

Transcript of Interview with Landon Bridges by Zoe Vorndran

Interviewee: Landon Bridges

Interviewer: Zoe Vorndran

Date: 03/30/2021

Location (Interviewee): Indianapolis, Indiana

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Abstract: An oral history between three students from Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis concerning the Covid 19 pandemic.

Zoe Vorndran 0:02

Okay, so we are recording. My name is Zoe Vorndran, and I am here with Landon Bridges. It is 10 a.m. on March 30th, 2021. Landon and I are in Indianapolis, but this interview is being held over Zoom. So Landon, thank you so very much for taking your time to tell your experiences with us.

Landon Bridges 0:23

Of course, glad to be on here.

Zoe Vorndran 0:27

Before we begin, I would like to briefly review the consent and deed of gift form that you signed and explain our project a little bit. So, the COVID-19 Oral History Project is a rapid response oral history focused on archiving the lived experience of the COVID-19 epidemic. This project was designed so that professional researchers and the public can create and upload the oral histories to our open-source database. This study will help us collect narratives and understandings about COVID-19, as well as help us understand the impact of the pandemic over time. The recordings, demographic information, and the transcripts will be deposited in the Journal of the Plague Year: A COVID 19 Archive and the Indiana University Library System for researchers and the public. Do you have any questions so far?

Landon Bridges 1:14

Nope, sounds all good.

Zoe Vorndran 1:16

Okay. Taking part of the study is voluntary, which means you may choose not to take part or leave the study at anytime without any penalty to your current or future relations with IU, IUPUI, or the IUPUI Arts and Humanities Institute. Participating in this project means that your interview is being recorded and transcribed, and the recordings and transcriptions will be deposited to the Journal of the Plague Year and the Indiana University Library System, and your name will not be confidential. Do you have any questions?

Landon Bridges 1:50

Nope.

Zoe Vorndran 1:51

Okay, so in addition to signing the document, would you please offer a verbal confirmation that you understand and agree to these terms?

Landon Bridges 2:00

I understand and agree to these terms.

Zoe Vorndran 2:04

And I will also be asking you to verbally confirm that you agree to your interview being available under the following licenses, which I will read really quickly.

Landon Bridges 2:14

Okay.

Zoe Vorndran 2:14

So, the first license will be under the domain of the Creative Commons Attribution Noncommercial ShareALike 4.0 International. Secondly, the COVID-19 Oral History Project, the Journal of the Plague year, and the trustees at IU have the right to reproduce, use exhibit, display, perform broadcast, create derivative works from, and distribute the oral history and materials in any manner or media existing now or developed later. You agree that the oral history project materials may be used by the Voices from the Waterway and IU for any purpose, including, but not limited to marketing, advertising, and publicity. You agree the IU will have final editorial authority over the use of the COVID-19 oral history materials and you waive your right to inspect or approve of any future use of the oral history. Lastly, you agree that the public has the right to use the materials under the terms of fair use may get a verbal confirmation.

Landon Bridges 3:14

I consent to that.

Zoe Vorndran 3:17

And then lastly, I just wanted to ask for verbal confirmation that you have agreed to make your interview available to the public immediately after this interview?

Landon Bridges 3:26

Yeah, that is fine with me.

Zoe Vorndran 3:29

All right, cool! So here comes the fun part! So Landon, could you tell us just a little bit about yourself, where you're from and what you're currently doing?

Landon Bridges 3:40

Okay. I'm originally from Indianapolis, Indiana, so I grew up here. I moved here when I was about four years old. I spent, clearly, most of my life here. I went to school at Manchester University from 2015 to 2019, studied athletic training. And I am an athletic trainer with IU Health, working at George Washington High School here in Indy.

Zoe Vorndran 4:08

Okay. And so you said that you are working with George Washington High School.

Landon Bridges 4:17

Mhm.

Zoe Vorndran 4:18

So what do you do there as an athletic trainer?

Landon Bridges 4:22

So as an athletic trainer, I am a health care professional, right? So, I'm a trained health care professional. I help assist athletes with emergency care, rehab, keeping them safe during sports, equipment, really anything that falls under that umbrella, I'm helping with. So, if a kid comes in and he has a sprained ankle, well, first I have to be able to treat said sprained ankle, rehab it, clear him to participate again, that sort of thing.

Zoe Vorndran 4:53

In what ways has COVID-19 affected your job?

Landon Bridges 4:57

A lot. So, like I said, as an athletic trainer, I'm mainly working with sports, right? When COVID first happened, when it finally reached Indiana – reached Indianapolis – I think the first like case of a student getting it was in Avon School District and I remember talking to a couple of kids at track practice and they were like, “Hey, we're going to be next, man. We're going to be next.” I'm like “Bro, look.” I'm telling my athletes now, I'm like, “There's no way IPS will close.” You know, because we're the largest school district. We have kind of a high poverty rate in IPS. A lot of kids depend on food, shelter, Wi-Fi, whatever they need, it's usually at school. So, I'm like, “nah, man, we'll never never cancel.” And literally, as I was saying that, a couple days later, they dropped the bombshell that “hey, everything's getting shut down, everything's getting closed.” Technically I work for IU Health, so they just kind of pulled us back from the schools, and it was kind of a confusing time at first, if that makes sense.

Zoe Vorndran 6:13

Yeah, so you started talking about it, but what were your initial reactions to COVID-19, whether you thought about it in terms of your jobs or your personal life or health?

Landon Bridges 6:26

I didn't think it was going to affect us that much. Like, you know, we've heard of Ebola, we had the swine flu epidemic, that type of deal, and it just didn't seem like it would be anything like that. It felt like something out of a movie where we're starting to get quarantined and we're starting to actually have to stay at home, and there was so much stuff we just didn't know. And I didn't think it was ever going to be that serious or it was ever going to take as long to figure out as it has been. So like I said, when it got shut down, I was like, "Okay, well, we'll be back in school probably by the end of the month or whatever, and we'll go from there." A month went on and we're still not back in the school; I'm not in my ordinary setting. We continue to have to like- there's new updates as more and more people are getting it. Sporting events are getting cancelled. That's when it really started surprising me is when sporting events started getting canceled. Yeah, it was kind of surreal.

Zoe Vorndran 7:33

Yeah, absolutely. And so have your thoughts changed since then?

Landon Bridges 7:38

Well, yeah, for sure. It was definitely way more serious than I think any of us were expecting. So I kind of touched on it earlier, when we got sent away from the schools, all the IU Health employees, if they weren't working directly in the hospital, we had to try to figure out something else we were going to do. They had something called a Resource Command Center or RCC. The RCC what it did was it kind of reassigned people to different roles within the hospital wherever they needed help. So from the hospital side, it was complete- I won't say it was chaos, but it was hectic because now you have people being put in different situations where they need assistance. So for me, I was assigned to do two different things. I was assigned to do warehouse work at first, just kind of help sort the donations from the state and from the governor and start packing pallets of which hospitals it needed to go to. I'm not going to lie, that was awful – don't recommend that, but it was a thing we had to do. And then shortly after that, I started helping out at the COVID testing center off of Georgetown, and I was there for a good four or five months.

Zoe Vorndran 9:03

So to clarify, the RCC, was that a response to COVID? That was a rapid response to the solution?

Landon Bridges 9:12

Yes, so it was more of a rapid solution to pay people. We need more help in different areas and say, if your department wasn't doing its normal job right now, you got moved around to where you'd be helping the hospital, be helping the healthcare system, but you're also keeping a job, keeping your money, that sort of thing. Also, I think it gave an opportunity to give people who were kind of immunocompromised or older a different role in the hospitals. Even when I was at the warehouse, there were a couple of nurses who were there, and I thought that was kind

of weird, but she was like, “I have people in the house who are sick and elderly. I can't be around a lot of people during the COVID pandemic.” So, this was a good opportunity for her to still work and get her normal hours in and get her normal pay in without being let go or furloughed or anything like that.

Zoe Vorndran 10:16

Do you think it was effective given how spontaneous it was implemented?

Landon Bridges 10:21

Surprisingly, yes. IU Health didn't actually have to furlough or let anyone go. Most of the time they just got reassigned or moved into different parts of the hospital. I thought that was probably one of the best responses to it in the state because you're seeing people being let go and furloughed. I will say I was lucky enough and blessed enough to not have to be unemployed at any point during the pandemic. I didn't have to just sit and wonder if I'm ever going to get called back to my job. They just kind of did a good job of trying to not let anyone go and try to be able to pay people and that sort of thing, so I thought it was an appropriate response. We were able to help out in the pandemic in a way that I probably wouldn't have thought I would've been able to help.

Zoe Vorndran 11:16

Yeah, that's really neat that you had that opportunity. And so you mentioned that over the summer you helped administer or you helped with the COVID-19 testing areas. What was that like? What were your responsibilities?

Landon Bridges 11:33

So the very first time we were over, a lot of different- like surprisingly there was, I think, Neuroscience Nurses and the ATs, so the athletic trainers were involved in it, and the path lab people were involved in it. So at first, it went through a lot of different changes, but at first there were three lines. You'd have to go in and you'd have to check in the people – at first it was only open to IU Health employees – you'd have to go check them in, make sure they have their badge, their confirmation, and you just kind of try to keep the lines even and send them to whichever lane. So at first, we were doing well over 200 tests a day, which is wild! And we're all outside, so we couldn't be inside. The building we were at, it was off of Georgetown. IU Health has these two health pavilions over at Georgetown, so there's the one they actually use and then there's this one closed down building and they just made their center of operations there for this test site. So you go in, they had plenty of PPE's; people would drop off new PPE's. And by PPE's I mean like the preventative equipment – like the gowns, the gloves, the masks, the face shields, all of that. So you'd have that, you'd have people dropping off new tests, you'd have people picking up tests while they're dropping them off. It went through a lot of different changes, but I just remember the first time it looked like something out of a horror movie. Like, we have these big yellow gowns. We had to wear the yellow gowns, we had to double up our gloves, we had to wear a mask, we had to have a face shield – the thing had a hood on it – and I'm a large individual, so I thought it was awful, and it was tight. Plus it was cold and foggy in

the morning, so it just looked like something out of a horror movie and it was kind of funny. I guess they went through a couple of different changes, but that was my first experience with it. Then what the athletic training role was we just started checking in people. We'd check in people and get their information so it made it easier on the backend where people could just get their labels and we can start labeling the tests and go from there.

Zoe Vorndran 14:11

Right, so you weren't directly administering the COVID tests or anything?

Landon Bridges 14:16

Not right away. So that didn't come until later when we started getting confirmation to do it. A lot of nurses started having to go back, and I also was like, "I'd be perfectly fine doing this." I wasn't really that nervous about it. Towards, I think, the middle of April maybe early May, that's when I started actually being involved in the testing.

Zoe Vorndran 14:44

So did you think that the community- how did they respond? When they were in the lines, were they easy? Did they sort of just comply with the regulations that you guys had set?

Landon Bridges 15:00

Yeah, for the most part – almost to an annoying degree. What I mean by that is sometimes some people were very cautious, and they wouldn't open the window because let's keep all windows closed, but they tried to have whole conversations, and it just wouldn't work out that well. I was like, "okay, just crack the window, I have a face shield, I'm going to be okay." But for the most part, the community, it was a mixed bag. It was either they were perfectly fine with everything and they just kind of did whatever. They might complain about the nose swab because I would complain about the nose swab. And then sometimes you got people who were just straight up strange. Like I had one guy in line. He drove up and he- first of all if any normal human being does this, if you get a laser pointed at you, wouldn't you be kind of freaked out by that?

Zoe Vorndran 16:07

Yeah.

Landon Bridges 16:07

This man decided to pull up and he pointed something at us, and we didn't know what it was at first. It was a thermometer. So he was taking our temps and being like, "Well, if I have to make sure my temperature is okay, I have to make sure your guy's temperatures are okay before you administer the test and the whole thing." I'm like, "man, you're kind of weird." Why would you just point the laser at somebody that you don't know? That's strange. But I don't know, it's kind of a mixed bag when it came to the community. You got a lot of people who were very kind of scared about the test, kind of scared about COVID. And then people who felt like they couldn't care less or were like, "Oh, well, I have to get this and go back to work." Sorry, I feel like I'm going off on separate tangents, let me slow down.

Zoe Vorndran 17:07

No, this is perfectly fine!

Landon Bridges 17:10

Okay, but I felt like there was a lot of people that would sometimes come in and say, “Oh, well, I just need to go back to work and I've had four or five COVID tests. I'm still popping up positive and I haven't been able to work.” And part of me just would just feel bad for them – like that's kind of stressful, and these are people who are asymptomatic, don't have anything going wrong with them and yet they're still testing positive. We just don't know why. We've had people who were who just needed to go back to school, and they were just trying to hurry up and get a COVID test done. People who are trying to, I don't know, take a trip, so they're like “I needed to get COVID tested.” Oh yeah, just a whole lot of different interactions, lot of different reasons for getting tested. People who truly weren't feeling well, and then on top of that, some kids have to be tested. Children have to be tested on. People with special needs need to be tested. It was a whole- we touched on everyone in the community, I feel like.

Zoe Vorndran 18:26

Mm hmm. As the testing went on and as COVID went on, did you sense a difference in the way that the community had felt about COVID? Like was there more fear in the beginning or was there a shift in community sense of COVID-19?

Landon Bridges 18:42

Yeah, I think I could sense that. So I think at the beginning there was definitely a lot more fear and just less understanding of what was going on. Also at the very beginning, we were kind of dealing with just employees, so that was a little bit different. So, the employees kind of knew what to expect, but they also were getting tested for a) so that they could go back to work, but also there was people like, “I showed this symptom, so I got sent here right away.” So you have that fear of no matter what symptoms you're having, you were going to get tested. This is kind of like that joke at the beginning of the pandemic, it's like: Can we just be regular sick? Does it always have to be COVID? Like that type of deal. There were people coming in saying like, “I have food poisoning, and now I'm being tested. I have to get tested for COVID.” So it was that misinformation, that kind of frustration of like, I don't think I have COVID but I have to get tested anyway because we just don't know and we don't know enough about it. Towards the end of it- well by the end of my tenure there, it was more of, it way less busy. I told you at the beginning we are doing maybe 200 a day; it kind of dwindled down to maybe like, 80 a day. I'd go in, and people were a little bit more calm. I think people knew what to expect when it came to the swabbing, and they weren't as scared about it. People were trying to just go back to college, trying to go back to work. “Hey, I have a cough or sniff, I'm just kind of nervous about it so I want to get tested.” I think we helped put a lot of people at ease about that. So yeah, I think towards the end, anxiety kind of decreased a little bit, but people still saw the importance of getting tested and just tried their best to get tested if possible.

Zoe Vorndran 20:42

Yeah, definitely. So, what ways do you think that COVID-19 has been affecting people's mental health and even their physical health?

Landon Bridges 20:55

I think mentally, it's just kind of exhausting. You get bombarded with it all the time, especially in the middle of the summer, you're getting bombarded with just- oh yeah this is, um, hey, the COVID numbers are here, and it felt like there's no end in sight, right? Like there's no talk of a cure yet. A lot of people thought it was going to be done relatively soon and the rates kept going up. People still have to wear masks everywhere. It was just nerve-wracking, right? And then you have to stay in the house a lot of the time and can't really go anywhere. You can go on a walk, but people can't go see their families. People can't go see their friends. People can't gather these big gatherings that they would like to. Maybe you take a trip every summer and that's one of the biggest things that you look forward to and you don't have that vacation anymore. Or hey, maybe you'd like to take a trip over to grandma's and you can't. It's... that's horrible. That's hard on people's mental health. And I guess for people's physical health. I'm not sure. I think it could affect it, like you're also just in the house all the time. You're not walking, you're not running, you're not doing a whole lot, you can't go to the gym, you can't do a lot of things, plus someone might put on weight. You might get kind of tired, start getting depressed – that type of deal.

Zoe Vorndran 22:40

Yeah, absolutely. And we've seen, you know, terms like self-isolation and social distancing and flattening the curve sort of emerge from this pandemic. And do you think that has a, an effect on people's mental health?

Landon Bridges 23:00

Yeah. I think a lot of people coined something called COVID fatigue, right? So, people just constantly hearing, “oh, well make sure you stay six feet.” You go to a grocery store and you hear the PA over and over again say, “Hey, make sure you stay six feet. Everyone who's here has to be wearing a mask. Hey, there's plenty of hand sanitizer.” And you turn on the TV, there's no escape from it. “Hey, make sure to social distance.” I think even once COVID has calmed down and we're not in a pandemic anymore, I think that'll still stick with people – the social distancing thing, the make sure you're wearing a mask. I think that will affect people because you never know. Can you get that sick again and that sort of thing? I think that will definitely stick with people.

Zoe Vorndran 23:49

Yeah, absolutely. Do you think that- you mentioned a little bit about misinformation. Do you think that the media has been covering this COVID-19 pandemic well and have you seen shifts in the way that they talk about it?

Landon Bridges 24:10

Yeah, I definitely think so. I think even I was guilty of it at the beginning where they're like, "oh, it's just kind of like a flu strain, it's whatever." And then it quickly wasn't just a flu strain, like it was clearly people are being affected by it in so many different ways. It's crazy. You'd have people who have no symptoms, you have people who don't have the sense of taste or smell, chills, old, and young – kind of dying of it. I think over half a million Americans died from it? Something like that? So you think of the media, like at first, it was like, "Okay, well you know, it's not that big of a deal. We're going to be fine," to "Oh, it's very much serious. We should probably be reporting on this. Let's not spread misinformation." I think a lot of misinformation has just come from people. They just hear rumors, and they'll just post whatever they'll say. Then you're battling media plus just general misinformation and maybe the social media sphere or just in the public sphere. You know what I mean?

Zoe Vorndran 25:29

Yeah, absolutely. And do you think that the local, state, or federal authorities have been responding to this crisis well?

Landon Bridges 25:42

Locally, I think Indianapolis and Indiana hasn't been horrible. We were pretty quick to have a stay-at-home order. Now I could argue that stay at home could have probably lasted a little bit longer. We had a mask mandate. One of the states in the Midwest that have a mask mandate throughout the entire state. More recently, we're probably one of the fastest states to really roll out vaccines as quickly as we have. We're down to anyone over 30 can now get their vaccine. So, we have done a lot of good things, like a lot of right things right, but I think maybe from a county-to-county level, it really depends on where you're at. So, in Marion County for example, we wear masks all the time, right? You go in, and you rarely see somebody just not wearing a mask. Now, if I literally go 10 minutes down the street, down to Johnson County, it's not the case all the time. People wear their masks improperly. People don't wear masks. Some restaurants don't social distance as well as they should. And they just don't enforce it as well as they should. Or if you get to more of the rural counties, so let's throw out a random one like Wabash County, it's not very- no one wears masks, it just doesn't happen. I don't think they think COVID is a hoax or anything, they just think, "it's not going to affect us- haven't done this in a while." I've heard this line a few times, for people it was like, "Well, it hasn't affected me yet, so I'm not going to wear a mask or I'm not going to do this or I'm not going to social distance. I'm going to go take that trip to Florida. It just doesn't affect me, it doesn't bother me, so I'm going to do it." So, I think it really just depends county to county, but I think statewide, we've done fine.

Federally, I think it's been horrendous. Absolutely horrendous. There's been no national act on anything. There is no national mask mandate. They had the one stimulus and then for six more months didn't get another one and then probably four months after that, finally I got another one. Meanwhile, there are businesses that are falling, even locally, just failing. You have, I think we've ballooned up to some of the worst unemployment rates that we've seen since the Great Depression, and that's not an exaggeration. Like that's just abysmal, and there is no real relief for that. There's a lot of families losing money, not having enough food. It was just abysmal. It was

just kind of tragic. A lot of people were or had to be on unemployment. Some of the wait times to get unemployment was like sometimes you had to wait on the phone for like four hours, maybe a little bit longer just for them to process everything. So yeah, it was bad. I don't think federally, I don't think we handled it as well as we should have. Especially when it comes to relief for families that definitely needed it or people who definitely needed it. Like I said earlier, I was lucky enough to keep my job. A lot of people were not and a lot of people had to suffer because of that, so I don't think we did a good enough job federally.

Zoe Vorndran 29:25

Yeah, and you don't have to comment on this, but I'm just curious. So we saw a change in presidency halfway through the pandemic. Do you have opinions on how that has affected the way that the government – the federal government – has responded to COVID-19?

Landon Bridges 29:46

Not really. I think more or less it's yeah, we got another stimulus, and I like how we're getting more vaccines out there, but I feel like that's more of a state thing. But no, I don't think there's been much of a change. A lot of damage has already been done and a lot of stuff you probably can't redo. But honestly as the pandemic is still going on, probably unemployment rates are still probably still kind of up there. A lot of people still probably need some sort of relief, especially a lot of these small businesses that probably lost at least four months of revenue. Yeah, it's just all bad. I'm not sure if it really made too much of a difference right now.

Zoe Vorndran 30:37

Yeah, so do you think these conversations have sparks any kind of debate or different conversations amongst your friends and family or community members?

Landon Bridges 30:51

I don't think it's done anything crazy in terms of my family. My family is- like my mom's a healthcare worker, you know, under kind of on the older side. So it wasn't necessarily a thing where they were concerned about- it wasn't like, "Oh, well I just don't believe in it." No, they wear masks everywhere. They order in when they can. I think my brother still orders them groceries. So no, nothing crazy like that. I think for my friend group, I think we just didn't meet up a lot of the time during the pandemic. We'd have Zoom calls and stuff like that, play on the PS4, but I think a lot of us had the same thought processes like, "okay, we're not trying to get anyone else sick. There's people who are immunocompromised, we can't really do that." Or if I did meet up with friends, it was mostly outdoors or maybe a small gathering, but nothing to the point where we're having a party of 20 people in a cramped apartment or something like that. I think in total, there really hasn't been much debate, at least for me.

Zoe Vorndran 32:15

Yeah. Do you think that the nature of Zoom calls or online communication changed your relationships with your friends and family?

Landon Bridges 32:28

No, I think it just made it more accessible to talk to people. I think for- I will take that back. I think definitely my dad's side of the family decided to meet a lot more than we usually do. Like I've never talked to my dad's side of the family this much during normal years, and now this year it's like, "Hey, it's your birthday, let's have a Zoom call. Hey, it's Christmas, let's have a Zoom call. Hey, it's Thanksgiving. Hey, it's the third Saturday of the month, let's have a Zoom call." It's been ridiculous! I've talked to my aunts from Georgia and my cousins from Georgia more times than I have in a while. Some of these people I haven't seen in years before the pandemic and now we're talking like all the time. So I think more people are willing to reach out now, and I feel like these group Zooms are a thing and let's do it. And I think for even friendships, right, people have to get creative: "Like, hey, let's have a PowerPoint night or let's just talk about really anything. Or let's watch Hamilton." I forgot Hamilton dropped during the pandemic. Hamilton was played a lot during this, I'm not going to lie.

Zoe Vorndran 33:48

Well that's a positive spin to the whole Zoom thing.

Landon Bridges 33:52

Yeah, I think that's going to be the one- there's some positives, it wasn't all bad. I like talking to people in person, I like being there in person. I'm a quality time kind of person. So I like to go, "Hey, let's go hiking or let's go play basketball. Or hey, let's go out to eat because I like food." And, you know, go do that kind of thing. I like to sit around and talk. And sadly, we couldn't do a whole lot of that, but they will talk on Zoom. It wasn't the end of the world to talk to people on Zoom. Now, work meetings, Microsoft Teams, bad. We met way too much. I didn't like doing all that. We meet every Wednesday for COVID updates, updates at your school district or your school because, you know, for IU Health, there's different school districts that we have athletic training or sports medicine through. So we had to get updates like, "Hey, are you talking- are you in conversation with any of your athletes or anything?" I was like, "No. Can't do that." That was the only thing that got kind of tedious was working meetings for sure.

Zoe Vorndran 35:13

Yeah. In these work meetings, did you get a sense that different school districts were being affected differently?

Landon Bridges 35:22

Yes, so for example, I think down at Center Grove, they have the of idea like, "Hey, let's link Center Grove and Ben Davis." They're like, "Hey, we can do Google Hangouts and try to talk to our athletes if they need to do rehab or if they had a serious injury." And so that was a positive thing that came from it. Like that's a great thing to do, and I wouldn't have thought about that right off the bat. Just be able to do that sort of thing over the phone or send rehab to kids. Also, as well for Ben Davis and IPS especially, they would have the drive-through handoff like food for lunches and maybe dinners for some families. That was a huge thing. I tried to get involved

with that, but there were enough volunteers for that, fortunately. I don't think we really had that much of that kind of thing in Pendleton, where they had to do that or in Center Grove. Center Grove is a little bit more well off. I don't think that they really had to worry about something like that, but I do know in the inner city and just in Indianapolis, period, we definitely had to have the, "Let's give out the lunches and that kind of thing." Now for IPS, in terms of trying to communicate with our athletes, it typically didn't happen like that. So we did not, I know personally, I was not able to talk to my athletes. There was probably a couple of kids, I'm just thinking of right off the bat, where I wouldn't have minded being able to talk to them, but I had no way, no real way, to communicate with them through Google Hangouts or anything like that. That just didn't happen. Yeah, I think that's the biggest difference, at least during the pandemic.

Oh, I take that back. So towards the end, like we're actually going back to the schools, I think the pandemic was handled differently from district to district, right? You had different kinds of support. So for me, for all the A's we had to figure out how we're going to do many things. So outside, are we going to have bottles, right? Because, you know, we can't share bottles. That used to be a thing. You could just carry a 6 rack of bottles and have kids pick them up and that sort of thing. Are we going to be able to do that? The answer is no, we can't do that. We also have to check in kids, all the kids who were in any sport or any sort of fall sports, what are we going to do? So what kind of questions are we going to have when they check in every day? So you have these QR codes posted everywhere – I think that's another random thing, QR codes are way more accessible now, it got posted everywhere – so kids had to come in and there was no one allowed in the building. You couldn't go in the locker room, so you kind of had to come already prepared in what you were going to wear for practice. You had to come around back, you had to scan the code. There's really no walking past me because I sat right at a table and you needed to come check in, and you'd have to walk through, and you have to bring your own water bottle. There's no sharing towels, no sharing bottles. I have a big power flow type of deal, so just this big thing of water that has like several different hoses. They could not- I had a coach stationed at that, so only people who were touching it would be me or a coach, so we're not having a whole bunch of people touching the same thing, right? Clothes were getting washed daily by our coaches and that's just kind of how our COVID protocols were. You were able to social distance all up and down the sidelines. Kids were encouraged to bring bottles during games. That sort of thing.

Now, some schools, if you have a little bit more parent support- like I love IPS, but at times there's not a lot of parent support. There are sometimes they [athletes] get dropped off and they're not going to get picked up or the parents aren't going to show up to a game or it's hard for me to get in contact with them to let them know that their child is hurt and maybe they need to go to a doctor. I have, those are just hurdles that I knew when I signed up for. Those are still hurdles I'm trying to get over it – that's just the culture of it. Now if you go down to Center Grove, the parents down at Center Grove were very helpful to our athletic training staff. They built a big ole' power hose where basically none of the kids have to touch it and just continue to flow with water all the time – basically like an overbearing water fountain. Parents were very involved in the planning and very involved in- and also had the money to do these certain things. Whereas I'm just like, "no man, I'm out here by myself." My AD (athletic director) kind of put me

responsible for doing some of these things. So it was on me to come up with a plan and try to get something as safe as possible out so we could have a fall season. And it worked. So yeah, it definitely differed from school to school what you had to do.

Zoe Vorndran 41:27

Yeah, I imagine that economic disparity would certainly play a role in the way that COVID-19 was handled in the school system?

Landon Bridges 41:39

Yeah. Honestly, I was surprised that we even had any sport season at all. We were entering the spring; I wasn't expecting to get this far. Right off the bat, I'm not sure if you've heard about this, North Central, so Washington Township, their athletic director had passed away of COVID in late March. And so their initial reaction was they canceled all fall sports. They weren't going to have it. IPS was this close [hand gesture] to making that same call. I think someone else was about to make that same call. So for awhile I was like we're just not going to have it or they're going to try and move it to the spring or do whatever and we're just not going to have fall sports. Fortunately, we didn't have to do that. I didn't have any positive COVID tests in the fall. No one showed up with symptoms. I think that was very successful. But I was, in general, pretty surprised on how we were going to have a fall season and actually had it work out.

Zoe Vorndran 42:53

Yeah, absolutely. That would be certainly a hurdle to jump over.

Landon Bridges 42:59

Yeah.

Zoe Vorndran 43:01

I want to pivot a little bit. So during the pandemic, we saw the Black Lives Matter protests in June. We saw [audio cuts out] ...at the capital in January. And now we're watching the reactions to the shootings that happened in Atlanta this March. How have these protests, affected your daily life?

Landon Bridges 43:32

I'm not completely sure. I think, especially in the very beginning, it was very exhausting. Especially with the George Floyd case, and you could not avoid it. Like you could say, I turned off the TV or you could go for a walk – don't go downtown – You couldn't avoid it. It was such a thing where it was just so ugly. And like you just see the comments were even worse. If we tried to go on social media at the time, it was gross. So I had a very hard time dealing with it, honestly. Then you get the random text messages like, “Hey, you feeling okay with everything going on?” And you could not avoid it. It's not like I know the guy, but like clearly it could be any of us, I guess. I was just like- it felt- I felt really bad, honestly. It was exhausting.

Now kind of reacting to the stuff going on in Atlanta and to the raid on the Capitol – it felt, after all of that happened this past summer, it was kind of like, this is what they were protesting about. You see a whole bunch of people storm the Capitol, and I think a police officer died from that. There were no complaints about police lives’ matter or anything like that. It wasn't, “oh these are just a bunch of thugs.” You know, there was nothing like that, but it just felt like every time that there's a black male who dies, they have to bring up his past, right, and they have to find a way to demonize them and there was nothing like that. And then you see what's going on in Atlanta with now it's like stop Asian hate. And now you see Asians are getting killed for no reason and it's just like this is what we were protesting about a while ago. And it's more or less the same now. So it's a heavy subject that I try not to dwell on too much because it's exhausting.

Zoe Vorndran 45:57

Yeah, it's definitely exhausting but it's part of the course of the pandemic and I don't know if you that Covid-19 has sort of increased some of these problems or amplified these problems of race?

Landon Bridges 46:21

Hmm, I'm not sure. Honestly, I don't know. I think for some people it's definitely maybe they've had more time to think about it or... I don't know. I'm not sure if COVID really made it worse or was it always just *this* bad and we just didn't notice. I don't know. That's my best answer.

Zoe Vorndran 46:47

Yeah, and so have conversations with co-workers or friends sort of stemmed from these issues?

Landon Bridges 47:02

Not really. I don't think I've talked too much about it to my coworkers. Friends, like I said, it's a hard cut subject, so I try to avoid it, but more or less, it's been mostly like support. It's been mostly like, “Yeah, this is not right. This is not okay. Here if you need anything. Sorry that this keeps happening.”

Zoe Vorndran 47:29

Yeah, absolutely. Okay, so you had COVID-19 back in November and December and it wasn't related to you working with the COVID-19 centers?

Landon Bridges 47:46

No, it was- I don't exactly know where I got it. I don't know, but it was awful, would not recommend. Luckily, I didn't have like any of the coughing or the pneumonia associated with it or the shortness of breath. I just had the chills, I had the fever, the loss of taste or smell, the headaches, the body aches. I felt awful, like I would not wish that upon anyone. If that's a flu... that's not a flu, that was awful. It probably took me probably another week or two after I had it to fully recover because I was exhausted. Like that makes you- Your body was fighting off a pretty serious infection and now you have to rest and I didn't really recover for a month after that.

Zoe Vorndran 48:48

Yeah. Were you fearful when you got it?

Landon Bridges 48:52

No, because I'm young and I can't die. No I'm joking. But I was more worried if I started getting a cough. I would've been very kind of scared if I started getting the cough because then I'd have to start taking my pulse ox and if that drops, I have to go to a hospital. And if I go to the hospital, maybe I have to be put on a vent. Like that's scary. I don't want to be put on the vent. I don't want to see pictures of myself on the vent, you know, like that's scary. I didn't want that to happen. Like I said, fortunately that came down to that point. Some days I was worried that it would just get dramatically worse. I'm very grateful that it didn't. Yeah, I was a little scared. Not going to lie, a little scared.

Zoe Vorndran 49:42

Yeah. So, I mean, you were social distancing clearly – quarantining – for sure during that time.

Landon Bridges 49:52

Yeah.

Zoe Vorndran 49:52

Did that affect your relationships with your family or your friends because you weren't able to interact?

Landon Bridges 50:02

No. I think it was fine. I have to- I had to miss Thanksgiving. Clearly. I also had to- once I started getting better, people were nice enough to bring over food and leave it outside. And if anyone wanted to come by, I have a screened in patio. So I went outside to my patio and people would be out in the car and they would talk to me from there as I'm starting to get better since I was still in quarantine. So they found ways to interact. I was grateful to have good friends that helped me towards the back end of when I had COVID. But just kind of not the middle of it – that part wasn't fun. I would not wish that on anybody.

Zoe Vorndran 50:56

Yeah. And so has COVID-19 affected- or do you know of other people who have had COVID-19 and how did they deal with it? You don't have to talk about specifics, keeping in mind HIPAA.

Landon Bridges 51:09

Yeah. For sure. I definitely had- well my own brother-in-law had it. And then I definitely had a coach definitely talk to me about it. He got it in the middle of the summer and it was- he explains his reaction to it. He was really bad. He was put on a vent. And kind of talked about, you know, what that felt like. It didn't feel great. He was just thankful to be alive. My brother-in-law was, I think, he was about this close [hand gesture] to being vented. He was on a BIPAP machine, he was conscious but he got supplemental oxygen. I think for him, he might just take my opinion a

little bit more seriously when I tell him to go to a hospital, but that's another story. But I'm glad he's okay. I can joke about that now, but my man is hard-headed.

Zoe Vorndran 52:24

Yeah, absolutely. Sometimes it's hard to come to terms with the fact that we're not invincible.

Landon Bridges 52:32

Yeah, for sure. You know, my partner also had COVID the same time I had COVID, and it affected her a little bit differently. She had a cough, but it never got too bad. She had the loss of taste and smells as well. Unfortunately for her, she really hasn't gotten all that back. She really can't smell all that well. And for her everything tastes metallic. So that kind of that kind of sucks.

Zoe Vorndran 53:01

Yeah, I didn't know that the effects can be so long lasting.

Landon Bridges 53:06

Yeah, there are some people who are, I think, called long haulers where they're just still recovering from the damage from COVID. Whether it's the lung stuff, or some people have weird reactions where they have to learn how to walk again. It's was crazy to me. For me, I got my taste and smell back relatively quickly, which is uncommon because usually you have the loss of taste and smell, it usually takes a couple of months to get back. I got it back with probably less than two weeks after I had it.

Zoe Vorndran 53:45

That's amazing.

Landon Bridges 53:47

I was like, yes, awesome. I think, just random tangent, I think losing your taste and smell is like one of the weirdest sensations like to have, right? Like for me, do I forget what things taste like? What does this taste like? I didn't- for a second, at the very beginning I either had the flu or COVID. I woke up one morning, I was like, "Okay, let me just go lay on the couch." I went and grabbed something to drink and a little something to eat. I was drinking the drink and I'm like, wait a minute, I take another sip of it and I can't taste it. I can't taste anything. It's over. I have COVID.

Zoe Vorndran 54:29

Yeah. I can't imagine not being able to taste anything and to satiate some of my cravings.

Landon Bridges 54:36

Yep. Look, the crazy thing was I still had an appetite. I still was hungry. So I tried to eat something and I'm like what's the point of even eating, I can't taste it. I can't even enjoy it.

Zoe Vorndran 54:49

Yeah, that, that's awful.

Landon Bridges 54:53

Yeah, it was pretty bad.

Zoe Vorndran 54:56

So yeah, I just have a few more questions before we wrap up. But do you think that- or how does this pandemic sort of compare to other big events in your life? Like I'm thinking 9/11, swine flu, the great recession of 2008. Any number of those events? Do you think this compares?

Landon Bridges 55:20

I think maybe- that's hard to say. All of those are really life-changing things, in general. I think for me specifically, I think the recession was like a very big event, right? Once again, fortunately, we all kept jobs and stuff like that, but we couldn't go to a whole bunch of places, couldn't travel to a whole lot of places because gas prices were extremely high during that time. My mom was able to keep working, fortunately, but pretty soon after that recession started, the company that she really liked and loved to work for, went under. And she had to go somewhere else and that effected a couple of different things. Yeah, I think that was the one that affected me the most.

Swine flu, like I was conscious for it, I didn't think it was that big of a deal. I remember having to do like the inhale vaccine thing. If you remember that, did you guys have to do in elementary school?

Zoe Vorndran 56:27

[nonverbal, shakes head].

Landon Bridges 56:27

You all didn't have to do that? What? Yeah, basically for whatever reason, the vaccine was nasal. So we went to school one day and we just got it done and that was that was the end of that. Okay, I'm glad I got to share something you didn't know! That was a thing we had to do.

9/11, I was just too young. I understand the repercussions of 9/11 after the fact, but I do not consciously remember a whole lot of that day. I think my mom yelled about it, but other than that, I guess that's the only thing I really remember.

Zoe Vorndran 57:11

What can you imagine your life to be like in a year?

Landon Bridges 57:18

Hopefully, it's died down and I can start enjoying some of the things that I've really enjoyed doing prior to the pandemic. I think hopefully after all of this, our infrastructure will be a little bit

more prepared if this happens again. And chances are it may happen again, probably not in our lifetime but it can definitely happen. I just kind of hope that our infrastructure is in place to where it works out a little bit better. That we've learned from our mistakes. That sort of thing.

For me personally, I will probably be a little bit more health conscious. I'm not sure if I'm going to still be wearing a mask, but definitely maybe distancing a little bit. But yeah. Maybe definitely going out a little bit more often and just not taking the things I took for granted, like going to a movie theater or "hey, let's go to this restaurant, eh it's a little busy but I can wait," you know, that type of deal. Or being able to go to a concert. I haven't been to enough concerts and then right as soon as adulthood hits and I could save up for this, COVID happened. I think I'll just be more health conscious, being able to take care of my mental health, taking care of my physical health, and just being able to take time off and to enjoy those things I couldn't before. If that make sense?

Zoe Vorndran 58:59

Yeah, absolutely. And then I like to end the interview with two questions. The first one, what have been the biggest challenges you've faced with this COVID-19 outbreak?

Landon Bridges 59:13

The biggest challenges? I guess at first, just not knowing if I was going to be able to keep my job or having to be furloughed or anything like that. And just kind of being creative and trying to make myself available so I could keep my job and try to work and all that sort of thing. I think some of the other challenges, too, not being able to see my family as frequently as I like. Not being able to see my friends as much as I'd like. Kind of feeling isolated, not being able to do a whole lot. Trying to have to come up with, at least work wise, come up with safeguards to try to help protect my athletes, protect my coaches. I try to keep all that kind of in the right place and make sure everyone can get through it. It has been a long haul and it's kind of crazy around this time last year, this would have been like the first time I went to test people at the COVID site. Now I'm kind of like this has been a full year and we've had a sport season since then. I think those have been some of the biggest challenges, especially just kind of being inside, isolated and not being able to talk to everyone I want to and trying to just put all the safeguards in place for work and things like that.

Zoe Vorndran 1:00:43

Right. And then the second part to that question, which is, what's the first thing, if you could do anything, what's the first thing that you'd do after COVID-19 is over?

Landon Bridges 1:00:58

I don't even know. I think I want to take a nice long road trip. That'd be fun being able to actually go see things without wearing a mask. I think that's the biggest thing, like just being able to go places where I'm comfortable enough where I don't have to wear a mask around everyone. Yeah. I don't know. What about you though?

Zoe Vorndran 1:01:27

You know, I don't know. I toggle between, you know, just going to a restaurant and eating without having to wear a mask or just giving someone a hug without thinking I might kill them accidentally because... germs.

Landon Bridges 1:01:44

Yeah. I know. It's little things, I don't even think it's big things like, "Oh man, I got to travel every country now." Like, in general when mine's just walking around without a mask, I think I'd be fine with that.

Zoe Vorndran 1:02:00

Yeah, Absolutely. Well, thank you so much for your time. Is there anything that we didn't talk about that you would want to talk about before we wrap up?

Landon Bridges 1:02:14

Nope. I think touched on a lot of things. Maybe some that could've been in more detail or less detail, but they're all good. It's all good.

Zoe Vorndran 1:02:24

Awesome. Well, thank you so much for your time. It's been a pleasure to hear about your experiences with COVID-19.

Landon Bridges 1:02:32

For sure. Thank you for having me.

Zoe Vorndran 1:02:34

Yeah.