

Transcript Interview with Joseph Giangreco-Marotta by Ashley Tibollo

Interviewee: Joseph Giangreco-Marotta

Interviewer: Ashley Tibollo

Date: 07/09/2021

Location (Interviewee): between Buffalo, New York and Watkins Glen, New York

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Abstract: Wife interviews husband about COVID-19 thoughts and experiences.

Ashley Tibollo 0:01

We are recording my name is Ashley Tibollo. I am here with my husband, Joseph Giangreco Marotta. The date is July 9 2021. The time is 1:10pm. We are in our car on the road between Buffalo, New York and Watkins Glen, New York. Joe, I want to briefly review the informed consent and deed of gift with you. This interview is for the COVID-19 oral history project with which is associated with the Journal of the Plague Year a COVID-19 archive. The COVID-19 Oral History Project is a rapid response oral history focused on archiving the lived experience of the COVID-19 epidemic. We have designed this project so that professional researchers and the broader public can create and upload their oral histories to our open access and open source database. This study will help us collect narratives and understandings about COVID-19 as well as help us better understand the impacts of the pandemic over time. The recordings, demographic information and the verbatim transcripts will be deposited in the Journal of the Plague Year a COVID-19 Archive in the Indiana University Library System for the use of researchers and the general public. Do you have any questions about the project that I can answer?

Joseph Giangreco-Marotta 1:32

None at this time.

Ashley Tibollo 1:34

Taking part in this study is voluntary you may choose not to take part or you may leave this study at any time. Leaving the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled, your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your current or future relations with Indiana University or IUPUI Why are the IUPUI Arts and Humanities Institute. Participating in this project means that your interview will be recorded and digital video and/or audio format and may be transcribed the recordings and possible transcriptions of my interview copies of any supplementary documents or additional photos that you wish to share and the informed consent and deed of gift may be deposited in the Journal of the Plague Year a COVID-19 archive in the Indiana University Library System and will

be available to both researchers and the general public. Your name and other means of identification will not be confidential. Would you please offer a verbal confirmation that you understand and agree to these terms?

Joseph Giangreco-Marotta 2:41

Yes, I do. I agree.

Ashley Tibollo 2:45

Okay, great. So let's get started. Can you please state your name?

Joseph Giangreco-Marotta 2:52

Joseph Thomas Giangreco-Marotta

Ashley Tibollo 2:56

And the date and time

Joseph Giangreco-Marotta 2:59

July 9, at approximately 1:15.

Ashley Tibollo 3:04

Yeah. So what are the primary things you do on a day to day basis, for example, your job or extracurricular activities.

Joseph Giangreco-Marotta 3:18

My primary job is mechanical engineer at a company in East Aurora, New York, I work at a typical kind of eight to five work day. And in addition to that, I have a side business that I do upholstery work. And I do that, typically nights and weekends as time permits. Obviously, I also help to take care of family. And you know those responsibilities, obviously take that amount of time as well.

Ashley Tibollo 4:02

Where do you live? And what is it like to live there?

Joseph Giangreco-Marotta 4:07

I live in Williamsville, New York. In terms of what is it like to live there? I don't know. It's a bit of an older neighborhood. Very quiet. I would say. When I say an older neighborhood, I mean in the sense that there's a number of older families that have been there for a long period of time, maybe the original owners of the house. And then there are some new families that are moving into these houses. But that's what the neighborhood is like. I don't know it's pretty quiet neighborhood, frankly.

Ashley Tibollo 4:54

Urban, suburban, rural?

Joseph Giangreco-Marotta 4:57

Suburban.

Ashley Tibollo 5:01

When you first learned about COVID-19, what were your thoughts about it? And how have they changed since then?

Joseph Giangreco-Marotta 5:10

So I first learned about it because of co-workers. I was working on a project with a Chinese company. And I had a number of co-workers who were planning trips to China shortly after the New Year, if I'm not mistaken. Sure, they don't have in January 2020. And they had flights being canceled and things as a result of what was happening. I'd say that was when I first really learned about what was going on. My thoughts at the time, I mean, I recall, again, a lot of this was conversations with co-workers. So I recall having discussions about, you know, risks, and, you know, very early information. I mean, it stayed relatively consistent. But I'd say, I remember early on there being a lot of discussion around the primary people who are impacted were older people, right. And I'm younger, right? And so I was not terribly concerned, I distinctly remember a conversation with a co worker, where I, you know, I said, I'm not terribly concerned about myself, and he had older parents, and a grandparent, I should say, you know, and so he was very concerned about that. And I guess I hadn't originally thought of it from that perspective. So I say, pretty early on my mindset changed there being more concerned about other people and the impact on them, despite the fact that I don't know, I've, you know, it's, it's maintained pretty much all the way through, I should say that it wasn't really the most dangerous thing for younger healthy people. Yeah, does that, I think that answers the question.

Ashley Tibollo 7:21

Yeah. And what issues have most concerned about the covid 19 pandemic?

Joseph Giangreco-Marotta 7:33

So, you know, there are a lot of things that concern me. I guess I'll start by thinking about obviously, there are health concerns, as I previously mentioned, particularly for older family members, and, you know, people who have pre existing conditions that concerns me. I'm not. Nevermind, I apologize. So I had concerns there. I also had a lot of concerns from a economic perspective, you know, I mean, there were, there was a lot of slowdown at my job for a while, didn't impact me as much as other people. But, you know, anytime that there's an economic slowdown, that's concerning to me. And so the long term effects of that were concerned and, you know, to some extent, still our concern.

Ashley Tibollo 8:48

Did the covid 19 pandemic affect the employment of people? You know, Sanders was stable, but if so, ways.

Joseph Giangreco-Marotta 8:59

So, I mean, my dad was certainly impacted. He's, his primary job is that he's, you know, he's self employed and owns his own business. He certainly had a tremendous reduction in you know, the summer of 2020. In his job,

Ashley Tibollo 9:22

Then what is it that he does?

Joseph Giangreco-Marotta 9:26

He owns a business that he does service for, primarily for the marine industry, detailing boats. In the winter, he you know, winterizes, those boats, preps them in the summer for people. So there was a big slowdown there. He was heavily impacted. You know, I've had conversations with my parents about the, you know, financial impact on them as a result of that. Thankfully, you know, none of my direct co workers in my facility were directly impacted. I certainly know of people in, you know, overseas, Italy, India, that type of thing, where there were some people who were temporarily laid off, didn't impact me directly. Like I said, my job was always very busy. Yeah, and I mean, I have a relatively small social network of people. So thankfully, within that group, I don't know of anyone who was tremendously impacted in the sense of they lost their job, or they quit their job or something. But I know that that did happen to a lot of other people, for sure.

Ashley Tibollo 10:47

And let's switch from your employment to family and household. How has COVID-19 affected you and your family's day to day activities? Or has it?

Joseph Giangreco-Marotta 11:02

You say currently, or during the, like, the worst part of the pandemic?

Ashley Tibollo 11:09

Either. Both.

Joseph Giangreco-Marotta 11:12

So, you know, I'd say, for the majority, well, I'd say for the majority of 2020, I worked from home. Starting in March, basically, I did go in occasionally over the summer, one or two days a week, if I recall correctly. But, you know, as a result of working from home, that, you know, that clearly impacted day to day experiences, right, you know, I didn't, we didn't go into work, I would work from home. After Charlotte started going to school, Charlotte's our daughter, after she started going to school, you know, there was a there was certainly more more of a demand for, you know, being more self sufficient, as a, you know, family of the three of us, I should say, I don't think that we depended nearly as much on parents or grandparents, things like that, to help with things because of trying to limit interactions. And then, you know, that since gotten a

lot less, you know, restrictive, I think both your parents so my parents were are no longer nearly as concerned at the moment because everyone has gotten vaccinated. And then in terms of current impact. I mean, there's a fairly minimal current impact at the moment, I still am wearing masks at work, for instance, but it's not required anymore. It's optional for people who've been vaccinated. Think I still minimize going in certain places and doing certain things but not nearly to the extent and before.

Ashley Tibollo 13:31

And what, what did you and your family, our family do for recreation during COVID-19, particularly during the worst parts of it?

Joseph Giangreco-Marotta 13:44

I had a lot of fun doing puzzles.

Ashley Tibollo 14:14

Okay, sorry about that pause. We were just about to talk about what you and our family have done for recreation during COVID-19, particularly during the worst parts of it.

Joseph Giangreco-Marotta 14:30

So, like I mentioned, I recall we did puzzles was something that we did for sure. I did a renovation project, I redid a bathroom. I know it's not really recreation, but it's recreation for me. We also as the weather started getting better, I'd say after like the Easter timeframe, we started taking the dogs for walks when the weather was nice. We, we did some outside activities that I think we otherwise wouldn't have done. You know, just because we weren't going and doing indoor activities. Those things included, you know, we would go to parks or things or I think...I don't think I ever really convinced you to go for a bike ride. But Charlotte and I tried to do some more bike riding, those types of things. Charlotte got a scooter. So we did some scooter rides and so forth. You know, those were the type of things. Additionally, I mean, I remember there was, there was certainly some time in between, let's say, April, and maybe June, where I wasn't terribly busy from an upholstery standpoint. We watch more television at night, and then I think we ever did for a while. So that was sort of recreation as well.

Ashley Tibollo 16:28

Okay, and how do you think COVID-19 has affected your community?

Joseph Giangreco-Marotta 16:42

Well, I mean, I guess, when you say community, I tend to think of like our, you know, the people that we interact with. But then I also think of the city as a whole or, you know, town as a whole. So the people that we interact with, I think that, like that community of people. For sure, there was a lot of fear and things for a while. And I think some of that is still lingering. I think that there's a fair bit of division that resulted. And I think that that's still being worked through and the larger community. You know, there was, of course, a lot of, like, political differences, we'll say, between groups of people, that was particularly obvious to me with people that I work

with, where there was certainly a lot of people who chose to, you know, minimize COVID in general, and, you know, think it almost not real to some extent, and I think that we still have, and we'll probably be dealing with that at a community as a larger community, I should say, for an extended period of time, because I think that's, that's not going away anytime soon, unfortunately.

Ashley Tibollo 18:16

Why do you think those people felt that way? That COVID was fake, or a hoax or just not nearly as devastating as it was made out to be?

Joseph Giangreco-Marotta 18:30

Well, I think that you have a lot of people who, you know, clearly we're influenced by the politics of it. Right? You know, I think we can't underestimate or we can't forget about the impact of, you know, Trump as a president and the way that he handled things early on, and of course, the polarizing nature of him even Well, before COVID. Right. So I think that you had a lot of people not to generalize, but who are supporters of him who, you know, just took what he said, and didn't really critically think about anything else that was going on. And that just continued. So I think there's that. I think you also have, you know, people who might be somewhat like me in the sense that they, you know, aren't immediately impacted. Their job wasn't impacted. You know, their co-workers weren't impacted. They didn't see a family member who may have died or, you know, have friends or things who had lots of people who have gotten sick or were very sick. And so it's easy then to just say, well, it doesn't impact me. I don't see it. It's not real. I think you know, I'm not saying that my opinion, that's how I see things. But I could see how you if you were in my position, and you didn't see people, or know people who were really, really impacted or who became very, very sick or who died, you might choose to not believe it.

Ashley Tibollo 20:19

Didn't you have coworkers overseas in India and Italy who had some problems with COVID? either personally or with their families?

Joseph Giangreco-Marotta 20:29

Sure. Yeah. I mean, there's still continues to be I mean, I have co workers in India who are still working from home. And, you know, things have gotten a lot better in India in the last month and a half or two, really, but yeah, for sure that, you know, I know of colleague, Italian colleague, who lost both of his parents. So yeah, I mean, for sure. I've seen that.

Ashley Tibollo 21:02

And more so than just COVID-19 affecting people's health itself. But what in what ways do you think the pandemic in general has affected or is affecting people's mental or physical health?

Joseph Giangreco-Marotta 21:21

I mean, I can, I can certainly see how people who are much more extroverted than I am, would

be very uncomfortable, being unable or unable, I guess, is the right word to really interact with other people. How that would take a tremendous toll mentally, I mean, it's not hard, you know, if you listen to news stories and things, for instance, I listened to NPR fairly frequently. For a while they were talking an awful lot about mental health. And, you know, they have interviews with lots of people who have personally, you know, said that there, they've had to change the way that they behave and change the things that they do find other ways to keep their mind occupied. You know, I think that there are a lot of people who are mentally impacted by being alone, right. I mean, I'm, I'm lucky in the sense that I have, you know, my wife, you and Charlotte, our daughter. And so even though we were, you know, quarantining and by ourselves for extended periods of time, we weren't really alone. You know, if you were alone by yourself and didn't have that group of people to interact with that could certainly be very taxing.

Ashley Tibollo 22:51

And you mentioned that you listened to NPR? Was that your primary source of news during the pandemic? Or did you have multiple sources of news.

Joseph Giangreco-Marotta 23:02

I would say for sure, NPR was by far and away. My primary source of news. You know, especially early on, it was something to listen to the daily press briefings from Andrew Cuomo, those were broadcast on NPR for a while. And even after they were no longer broadcast there, I would still seek those out to some extent. Same thing with the local Mark Poloncarz would do a press conference occasionally, as well, to talk about what's going on those were also sources of information. I definitely did not use any other, like web based news sources, like, you know, a lot of people, you know, look for news on Facebook or things like that, like that was definitely not even, not even on my radar from a news source. And I don't personally watch a lot of TV or cable TV. So I didn't use that as a news source either.

Ashley Tibollo 24:17

You mentioned listening to the press conferences of Poloncarz and Cuomo. How do you feel our local and state governments handled the pandemic?

Joseph Giangreco-Marotta 24:31

I think reasonably well. I mean, it's not a easy situation, of course. You know, state government, obviously, very early on was heavily focused on things in New York City because of what happened there early on. I think things were done reasonably well. There were some things that I was frustrated with some things that I thought were done well, but on the whole

Ashley Tibollo 25:00

Can you be more specific about the things you found frustrating and the things that you thought they did?

Joseph Giangreco-Marotta 25:06

Sure. So one thing in particular, that I found to be frustrating. For a while, there were these

state guidelines for red and orange and yellow zones. I think those were the colors, I could be mistaken. But there was a definition given for what those zones meant. And then those definitions seem to be absolutely useless. When it came to applying the zone colors. I remember, Erie County, had relatively high hospitalization rates and new case rates. And you know, there were a few press conferences, where it was okay, we are in this yellow zone. And it means this. And, by the definition, as I understood it, we were easily within to the zone that, you know, would have mandated more strict lockdowns and yet there was a hesitancy or, you know, after the fact, I think there was some other qualifying criteria that was either, I don't want to say made up or announced or whatever. But, you know, my opinion based on what I was being, you know, what I was finding positivity rates and hospitalization rates there, there should have been no reason not to place the county in a higher lockdown category than it was in other than the fact that people were afraid of the political ramifications or the economic ramifications of it and weren't considering in my opinion, as much the health ramifications of it as they should have been.

Ashley Tibollo 27:02

And what did you think they did well?

Joseph Giangreco-Marotta 27:06

I mean, I think that, in general communication was pretty good, right? I don't, I guess maybe I didn't pay attention to it. Because I wasn't in some other state. But you know, of course, early on, there was a lot of discussion around supplies and procurement of those supplies and trying to distribute those supplies or up and down the state. I think that my understanding of what happened was that the state did a pretty good job of trying to, you know, have hospital supplies and hospitalization rates equalized. I know that didn't work as well as it probably could have very early on in New York City. But I'd say once you got towards the maybe May, June timeframe. I think that, you know, there was a better sharing throughout the state of supplies and equipment and things like that. And I thought that was an example of something that was handled pretty well.

Ashley Tibollo 28:25

And you touched on this a little bit, but how did you feel about the handling of the pandemic by the federal government?

Joseph Giangreco-Marotta 28:37

I mean, federally, I think that the message was incredibly inconsistent. You know, you had people like Anthony Fauci saying one thing, and then you had contradictions by the President. You know, minutes later. So I think that was certainly not clear. That led to a lot of confusion, I think. Yeah. I don't know. I, I didn't put as much of an emphasis on the federal response, because frankly, I didn't expect a whole lot from the federal response. Just because I, you know, I saw what was coming out of the office of the president and didn't think that it was particularly helpful.

Ashley Tibollo 29:36

And has your experience transformed how you think about your family, friends, for community? And if so, in what ways?

Joseph Giangreco-Marotta 29:48

I don't think that it's transformed. How I see my family, friends or community I mean, I think the only thing I will say is I probably am more accepting of you know, some buddies opinion of how they want to handle, you know, their own personal health. And, you know, I probably would not be as quick now to judge someone if they said that they don't want to do something because, you know, they're not comfortable. Like, I probably am more accepting of that, but that's about it.

Ashley Tibollo 30:25

And my final question is knowing what you know, now, what do you think that individual communities or governments need to keep in mind for the future?

Joseph Giangreco-Marotta 30:46

Well, I think that, you know, it's apparent how important messaging is. And I know there's never going to be a consistent message. But you know, that would be the thing that I would say is knowing what I know now. Try to be more consistent in your messaging, if possible, because it just leads to confusion.

Ashley Tibollo 31:20

Is there anything else that you wanted to add to this interview?

Joseph Giangreco-Marotta 31:25

No.

Ashley Tibollo 31:26

Thank you very much for your time and your contribution to the archive.

Joseph Giangreco-Marotta 31:31

Thank you. Have a good day.