

## Transcript of Interview with Jeff Plapp by Interviewer

**Interviewee:** Jeff Plapp

**Interviewer:**

**Date:** 03/20/2020

**Location (Interviewee):** San Diego, California

**Location (Interviewer):**

**Abstract:** Jeff Plapp is interviewed about his experience and thoughts about COVID-19. He shares how he and his family took precautions during this time and also discusses how the pandemic affected his career in education.

**Jeff Plapp 0:00**

Go ahead.

**Interviewer 0:02**

What is the date and time?

**Jeff Plapp 0:05**

Today is Wednesday, March 20, 2020, and it's noon.

**Interviewer 0:10**

What is your full name?

**Jeff Plapp 0:11**

Jeffrey Doyle Plapp.

**Interviewer 0:12**

How old are you?

**Jeff Plapp 0:14**

I'm 50. And I'll be 51 June 22.

**Interviewer 0:17**

Where do you live, and what is it like to live there?

**Jeff Plapp 0:20**

I live in the suburban neighborhood of South Park in Southern California, in the city of San Diego. It's a very pleasant place, and the weather's ideal. And I've lived here for 20 years or more, over 20 years.

**Interviewer 0:37**

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

**Jeff Plapp 0:43**

I first heard about it, I guess in January, as a SARS virus relative coming out of the Chinese city of Wuhan. I believe that it would be dealt with effectively by our CDC and other public health agencies, just like other flu viruses that had killed people in distant countries around the world in the past. I knew that it had jumped species from at least one animal, probably a bat to humans, and it was serious. I never thought it would arrive here and infect large numbers of people though. I thought it was interesting enough to present as a writing topic to my students. One student in particular voiced his opinion during writing/sharing time, that it didn't impact him, and he didn't care about people dying on the other side of the world. In the succeeding days, a couple of students showed up at school wearing masks. We told them it wasn't necessary because experts interviewed by news outlets were saying masks were only, they would only make sense if you were infected, because they would keep particles from spreading through sneezes or spittle. And we began encouraging students to wash their hands frequently and avoid touching their faces.

**Interviewer 1:54**

What issues have most concerned, worried, or bothered you about the COVID-19 pandemic?

**Jeff Plapp 2:00**

Well, initial reports were indicating that most people who became infected or at least got really sick and faced the real possibility of dying were elderly. I was worried about my parents because they're both in their 90s, and both have had some serious health issues. As time went on, it seemed that people who got fatally sick could be other ages, but they had underlying health issues like diabetes or have a compromised immune system. Then it seemed to start spreading so widely and quickly that it didn't matter what your age or health was. When it started to get very serious in major European countries, and it looked like we were going to shut down the schools, I worried that people would start to panic and behave irresponsibly. I also worried that essential supplies like water, food, and gas might suffer shortages. We began to stock up when my school shut down. I even brought home the large first aid kit from my classroom, which I take on the seventh grade Joshua Tree field trip. I was concerned about the health and safety of my students because I had no idea how this crisis would affect them and their families.

**Interviewer 3:09**

Has COVID-19 affected your education, in what ways?

**Jeff Plapp 3:14**

Well, I work in education, and I worked for a charter school and in Linda Vista in San Diego. A few weeks prior to the shutdown, our principal, Sarah Saluda, had to sit down and prepare for a shutdown by planning and putting in place the necessary virtual learning sites and platforms we need to continue school. As a result, we were much better prepared than other schools and entire districts, many of which ended up sending students home with no work for four to five weeks. Going virtual, going virtual required us to check in with all our students weekly, via chat or video chat. Along with creating lessons, creating work and communicating with students and

parents via email, I was on a computer screen from eight to four Monday through Friday. This has been a big shift. At actual school, I'm always moving, standing crouching, and I'm not on my computer so much. I'd really feel the effects of it at the end of the day when this all started. It's also been difficult because some kids didn't check in or respond or keep up with our work. I was worried I was giving too much work or not enough. Some families seemed to fall apart. We really had no idea what families were dealing with as far as food insecurity, financial distress, mental health issues, etc. All the end of the year events like dances, graduation and extended field trips were canceled, which was a terrible blow to everyone. The worry and sadness that I feel for people here and around the world is intense on some days, but I keep my same routine and that helps. In fact, that was the advice I gave every student I talked to you in the first few weeks - stick to a schedule, take breaks, get exercise. It's been hard to follow my own advice sometimes.

**Interviewer 5:03**

What concerns do you have about the effects of COVID-19 on your education and how school will work in the future?

**Jeff Plapp 5:10**

Well, now as we look toward reopening the US economy, California, and eventually schools, there's so much to consider. Obviously, until we get a vaccine, we have to continue social distancing, an intense sanitizing regime, limit the number of students, do temperature checks, testing, and who knows what else. All this makes teaching harder. I'm concerned that the country is opening too soon and people will die needlessly. I worry that the shift in our program will not meet the needs, needs of our kids and families. And I worry that the economic downturn will negatively impact education and make teaching even harder. At the same time, I feel lucky to have a job with so many people suffering.

**Interviewer 5:57**

How has COVID-19 affected you and your family's day to day activities? When you weren't in quarantine, what do you like to do every day? What would a normal day look like?

**Jeff Plapp 6:07**

Normally I drive to and from work each day, and my wife and I go out to eat occasionally. We visited friends weekly before COVID-19. We would walk in the neighborhood and nearby Canyon trails. We shop frequently because we could. Now we shop less frequently and making lists of necessary items and waiting until we really need to shop to do so. During the stay at home order recommendation, we avoided going out and wore masks when we did, always being careful to wash afterwards. We still walked in the neighborhood with masks. I used to do yoga three times a week before the stay at home but haven't for several months. Now that things are opening up, I can again exercise on the trails near my house. I create art here and there as I did before.

**Interviewer 6:57**

How are you managing day to day activities -c hores meals, school hobbies in your household - is there a schedule you follow?

**Jeff Plapp** 7:04

Like I said, I tried to keep a routine for work. I do chores before and after work and sometimes in between work, work items. Weekends are the same as before COVID; my wife cooks, and I often help. We still are able to run errands through the shutdown. I have plenty of supplies I've collected for art making. And the cable television and internet provided plenty of entertainment in the evening.

**Interviewer** 7:30

Has the COVID-19 outbreak affected how you associate, connect, and communicate with friends and family, in what ways?

**Jeff Plapp** 7:38

Well, obviously we're social distancing and doing less in person social interaction. We went to visit very close friends and family a few times during the quarantine where we sat six feet apart and wore masks. Afterwards, we occasionally question whether the risk had been worth it. So far, so good. We're all healthy.

**Interviewer** 7:58

What have been the biggest challenges that have, you have faced during the COVID-19 pandemic?

**Jeff Plapp** 8:04

Keeping a positive attitude has been a challenge. Being aware of the need for movement and acting upon it has been a challenge. I feel a constant anxiety that something bad is going to happen, which is understandable, since bad things are happening all the time with people dying and suffering all over the world.

**Interviewer** 8:24

What have you, your family, and friends done for recreation during COVID-19? Feel free to include details about shows, games, books, etc.

**Jeff Plapp** 8:33

We have been using exercise machines, weights, and walking. We play word games on the internet, watch tons of different shows that we've been binging on Netflix and other services. We cook, we clean, and we play with the pet.

**Interviewer** 8:49

How has COVID-19 outbreak affected your community? Remember, you may be part of many communities including school, club, church, job, etc. You're welcome to speak about all of these.

**Jeff Plapp** 9:00

Around home the viruses brought some neighbors into more frequent contact with us as we walk the neighborhood and stop to chat with people from a distance. The school community has lost a level of communication and connection through all this that our virtual school cannot replace, although we're trying our best.

**Interviewer** 9:18

How are people around you responding to the COVID-19 pandemic?

**Jeff Plapp** 9:23

I think we're all doing the same things. I suppose just trying to cope with the crisis, people were scrambling to figure out the unemployment system, loans and other ways to respond to the economic downturn. A few friends and family have mentioned that they have episodes of crying and despair. People are trying to stay busy, continue working, continue with school and take care of their families. Some people are very considerate and follow all the safety guidelines. Other people don't wear masks or seem to care about protecting other people.

**Interviewer** 9:55

Have you seen the people around you change their opinions day to day activities or relationships in response to the pandemic and how?

**Jeff Plapp** 10:02

I think in general, people thought this whole pandemic would be resolved much quicker than it actually will be, and they've had to come to that realization. People are starting to understand that some things about our modern life have changed are going to change permanently. People began to wear masks at some point after it was advised that they do so. I'd say people have cooperated with the recommendations and the stay at home guidance for the most part. Over time, people got restless. And some people began to protest and violate the orders here and in other places across the country. It seemed to me that a lot of people took up jogging and biking in order to get out and exercise which has always been allowed. People have been driving less, the freeways were deserted for a while. My wife's a jewelry designer who does large trade shows in Texas, her opinion on whether future shows will happen or not changes almost daily. Infection rates are increasing in areas like Dallas, Texas that haven't been hit hard. So we don't really know what will be possible in the future.

**Interviewer** 11:07

Self isolation and flattening the curve have been two key ideas that have emerged during the pandemic. How have you, your family, friends, and the community responded to requests to self isolate and flatten the curve?

**Jeff Plapp** 11:19

Well, we've stayed home, and we've, we've self isolated. All our doctor and dentist appointments were cancelled. We've only been going out really for essential supplies and exercise.

**Interviewer** 11:33

Has COVID-19 changed your relationships with family, friends and community and in what ways?

**Jeff Plapp** 11:38

Not too much. We stay in touch as much as before I think.

**Interviewer** 11:44

Have you or anybody you've, you know, gotten sick during the COVID 19 outbreak? What has been your experience in responding to the sickness?

**Jeff Plapp** 11:52

No one I know has gotten sick. I thought I may have had it at one point, but I can't be sure without a test. My temperature went up one degree, and I had itchy eyes like when you feel a cold or sinus infection coming on.

**Interviewer** 12:06

In what ways do you think that COVID-19 is affecting people's mental and or physical health?

**Jeff Plapp** 12:12

People are certainly feeling the isolation and loss of connection with other people to various degrees. The financial burden for many people is a source of mental and sometimes physical suffering.

**Interviewer** 12:24

What have been your primary sources of news during the pandemic?

**Jeff Plapp** 12:29

Network News, The Guardian newspaper online, and the New York Times Online.

**Interviewer** 12:35

Have your new sources changed during the course of the pandemic?

**Jeff Plapp** 12:38

No.

**Interviewer** 12:40

What do you think are important issues that the media is or is not covering?

**Jeff Plapp** 12:45

Well, I think that a very large number of people in this country are employed in the restaurant and bar industry, and some industries have received financial support during the pandemic, but

not enough is being done for this vital component of our economy. I've seen segments on this subject on MSNBC but nowhere else.

**Interviewer** 13:04

What forms of digital social media do you use, email, texts, FaceTime, Instagram, etc?

**Jeff Plapp** 13:10

I use Instagram, email, Google Hangouts, and Zoom.

**Interviewer** 13:15

Which ones do you use the most? Why?

**Jeff Plapp** 13:18

I use Google Hangouts the most to connect with colleagues and students because it's quick and easy.

**Interviewer** 13:23

Has the amount of time you use social media, digital media change due to the pandemic?

**Jeff Plapp** 13:28

I think it has substantially with so much online activity during my work day. I've had to make a conscious effort to avoid being on my phone on weekends and evenings, and it seems to be working.

**Interviewer** 13:41

How have leaders and government officials responded to the outbreak?

**Jeff Plapp** 13:45

The President has done a terrible job. He initially minimized the danger and said it would go away. His overriding concern has been his reelection and not the protection of the citizens. Some governors like Gavin Newsom and Governor Cuomo of New York have done an excellent job. Local leaders seem to be very confident and do-, are doing a good job.

**Interviewer** 14:06

Has the response been effective in your opinion?

**Jeff Plapp** 14:09

I think the federal response has been abysmal. There've been no overarching plans or strategy articulated by the federal government. States have stepped up and been effective. So many people have been waiting too long for financial assistance, testing and personal protection equipment for frontline health workers have been insufficient. The President sending mixed signals and spouting harmful misinformation. Now with the pressure to reopen, I'm afraid things that were effective won't be any longer.

**Interviewer** 14:42

Has your experience trans-, transformed how you think about your family, friends and community in more ways?

**Jeff Plapp** 14:48

No, I think most people are basically good and care about their fellow man, but there are always a few people that ruin everything for the rest of us. My view hasn't changed.

**Interviewer** 14:58

Knowing what you know now, what do you think that individuals, communities or governments need to keep in mind for the future?

**Jeff Plapp** 15:05

People need to be aware that the Coronavirus will most likely come back in, in the coming year in a second wave. And there'll be other pandemics in the future probably. I think our government needs a robust, thoroughly thought-out plan, so that we are prepared to limit the damage to people and the economy when it happens in the future.

**Interviewer** 15:28

What will you remember most from this time when you look back on it?

**Jeff Plapp** 15:32

I'll remember what we did to cope, stay safe, and remain positive in the face of so many unknowns. I'll remember the dedication of my co workers and the struggles of my students. I'll remember how strong we all were. I'll remember not to take things for granted like loved ones, or health or the joy of being in nature. I'll remember how global pollution levels dropped and that we can tackle big things if we all work together.