

Transcript of Oral History Interview with Judy Cherniak

Interviewee: Judy Cherniak

Interviewer: Marion Lougheed

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Location (Interviewer): Unknown

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Abstract: Judy Cherniak discusses how the COVID pandemic changed life for her during the opening months of the pandemic in Toronto, Canada in 2020. She touches on family life, her job loss, the local economy, news media, fake news, isolation, mental health, homelessness, and how she filled her time at home in isolation.

Marion Lougheed 00:02

So, um, so you're okay with the video recording?

Judy Cherniak 00:07

Yep. That's fine

Marion Lougheed 00:08

...Trying to get some recorded consent. Thanks. Yeah. So, did you have any questions about the consent form or about the project?

Judy Cherniak 00:20

I mean, the only thing I wondered about was when they had the three timeframes for when you could get the interview, or I didn't really understand what that was about, like, are you going to set? Or is it sent back to me? I just put 2021 Just because I thought that seemed like a realistic timeframe for people to do whatever needs to be done with it.

Marion Lougheed 00:42

Yeah, I mean, it won't, it probably won't be uploaded right away anyways. But I guess the idea is, some people either want some time to think about it, you know, to make sure that if they change their mind, they can...

Judy Cherniak 00:56

Oh, I see

Marion Lougheed 00:57

...or just for whatever other reasons, if maybe there are things they're going to talk about it that they don't want it maybe if they're working at a certain job or something. I don't want people to hear about what they said until later or, but it really if you don't have any preference, it doesn't matter. Like you can pick whichever.

Judy Cherniak 00:58

Okay, I just picked January 2021, because I thought seemed like the middle time, so why not? So that's all I really wondered about. And I only I picked the one that was for the...the pandemic, I can't remember, it was called the archive journal. Yeah, pandemic, I guess what I thought I would like to be a part of.

Marion Lougheed 01:35

Right. So, it's a little bit confusing on the form. Actually, I probably should have told you this before. But the either way, it will be part of those things, because those are the people who are doing the project. Oh, is the license. So, if you grant a license, a Creative Commons license, then it just means that researchers and artists and anyone can use the video file without getting permission from you. So, like, if someone wanted to make a documentary or something, they could just use the file. The other one is an exclusive license for the organization. So, they would have to seek additional permission if someone wanted to use it. So

Judy Cherniak 02:15

Okay, so I think I'll just stick with that one that I that I...

Marion Lougheed 02:18

Yeah.

Judy Cherniak 02:19

Yeah.

Marion Lougheed 02:20

Yeah.

Judy Cherniak 02:20

Yeah.

Marion Lougheed 02:21

So that's, that's all that is. But it's not entirely clear the way it's written on there.

Judy Cherniak 02:28

But that's okay. No, otherwise, yeah, no, I think it seems quite really a cool idea, actually.

Marion Lougheed 02:35

Yeah, it's, it's great. I'm happy to be part of it, actually, if it's...

Judy Cherniak 02:40

Put your skills to good use, right?

Marion Lougheed 02:42

Yeah, exactly. And some of the people who are involved in it, they actually did a similar oral history project in response to 911.

Judy Cherniak 02:51

Oh, ok.

Marion Lougheed 02:52

So, it's kind of this like Crisis Response oral history team. And yeah, it's pretty interesting.

Judy Cherniak 02:59

Very, very important too, I think.

Marion Lougheed 03:01

I think so. Yeah. It's, it's, I mean, there's a lot of projects going on to capture things, but they all have slightly different approaches and angles. The more the merrier, right?

Judy Cherniak 03:10

Exactly.

Marion Lougheed 03:12

Okay, so any other questions?

Judy Cherniak 03:15

No, I'm good.

Marion Lougheed 03:17

Okay. So, I'm just going to ask some background questions, just to kind of situate the the interview for people. So, could you just tell me today's date and the time?

Judy Cherniak 03:27

Today's date is May 26. Am I right?

Marion Lougheed 03:32

Yup, it's not a test!

Judy Cherniak 03:35

2020, and it is about 7:35.

Marion Lougheed 03:39

Okay, and what's your name?

Judy Cherniak 03:41

My name is Judy Cherniak.

Marion Lougheed 03:45

And what are what are some of the primary things you do on a day-to-day basis normally, such as your job or activities you're engaged with?

Judy Cherniak 03:53

Yeah. So twice a week, I work at a kind of book gift store for two 5-hour shifts. And I also help look after my grandson, two days a week, full days. And the rest of the time, it varies. I may visit friends. I read, watch some TV, go for walks, shop, regular...hangout with my husband.

Marion Lougheed 04:24

Great and where do you live?

Judy Cherniak 04:26

I live in Toronto, Ontario.

Marion Lougheed 04:30

When you first learned about COVID-19 What were your thoughts about it?

Judy Cherniak 04:38

I think at first when I heard of it in Wuhan. I...I wasn't convinced that it would get any further than that. And I thought Oh, terrible thing. And it seemed to be quite severe and moving quite quickly. But I sort of thought it was just going to stay there at the very beginning, then when it was in Italy, I thought, "What the heck? How did it get over to Italy couldn't quite make that connection?" And then the word pandemic started to be used, right? I was though I kind of like disaster news, in a sense. I mean, it's quite interesting to me all this, you know, climate stuff, and pandemic. And all that has is, is quite interesting

to me. So, I was following the news quite carefully. As it happened, and I guess I was wondering, you know, if and when it would affect us.

Marion Lougheed 05:44

And however, if that's changed since the beginning of it?

Judy Cherniak 05:49

Certainly, I underestimated how widespread and virulent it would be. I think that I think I might have assumed early on that we would know everything there was to know about it quite quickly. And I think we still don't know everything that we need to know about it at all. I probably in my head, I probably did say to any number of people. It how bad could it be? It's just another flu. And so wasn't sure what all the hullabaloo was about. And, of course, that's changed. I think it's, you know, obviously very different from the flu. And it took me a long while to understand the importance of flattening the curve, I didn't really know what that was truly about. I thought it was to save lives, which its kind of is but you know, I understand now it was really to save the healthcare system, to allow them to be able to do their jobs without being overwhelmed. But that took me a while to figure out. And so, I don't know if I was just being kind of obtuse, or if it wasn't explained very well, I'm not sure which, which is, but I think there were many people like me in the same boat who didn't really understand the terminology that was used, and thrown out so quickly, like so quickly, all these terms that we had never really used before ever. Were just became part of our everyday vernacular, like, instantly, it was quite amazing.

Marion Lougheed 07:26

What are some of the issues that have concerned you the most about the pandemic?

Judy Cherniak 07:35

Testing a testing is a huge, huge, huge necessity. And I don't know why nobody seems to be doing enough, in my opinion. So, testing and then tracing from the testing. I think it concerns me that I don't blame W.H.O. but it does concern me that we had that they didn't grasp quickly as quickly what was going on as maybe they could have, I don't know. And again, I don't think I blame them. I think it was something as you know, nobody really knew what was going on. But I think they probably underestimated, underplayed it as well. The American attitude certainly can concern me hugely. I suspect that many of our cases in Canada, came from the States, in fact, from people who either visited there and there just didn't seem to be any restraints put on people. So, it just traveled amongst themselves, like in Florida, or wherever, and then came up here, as well as international flights. So, it does concern me that that the international flights were stopped faster, I think that would have been a huge help to us. So, there's all that, there's the sadness about the numbers of seniors who are dying, probably because I'm, you know, I'm not so young anymore. I don't really worry for myself, but I could be in that boat for sure. My husband could be in that boat even more so. And it concerns me still, that there's any number of people who, who are taking it seriously who don't seem just don't seem to get the fact that they may not be sick, but they could make other people sick enough to die and that I just don't

understand the thick headedness about it, I guess. And then there's the, the economy which is also a huge concern for people not able to work not having enough money. The government is doing their best. And so, it's helping a lot of people but not everybody. I worry about in general the businesses that there are closing up, lots of them are closing up, they just can't keep it going. Some businesses I think stayed open. Because they didn't want to lose money. And I think that was a dangerous thing to do as well. So, I the concerns are huge, like multitudinous. One of the things that's that also concerns me or not concerns me but perturbs me is going back to people's attitudes. I think in Canada, we are supremely lucky in how we are locked down. We never...it was never said that we couldn't go out of our houses, so everybody could go for walks. There was takeout food, there was delivery, there was online ordering. We have TV, we have Netflix, we have internet. And so, this whole notion about the sacrifice. I mean, yes, it's a different way of life. But it's not a particularly different sacrifice. Not really, it's not like being in a war-torn country or, you know, afraid for your lives every day. So, it worries me that, that people can't like the isolation fatigue. It's not that I don't think it's real. I just don't think it's as big a deal as people would like it to be. I think it's an excuse more than anything. And I could probably go on, but I think I'll stop there.

Marion Lougheed 11:26

Just a follow up question. Thanks for sharing all of that. You mentioned your age. Do you mind sharing your age?

Judy Cherniak 11:33

Oh, I'm 66 and a half.

Marion Lougheed 11:34

Okay. What, what else? What other sort of personal background information would you like to share about either your things like ethnicity or places you've lived or your family situation? You mentioned your husband.

Judy Cherniak 11:50

Okay. So, I come from a Jewish background, I am born and raised in Toronto, truthfully. My husband is from St. Vincent in the West Indies, came when he was around 19. So, he's been here most of his life really. So, my kids are mixed. We also have an adopted Inuit, young woman. And we have lived Toronto, Vancouver, the Arctic, and then back in Toronto. So, we've lived a few different places. I personally have also spent time in Winnipeg and Paris. And so, we're kind of...my kids have also, two older ones in particular, they lived in Montreal, Winnipeg, New Brunswick. So they've, they've moved and B.C.. So, they moved around a bit. So, we have a lot of a lot of different provinces between us as places where we've lived. I have two, yeah, young grandchildren. One is almost 18 months, and the other is just turned 15 months. So, they're kind of sweet and take up lots of energy and time. And, yes, and three children. So, a boy and two girls, all adult children, by the way, obviously. And I don't think I have much more to add. We've been lucky. And in most cases, we're pretty healthy group, my husband

has had many and major heart issues for many, many, many, many years. He's in a very good place right now. It has been for about 10 months. So that's really nice. But in terms of COVID He has to be extremely careful. Like he if he gets it. I wouldn't like to think of what could happen. But he's, you know, he's, he's being very, very careful. So. So it's kind of, it's a little difficult because we can't see the little grandchildren and they grow up so fast. So, we can't see when we just see them on video calls. But little kids aren't really particularly good on video calls. So that's a little bit difficult, because three months in the life of an infant of a child, a toddler is a lot of time really. But I mean it's not the end of the world either. We still see them and talk to them and stuff like that. So...

Marion Lougheed 14:34

what is your current household situation right now?

Judy Cherniak 14:38

Right now, it's just my husband and I living in a one-bedroom apartment. And I'll be honest, we have extended the bubble, or I have to my daughter and her partner and their son because she has to work from home. He's doing a very intense course and they have a 15-month-old. And it's very good that people are saying work from home. But if you have a baby or toddler doesn't...so I go there, anywhere from once, once a week to once a week can stay over for the second day. And I've been doing that for about three weeks now. But they're very, very, very careful. My daughter doesn't go anywhere. So just her partner does any of the shopping. And he's very careful as well. So, I don't I don't feel too, I don't feel it's dangerous at all. No one has any signs or and if, if I got sick and my husband got sick, we'd know I suspect so. So far, so good.

Marion Lougheed 15:40

But stressful, though, I guess.

Judy Cherniak 15:44

Yeah, it is.

Marion Lougheed 15:46

What is it? What is it like in the city of Toronto, these days from your experience and observations?

Judy Cherniak 15:52

It's changed, I think it's changed quite a bit. It was quite quiet, there wasn't much traffic up where I live anyways. And I'm in a pretty, pretty busy area of the city. There were always people out and I live in an area that is predominantly Greek. And I think culturally, at least from what I've what I saw before, before this struck, there are a group of people who like to be out. They, they do most of their socializing outside and, you know, cafes or just even on street corners in that. So, some of that disappeared. Some of it didn't. It took I think it took them a while to figure out that, that they had to change their way of, of behaving. So, it took, you know, a couple of weeks really. But so, it was very, very, very quiet for a

long, long time. You could walk even on the main street, and it wasn't terribly difficult to stay away from people. I would say in the last two weeks that's changed substantially. There's way more cars, there's lots more people. A few stores have opened up a little bit. And there's lots of stores on our street that never closed, right convenience stores. \$1 store, a supermarket drugstores. That's basically what our street is made up of. So, there were always stores open and always people. But they were very careful. I find now people are wearing masks, and they're not as careful. So, there's a school field that I used to go I walk by, and I've walked by it most days since...since it started

Marion Lougheed 17:57

...for a second.

Judy Cherniak 17:59

Okay, good. I lost you there. Or I didn't lose you. But you froze.

Judy Cherniak 18:02

No, you froze.

Marion Lougheed 18:04

No, no you froze [laughing].

Judy Cherniak 18:07

Anyways, so that's...that's how I find Toronto right now. The buses still look quite empty, which is good. And certainly, I live in an apartment building. And I think people are being very careful within this building. But it's very, it's great to see actually.

Marion Lougheed 18:25

What does it look like people being careful?

Judy Cherniak 18:29

First of all, I think a lot of people are just staying in, in their places like this is a very busy building, people are coming in and out normally all the time. And there's lots of kids and I haven't seen very many of them. So, either we're all picking different times to go out. Or people just aren't going out as much. If you should happen to you know, go in the hallway and someone opens their door to come out there. They always wait for you to go by. Same in the laundry room because that's a joint facility. People are quite, quite good about it. Lots of people wear gloves in there just to be safe. I like I take a Clorox wipe and wipe down the washing machine or dryer before I use it. Yeah, and you know, only three people are allowed the elevators and our elevators are quite small. So, I think people are saying no, that should be two and most of the time you only have two people in an elevator. I usually take the stairs because they're empty. So, it just...people just seem to be very respectful of what's going on.

Marion Lougheed 19:39

Is there any signage or anything that's new in your building?

Judy Cherniak 19:44

Just sort of little messages. So, for example, you know, you can only have three people in the elevator. There was a note that came out early on saying you know, due to COVID 19 we're trying to do have not have people meet. So, if you have a problem, can you email the property management company rather than go and talk to the onsite superintendent? And or fill out an order form, which they said was attached but actually wasn't. But, you know, it seems to be okay. I don't really have any complaints with the way the buildings being run. So that's good.

Marion Lougheed 20:29

That's good. So, what about your job? You mentioned working twice a week as COVID affected your job?

Judy Cherniak 20:37

Absolutely. We were all laid off. I think a mar...February 27...March 27. I can't remember if it was March or February, I think it was March. So, we actually worked a little bit longer. And we, we were in a, a hospital setting. So, I think all of us felt a little bit nervous being in a hospital setting. But we did, they did close down all of the it's a chain store. So, they were all closed. And our company very, I think generously said that for two weeks anyways, we should apply for unemployment insurance, and they would top it up to 95% of our salary for just for the two weeks. But even that seems pretty, pretty generous to me. And then the provincial government or the federal government, sorry, started their own programs. So, they didn't need to do it. In the end, that company didn't need to top us up because we got a fairly good amount from the federal government. And so, I missed working, I kind of its, you know, it's a social outing, and it was something I like to do. So, I missed that. But...but you can't do anything about it. Right? I mean, it certainly was not an essential service. People can live without going shopping for books. I can't, but most people....

Marion Lougheed 22:16

Do you have any concerns about the effects of COVID on your employment going forward?

Judy Cherniak 22:23

You know, I didn't I think that the company, by and large, it wouldn't surprise me if they laid off people in the short term anyways. I think their online business has probably increased immensely. Whether or not people decide they'd rather go back to shopping in a brick-and-mortar store, I don't know. I kind of doubt it. So, they may use the stores as kind of showrooms to look at the books and then order them online. So, it's possible, you know, the store that I work at is quite small one. And that kind of unique one because it is in the hospital. So, we sort of serve a group of people who, especially the staff, who don't really have time to shop, because they're, you know, health care workers. So, they use us for a lot

of their shopping needs. It's there were convenient, and it's fast. And we also serve visitors to the hospital. Now, I'm not sure how many visitors to the hospital there are now if they've stopped all visitors, I have no idea. But it's possible that that has been curtailed quite a bit as well. So that would be another chunk of business that we wouldn't have. So, and I know that they're thinking of opening it soon, but it will be fewer hours and much fewer staff to start. And I'm not one of them. For lots of good reasons. So, I don't know, when I will be called back. Or if, I know that the manager would like to keep us all on staff. That's, that's been stated quite clearly, whether or not because it is part of a bigger network, he will actually have the dollars to do that. It's hard to know. I'm lucky in that I don't absolutely need the money. I mean, it certainly helps that I get tons of money from various pensions, but...but I can live without it. So, I'm in a kind of a pretty good situation there. I would miss it. I would just miss it as part of a routine and social outlet and the money for sure. So, I'm hoping that I will get back there. I'm guessing it may not happened for another two or three weeks to a month would be my guess, unless things go sideways, which that could happen too. So, I worry for my colleagues, for sure. I think most people are getting the federal money, which, but that will stop sometime mid-July. And without that, or employment, I think many of them will be hooked.

Marion Lougheed 25:31

So, what about on your sort of day-to-day family activities? How has it affected your home activities or your family's home activities?

Judy Cherniak 25:39

Well, quite a bit, really. Were a fairly close family. And so, we would get together maybe at least once a week. And sometimes more often, we could meet somewhere I would take the bus down, I could help out with little kids, my, I have one daughter, who's now living in a small town about an hour outside Toronto. And before this, I would see her at least once a month, either she come in or I'd go out. And so, I haven't seen her at all since...since all of this started. So that's been curtailed. You know, when it's little things like birthdays, and Mother's Day, and probably Father's Day, will we kind of our family who celebrate lots of we can and so we're trying our best, you know, we had a Zoom birthday party and, and none of us drive either. So that's the other part of it. So, there's none of this sort of drive by and honking and all that stuff, we can't do that. So, we did do a Zoom birthday. And we had a tiny little Zoom Passover, just with a few of just a few of the rituals that we all ate soup together. So that was kind of fun and silly. And so that's, that's difficult. I think that that's probably the most difficult for us. But again, so we've just replaced it with...with video calls of some sort. I also would see my sisters quite frequently I have three sisters in the Toronto area. And so, a one of them lives in Stratford. So, I haven't seen her at all, one lives in Toronto, but a little way away, and she doesn't drive either. And so, none of us were willing to go on TTC yet. So, I haven't seen her. And then another sister who does drive I've gone for a couple of walks, socially distanced. We've done that a couple of times. So that's nice. I get to see her and the four of us have have gone on Zoom calls a few times together. I don't really like Zoom; I'm going to be honest. I mean, I know it's certainly better than nothing. But I find it too formal. No matter what you

do. It's just, you know, you don't have any side conversations with anybody. You can talk over anybody and even hear it a little bit. So, but it's still better than nothing, I guess.

Marion Lougheed 28:17

Yeah, it's...it's a different it's a different experience. For sure.

Judy Cherniak 28:21

It is for sure.

Marion Lougheed 28:23

Are there other ways that your communication has been affected? Other than using Zoom? Do you use any other ways of communicating?

Judy Cherniak 28:32

Like other, other video call methods? We've always set my kids and I have always texted there's a there's a bit of phoning that what's going on. None of us very good on the phone. Never have been. So that's probably also why video calls are a little bit weird for us. It's just not that we've never been very good at it. I have I think that the silver lining, though, is that I have friends that I haven't been in touch with for a very long time. And for some reason, everybody feels like they...they want to reach out. So, there's some people I've reconnected with which has been lovely. That's been really nice. So, it's been through texting or Facebook messaging or and then eventually we go on...on a phone call. So, and because my friends tend to be a bit older, very few of them, like the video call. So, we're just doing it by phone. So, so that's been really, really special and very unexpected. I had no idea that that was going to happen. So that's been really good. And hopefully I won't lose touch. Yeah, it's been really nice. Some old, like a couple of board university friends that I probably talked to, you know, we exchanged something at Christmas and that's it. So, you know, I've talked to them a few times and, you know, sending jokes back and forth back

Marion Lougheed 29:59

And so yeah, so that's kind of, as I said, at least there's some positive things coming out of it as well.

Judy Cherniak 30:09

Yeah. Yeah. I think it could be a time of reflection. Certainly, a time of reflection. On maybe for me some personal things. But for me, it's also how can we be better as a society? And it's, you know, you just have to hope that more people are having those conversations, and I have no way of knowing if they are and you hope that they are you hope that the policymakers are also looking at things?

Marion Lougheed 30:42

Yeah, so that's actually one thing that I would be interested in is what...what you imagine or what you think individuals, communities and governments need to keep in mind? Like, what can be learned from this?

Judy Cherniak 30:55

Well, hopefully, to me, the...the biggest takeaway outside of you know, having hospitals and as always in the state of preparedness, because I mean, I don't I'm not really a pessimist. But I think that this is not the last thing that we that even I might experience, right. I think there's ample evidence, you know, of lots more violent storms, fires, flooding. And there's no reason to think that this is the last pandemic, right, there's, you know, every 10 years or so, it looks like we have one with the global village that we have, I think it's, you know, it will just spread like wildfire. So, so there's all that part, but I think I think that I hope anyways, that the governments all around the world, but you know, I'll just speak for Canada right now, look carefully at the fact that people who work hard, and maybe they have two or three jobs at a time, cannot make it without a paycheck. For even two or three weeks, they just don't have enough money, they can't save because they don't earn enough. So, my hope is that they will say we don't want to be handing out \$2,000 every month and scrambling to figure out how to do it. So, we need to make sure that people are getting enough money to live on, always. So that maybe, maybe they'll be able to put a little aside for a bad time. Right. And, of course, we'll have to help but maybe not to the tune of what we're helping now. So, you know whether it's a guaranteed annual income or topping up to a ger... guaranteed annual income, which I think is the smartest way to go. And regionalized, because Toronto is so much more expensive than Montreal, let's say or probably about the same as Vancouver, but so you can't, you can't pay the people in, you know, a small prairie town, the same amount that's needed in Toronto. So, it has to be regionalized. And usually, like federal payments or not. So that's something I think they need to look at. I think that what we have seen is an unprecedented amount of cooperation between all the different parties. And you think, oh, maybe they'll learn something from this and not go back to just the I can't think of the word right now. Anyways, they won't, that they won't always be adversarial, that maybe they'll look at...at governing in a different light, at least a little bit. It's already moving away from that now, but when one could hope I have mixed feelings, I think that all the countries will be looking at...at sort of protecting their own, which means that, you know, they'll do their own manufacturing, they'll do their own trade, they'll do this. And while I understand that, and I think certainly Canada could do much more with its resources rather than sending them, you know, off to China or Pakistan or wherever, to be made cheaply, and then sent back I think, you know, there's no reason we couldn't make lots of our own products. I also fear that it will become much more jingoistic nationalistic, right, that that will shut down those borders and, and, and it will be worse than it is in terms of looking at any people from elsewhere as the enemy right. So that's, that's a concern I have, and I hope people look at how do we balance that how do we take care of our own from our own place, but not not turned into isolationist. What else do I think? I think also, I think like, for Toronto anyways, one of the biggest things they need to look at is housing, housing and rents. And not, just not just residential, but commercial too, like, none of these stores can make it because their rents are so high. And we

already like where I live, and just little ways away the number of stores that have closed in the last year, because the rents have just skyrocketed. And they these are businesses that have done well enough and have been there for a long time. But they're just saying, "No, I can't, I can't pay the extra 2000 a month or whatever I'm making." So, I think we need to look at it. And I don't always like tons of regulation. But I think we need to look at what the heck is going on here. Because there are certainly lots of people making lots of money. And lots of people who are not making any. So, I'm hoping that they'll look at that a little bit.

Judy Cherniak 36:14

I have other things that I wish they'd look at, but I don't think they will, because I think what this has pointed out more than anything is that we are a hugely two-tiered system. And that and the...the top tier is very small, and the bottom tier is very big. And I think that I know people may not agree, but in my mind by...by declaring essential services. And I agree they had to be open grocery stores had to be open for us. I'm not sure that fast food places had to be open for us. But the people who outside of nurses and doctors, but I'll put PSWs and the cleaners and the cooks and all those people, they're paid the least and had to work right through this pandemic, often without the proper equipment. So, this may sound really rough, but in my head, I think what they're saying is that those people don't earn much are expendable. They can get sick; we're not going to worry about it. And I would hope that somebody looks at that and either pays them a lot more. Or finds a way to, to even it out somehow. I guess. So. And that's it, I think

Marion Lougheed 37:43

Yeah, so that's, that's a lot. Thanks. That's, that's really interesting. Some, some of that is probably more likely than other things.

Judy Cherniak 37:53

I don't know that any of it's likely to be honest. It's just things that I mean, to me, to me, if they only look at wow, you mean people can't survive a month without pay that and these are people who are working and you know, the food banks have had to double in size. But they really need to look at what is happening in terms of...of payment. I don't know how they cannot get it at some level.

Marion Lougheed 38:25

Have you seen the people around you change their opinions at all in response to the pandemic in any way, not just on this topic, but...

Judy Cherniak 38:32

I think the longer it's gone on the...there are more and more people saying you know, how economic should trump health? In fact, I think there's lots of people who are saying enough, we need to go back to work. We need to take the risk. And I don't know if they're right or wrong. It seems to me that certainly in Ontario, except for today, the numbers were going up instead of down. And that's not a good thing. Right? It's just it's just not a good thing. And it's all very well and good to say take the risk until

somebody you know that's died or been in hospital for three weeks with the ventilator. Right. I just. And I know at some point, obviously we have to go back to work. I don't get that, but I think that we might have to weather it longer, but I think people are getting tired. They need to make some money. I get that. I understand that. Although I think there's lots of people who are who are earning more with the federal money than they were working, which is kind of unusual.

Marion Lougheed 39:52

Do you know anybody who has gotten sick during the outbreak?

Judy Cherniak 39:56

Yes, I do. My very good friend's son in Victoria got sick. He was okay because he's young and healthy. But he, he had to take a week off. He works at a small craft brewery. And he took the two weeks off. And though he didn't get super sick, he said the fatigue lasted for a long, long time. This is a really young, healthy guy. A good friend of mine in Alberta, northern Alberta, her mother-in-law, so it's hard to know she was already ill, but she got it and she's just died. Now, I don't think they're gonna say it was from COVID-19 because she had all these problems. I think it was exacerbated by it. It might have hastened the end of it, it's hard to because she wasn't she didn't have a lot of severe COVID-19 symptoms, but as soon...like just shortly after they diagnosed that she got all are other problems just became worse. So, but those are the only two I know. Actually. Oh, wait. I know, I don't know. But if you're looking at like the degrees of separation, my son, my son knows, somebody of his work got quite sick, was fine in the end, but was sick. And a good friend of his brother or something got quite...quite sick. Nobody my family yet touch wood...

Marion Lougheed 41:29

That's good. Yeah. How do you think that COVID is affecting people's mental health? Or the whole situation with COVID?

Judy Cherniak 41:41

I think it is, you know, I have no doubt that it is. I think people especially people who live alone, could be...can be very adversely affected. Depending on their, their, what they live like before, right. So, for example, I have a friend who's a bit of a hermit anyway, so it really hasn't affected her much. I have another friend who I fully expected to be perfect with it. She...she likes to walk, and she are there. But she's, she's becoming miserable. She said, I really need to go back to work, and I miss going out for dinner. Like she said, I know it sounds ridiculous, but I miss those kinds of special perks that my normal life has. I don't think she's depressed. But maybe she's a little edgier. I think from the people I've talked to the...the people who are suffering the most are mothers in particular, and but all parents but mostly mothers who are staying at home, allegedly working, or even not working with young kids who can't, there's nothing, especially they don't have a big place, right, there's not a big backyard, they're really stuck. They're really stuck. And it's hard to be at home 24/7 without things to do with your, with your kid outside the house, right? Like even just silly things like you know, wandering into a mall and, you

know, pointing things out to your kid or going to the playground or, you know, going to a play area. So, I think those people are...lots of them are on the edge a little bit. I think people who have real economic worries could be very adversely affected. But I do go back to what I said at the beginning, which is I think people have a notion that they're giving up so much when really, they're giving up certain kind of freedom of movement, I guess, but, but they can all go out for walks. You can actually see people if you keep away from them, like not, not a million of them, but one at a time. And we've got lots of ways to entertain ourselves in our house for adults. So, I think some of it is a little bit privileged. So, we have privileged people who are feeling that they're hard done by, and I shouldn't be so rude, but I think they need to sort of stop and be grateful really.

Marion Lougheed 44:29

What are some of the activities that you've been doing just recreationally, either yourself at home with your husband or when you go to take care of your grandson?

Judy Cherniak 44:37

Lots of walking? Mostly walking really. Certainly, I read, although I haven't read as much for some reason. I think my concentration was off for sure. My rhythm was off, I think. Lots of Netflix, you know a few board game kinds of things for sure. Crossword puzzles, that kind of thing. When I, when I go with to see my little grandson, again, it's a bit of a pain right across from a little...little park that has a playground in it. And it's, it's almost heartbreaking because you go across and you have to like literally pull them away from the playground and you put them down and turns right back and goes to it. But you found we found other things, you know, like putting them in trees, for example, or running up and down the hills. So, there's that kind of thing. He's got a tiny little back area. So, they've got a water table for him to play with, that kind of thing. But it's hard. He was he was already in a daycare three days a week and was quite used to the other kids. So, I think he misses, and his mum misses, the fact that there are other kids to play with, right? So. But we haven't yet oh, I've done more baking for sure. I've done more baking, and my poor body will show it. So, I've been eating lots. Way too much. Listening to some music. So, lots of these things were things I would have done anyways, I've just...just increased. And, and visiting. I mean, lots of visiting, whether it's by text or video calls or phone calls way more than I would normally do. In fact, way more.

Marion Lougheed 46:34

Do you find you have any more any new or different responsibilities or chores or anything like that?

Judy Cherniak 46:39

Um, a little bit, just because, you know, neither my husband or I want him to be going out doing stuff. So, I've been doing I would guess, 98% of the shopping? Whereas before it was more of a shared responsibility and same with laundry.

Judy Cherniak 47:04

Outside of that, I don't not really. I don't, no, not really. But we're all people, right? We don't really have lots of things that we have to do, you know, there's, we don't need to mow or shovel or any of that kind of stuff.

Marion Lougheed 47:20

So that's nice.

Judy Cherniak 47:23

It makes it much simpler, much. I guess I'm in charge of all the technology stuff. And which I always was, but there's so much more of it now.

Marion Lougheed 47:38

Have you learned anything new technologically? Any new programs or apps or any?

Judy Cherniak 47:43

I mean, I've never used Zoom before. I still haven't hosted but it doesn't scare me if I think I could do it if I had to. But you know, I, oh I had a doctor's appointment on a secure video network. So that was I was quite worried about that because it was right near the very, very beginning. And I thought what they I had no idea what they're talking telling me to do, right. But I followed the instructions, and it was fine. In fact, I think my poor doctor was...was more upset by the whole thing than I was. He was not a happy camper. Oh, that it's too late now, but that's another concern I have actually. And it's a huge concern for me was that people with other medical problems, were not getting served. And, like I had a few little things, nothing very big. So, I was okay waiting. But I knew of people who had much more important things that needed to be done that that couldn't I guess be done or weren't done, right. So, I and I don't know where that line is if you need to have somebody who needs to have surgery for cancer. And they don't want to do it because they've got, they don't want to have any more people in ICU or they're worried about them picking up the virus perhaps I wasn't quite sure what the which side it fell on. But meanwhile, these people could be getting sicker and sicker and they're going to be kind of they could be inadvertent victims of the of the disease. Right. So...

Marion Lougheed 49:18

Is that an example like somebody who had cancer and needed?

Judy Cherniak 49:21

Yes. And so, I, to be honest, I didn't know this person, but a good friend of mine knew her. And she had waited. It was put off for a month and it was put off for another month and it was a very aggressive form of breast cancer, and she was having mastectomy and it just kept getting put off. So, you have to hope that they know what they're doing. But I mean, it's scary for the person. Right? And you're trying to be understanding but you know, it's...

Marion Lougheed 49:52

yeah, there's a lot of difficult balancing or trying things and some gaps. It's...it's hard to know, it's very hard. What have you been your...your primary sources of news or information?

Judy Cherniak 50:06

I watch a lot of CTV. And I'll read CBC. And sometimes people will send me things from like, the Times or whatever. But I watch a lot of the news. It's been some of it's been very confusing. Not so much now but there was a lot of confusion. I really like to watch all the public health experts like the city, the province, and the Federal one, just to see really, I think, in my head anyways, that they have the best real info on what's going on. And probably ways to deal with it, although they do it quite differently, like BC did a, quite a different approach than we did. And it's worked for them, but they don't have the vast dense cities that we have. So, you know, maybe it was smart not to do the same kind of approach. But that's really where I'm getting most of it. And lots of it, I think here's an interesting thing. It's just when you're talking about news. So, one of the most interesting things to me is now when people talk, that's the conversation almost entirely. There's very little that else that people talk about. I noticed that the other day, and actually even on the news the other day, like I just do I have on my phone, it gives you headlines, I think, yesterday or the day before was the first time in a long time, that in the top four they had other things besides COVID-19, which I think it's...it's time right. There's other things going on in the world as well. I mean, maybe this takes precedence still, and I think it does. But there are lots of other things that we'll probably need to know about. So...

Marion Lougheed 52:06

How do you feel about all the news being focused on that? And all the conversations as well, as you said, even informally, it seems to get...

Judy Cherniak 52:14

I think, the conversations, a lot of it's based on hooley. Right, like people are just talking, you know, they think they have the facts, but they don't really have the facts. And everybody's got an opinion based on nothing, essentially, I mean, it's fun to talk about, but really, you know, I do the same. And in the end, I think I don't really know what I'm talking about, but kind of fun. Well, look at what they did over in Sweden, look at they didn't type that kind of thing, right. I think the news is, is...is so repetitive, like so repetitive that I'm getting very tired, but I don't, I don't turn to it first thing anymore. And tuning out a lot of the COVID news, I look for the numbers every day. And I look for the trends. But and it's sad. I mean, you know, the news today, for example, about what the military are finding in some of those long-term care homes. It's just, it's so appalling. I can actually barely take it in. Even though I knew somewhere in my head that it was bad. This was beyond what I had imagined. And so, the news is almost unrelentingly awful. Which doesn't help anybody. I don't think I mean, lots of papers are trying to hero of the day and celebrate our frontline workers. But I mean, I guess the news, is that right? So maybe, but it's really, pretty awful. But it's in there. It's constant. It's a barrage of barrage of barrage.

And I think the newscasters like when they do they have the...the Premier or the Prime Minister talking, the reporters are asking questions to me, and they're just trying to stir the pot. They really they've said what they have to say they've said what they've tried to do Yes, they've made mistakes. Nobody knew everything about this when it first happened. So, to keep going back to well, don't you think you did this too late and everything you did that too late? It's done man. No, like, what are they supposed to say? I generally have a healthy respect for reporters but throughout this I think they have been really wanting to make controversy and we don't need that right now. We need to be working together on this and just you know, being forgiving for...for honest mistakes and the if they're you know, if they're calculated mistakes, then that's a different thing. But none of these I don't think any of us I don't think it's a conspiracy I don't think I think everybody wants it to be better. So, so news is one thing, and the reporters are different kettle of fish and I'm tired. A lot

Judy Cherniak 52:50

So, you find it sort of exhausting and also very informative.

Judy Cherniak 55:19

Um, for a long time, I was a news hound for sure. I mean, I had to use on probably always in the background. I don't anymore. I'm trying to get off quite often or turning into something silly. Maybe I'll watch Jeopardy instead of the news, right?

Marion Lougheed 55:38

Yeah, what were you...you did mention your watch...you've been watching a lot of Netflix and stuff like that. Is there anything in particular that you watch that you've been watching a lot of, or certain kinds of things?

Judy Cherniak 55:49

Stupid stuff. Not watching anything that has any value to anybody, I suspect. So, you know, things like blacklist are really adventure kind of spy almost stuff, right? So, that kind of thing. I haven't turned much to like romantic comedies, which I thought I would be, but I haven't been doing that much. I did, of course, right at the beginning watch Contagion. Just right at the beginning, I thought I got to watch this movie again. And I did. And I also read a book that was an end of the world type book. So, those things still are interesting to me. Okay, how did other people do it? But really nothing, nothing of value. I'm not even watching nature shows which I normally watch. Maybe a tiny but, but not much. Comedy, watch standup comics. So yeah, things to make life a little bit severe.

Marion Lougheed 56:51

Do you ever find somebody I was talking to mention that sometimes seeing people in movies that are out for dinner or at the mall or something like that? That it almost looks weird. Now, do you ever find anything like that?

Judy Cherniak 57:11

No, but my sister does she mentioned that she saw something on TV and they were we went to hug and she immediately her thought was, what are you guys doing? I somehow managed to keep that quite compartmentalized. I think the only time that actually bothers me is when people in real life are not are not keeping distance. And that that bothers me. But otherwise, no, it doesn't. And I don't feel jealous either. It's to me, it's just not it's not real to begin with. So it's not real. That sense either.

Marion Lougheed 57:46

Great. Well, this. This has been really interesting. I only have a couple of questions left. Okay, so one is still about the media. Do you think there are any issues important issues that the media maybe isn't covering? Or isn't talking about? And they don't have to be COVID. Related, just anything that yeah,

Judy Cherniak 58:09

I don't think they are talking enough about the divide between the rich and the not rich and the working poor. I don't think they're talking enough. And I think that, to me, this COVID-19 has, has really pointed out that just that division in a bigger way, it's not that it created it, it's just that it's...it's made it very clear that we have a group of underclass that make it possible for the others to keep making money, essentially right and safely. So, you know, not so much here. But certainly, in BC, for example, they never close the daycares. Some of them just close on their own, but they were never officially closed. And it was like you people, they don't, and they don't have very much. But they made it possible for the people who would make more money to stay home and earn. Right, because their kids could go in daycare. So, I think that hasn't really been talked about enough. And even the whole myth about sending people home to work when they have children. It's been talked about a bit, but more like kind of like little interest stories where we've really looked at what that actually means to the companies, as well. Because, you know, I think the truth is that people with kids are not putting in a full day's work. They can't, it's not it's not humanly possible. So, the companies have...have I mean, I think they kind of quietly know it, but nobody's talking about. what else do I think they have been talking about? I don't think they've talked enough about the fact that that in In minutes, the federal government found all this money to give to people. Whereas for years, it's been thought that that would be impossible. Right? We can't get any more money. We can't have bigger social safety nets. We can't do this. And then lo and behold, there was like, and money after money after money after money after money. So, I think they need to point out somewhere that hey, somehow, we did manage to do it and the sky hasn't fallen yet. In any case, we will have to pay for it at some point but or not. Right. I don't think they've talked about that yet. The only other issue that they've sort of talked about a little bit, but not very much is the increase in domestic abuse. And I'm guessing child abuse will fall into there, and that nobody's mentioning that, and I can't imagine it's not happening. So...

Judy Cherniak 58:24

Have you...have you seen any information about that that makes you think it's the case?

Judy Cherniak 01:00:03

Well, no, except when they say domestic abuse. It's not just the women. Right. But that maybe they're just not separating it out. I think I might have seen one comment that child protective services, maybe has had more calls, but it's a very difficult time, because what do you do with the kids? Right? That's the problem. And same thing with if there's women, where did they go? There's...there's nowhere for them to go. So that's a that's a big, big thing. Yeah, I think there'll be about they talked about homeless people, but maybe not enough again, about why do we have so many homeless people? That would be the question right. Now, just what do we do with them? But why are they there? So...

Marion Lougheed 01:01:55

Have you seen any of the tent cities that have sprung up downtown?

Judy Cherniak 01:02:01

No, I haven't been downtown, to be honest. But even before this, we lived near a path that followed the Don River. And you'd often see a couple of tents here and there. So, you know, people already, this was like, in the last few years, we're already living down there, probably because it was safer than being up on the streets. And I think there was one in that area, just not quite as far down that was dismantled? I believe so.

Marion Lougheed 01:02:34

Okay, great. So last question. What...what can you imagine your life your life personally being like in a year?

Judy Cherniak 01:02:43

Wow. You know, I don't know. I...Yeah. I think some of the I don't think we'll be out of it completely. Unless there's a vaccine, which there could be in a year's time. But I think there certain things that we as a group will be doing more of. I think lots of people will wear masks as a matter of course in TTC for sure. And crowded stores and Christmas time when there's lots of people. I don't know. I...you know, I'm not sure like it will depend on really what happens in the next five months, I think, as to where I'll be in a year. But I mean, the likeliest is that I'll be right back to where I was in January. Like that's the likeliest to just back to my regular routines and everybody else back to the regular routines, and nothing much changed. I mean, I hoping that's not the case. To be honest, I hope that there are some systemic changes that happen that will change all of our lives a little bit, but I don't hold out tons of hope for them. So, I'll be going to work two days a week if they'll still have me. And that that's probably the biggest if, I would guess. I'll be going help my daughter out with her baby and I'll be seeing my other granddaughter in the flesh now. And that's about it. That's the only changes I see. But I'm, you know, as I say, I'm...I'm not in a state of change or development in that sense. So, I think my kids may have very different mighs.

Marion Lougheed 01:04:27

How so?

Judy Cherniak 01:04:29

Um, well, for my son and his partner, I think they've been working from home. And I can...I can imagine both their agencies saying, this is a choice, you could work from home. And if they do that, I think they'll move out of Toronto to buy a house because they won't need to be in Toronto. So, I see that as a as a huge possibility for all sorts of...young kind of quasi white collar, like they're not the wealthiest of wealthy obviously. But they have the option to work from home. And if they had daycare or whatever, then they could actually do it, and they wouldn't need to live in Toronto. But that would be a huge change for all of us really. And I think that's actually something that could happen to any number of people who work in offices in Toronto. They've already closed spot...Shopify and Twitter, right. They're not having offices anymore. There's no reason those people have to live in the cities. I mean, even if they have to come in once every two months for a meeting. That's doable. Right. So...

Marion Lougheed 01:05:47

Do you think that will affect the local economy at all?

Judy Cherniak 01:05:49

Yes, I do. I mean, if you have a migration of people out of the downtown core in particular, I don't. I mean, I think that's a dangerous thing. I have seen American cities where everybody's left the downtown, and they just become havens for people who don't have best interests at heart, right. And you have all sorts of abandoned buildings, and, you know, but for economics, these offices, if they don't have to rent a whole bunch of downtown office space, then I guess, why would they? So, I it could be a huge, I think, I mean, a benefit for those companies economically, but not for the city. They lose property tax, they lose rentals, they have, I think, a higher possibility of crime because there's not people down there. So, I understand, I think if I were young, and didn't have to go Toronto couldn't afford to live here, I'd leave too, right. So, that's why I think it has to go hand in hand looking at rents and things like that for people so otherwise, I don't see my life will be substantially different, to be honest.