**Kit Heintzman 37:42**

And this is my last question. So I'm a historian. This is an oral history interview. And, as a historian, I am constantly encountering all of these chasms, right like these places where stories don't get told because there's no archives that documents them. So stories can hold. I'm wondering thinking about not just what stories are important, but also like the tragedy of which stories get forgotten. If you could speak to some imagined historian in the future. What kinds of stories would you tell them needs to be remembered about this moment and cannot be lost?

**Cecilia Joseph 38:30**

How apathetic some people were. And to make folks understand that COVID is real. We have a lot of folks who don't believe that it you know, until it happened to them, or to somebody in their immediate family, that this was a made up pandemic. And I don't know what purpose it was going to serve to put us all in a pandemic. But there are those who feel that this was just made up. It's a story that needs to be told. So it will not happen again, that when this type when it when it affects everybody in the world. Everybody needs to pay attention. You may have your own disbelief, that it's not real. But I don't think it should be voiced. Unless you have all the facts.

**Kit Heintzman 39:34**

Want to thank you so much for the beauty and honesty of your answers. And those are all of my questions. But I would like to take this moment to invite you if there's something you'd like to say that my questions haven't facilitated about, either the pandemic itself or life 2020 To present to please say So now

**Cecilia Joseph 40:02**

no I your questions have been right on boy I appreciate you I appreciate being part of it

**Kit Heintzman 40:09**

I'm very grateful to you as well thank you