

Jeff Litsey Oral History Transcript

Interviewee: Jeff Litsey

Interviewer: Joanna Reese and John Peyton

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Abstract: Jeff Litsey is a resident of the Fountain Square Neighborhood in Indianapolis with his wife and two children. Jeff discusses how the pandemic has affected his family life and schedule while also discussing how the neighborhood dynamics have evolved during the pandemic. Jeff talks about the challenges of running a small, locally owned, coffee shop during the pandemic in the Fletcher Place neighborhood of Indianapolis. This includes revenue, business plan evolution, government assistance, adjusting employee's hours and pay, and helping employees and customers feel safe during the pandemic. He also illustrates how the neighborhood community helped his employees through tips that rolled into a community employee assistance plan. Additionally, Jeff discusses his anxiety that increased during the pandemic from running a business and worrying about how his shop could affect others and himself. This extended to worrying about his family. The interview ends with his hopes for all people to have healthcare and a home.

Joanna Reese 00:08

All right, we are recording. My name is Joanna Reese. I am here with Jeff Litsey and [redacted, never speaks]. The date is March 19, 2021. The time is 4:09pm. [Redacted], Jeff, and I are in Indianapolis, Indiana. Jeff, I want to briefly review the informed consent and deed of gift document that you signed. This interview is for the COVID-19 oral history project which is associated with the Journal of the Plague Year, a COVID-19 Archive. The COVID-19 Oral History Project is a rapid response oral history focused on achieving the lived experience of the COVID-19 epidemic. We have designed this project so that professional researchers and the broader public can create and upload their oral histories to our open access and open-source database. This study will help us collect narratives and understandings about COVID-19 as well as help us better understand the impacts of the pandemic over time. The recording's demographic information and the verbatim transcripts will be deposited in the Journal of the Plague Year a COVID-19 Archive, and the Indiana University Library System for the use of researchers and the general public. Do you have any questions about the project that I can answer?

Jeff Litsey 01:22

Not at the moment.

Joanna Reese 01:25

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part, or you may leave the study at any time. Leaving the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your current or future relations with Indiana University, IUPUI, or the IUPUI Arts and Humanities Institute. Participating in this project means that your interview will be recorded in digital video or audio format and may be transcribed. The recordings and possible transcriptions of the interview, copies of any supplementary documents or additional photos that you wish to share, and the informed consent and deed of gift may be deposited in the Journal of the Plague Year, a COVID-19 Archive, and the Indiana University Library System, and will be available to both researchers and the general public. Your name and other means of identification will not be confidential. Do you have any questions?

In addition to your signed document, would you please offer a verbal confirmation that you understand and agree to these terms. I'm also asking that you would verbally confirm that you've agreed that your interview will be made available under the following license: The Creative Commons Attribution Noncommercial Sharealike 4.0 International. The COVID-19 oral history project, the Journal the Plague Year, a COVID-19 Archive, and the trustees of Indiana University acting through its agents, employees, or representatives has unlimited rights to reproduce, use, exhibit, display, perform, broadcast, create derivative works from, and distribute the oral history materials in any manner or media now existing or hereafter developed in perpetuity throughout the world.

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Jeff Litsey 03:49

Yep, I understand and agree.

Joanna Reese 03:51

Finally, I will ask you for a verbal confirmation that you have agreed that your interview will be made available to the public immediately. Do you confirm this?

Jeff Litsey 04:00

Yep, I agree.

Joanna Reese 04:01

Well, let's get started then. Why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself?

Jeff Litsey 04:08

Sorry, I'm munching. Yeah. Hi, I'm Jeff Litsey. I'm 37. I'm married, father of two. Run, well, co-own a coffee roastery and coffee shop with my dad. We've been open going on 12 years. It'll be 12 at the end of September. I like to birdwatch; I like to hike. I like to be outside. I like to paint. Yeah, I spend a lot of time at the shop but as much time with the with family as possible. Yeah, I mean that that's, that's it in a nutshell.

Joanna Reese 04:57

Great. What are your primary day-to-day activities?

Jeff Litsey 05:02

Um, specifically here at the shop? You know, honestly, it evolves. But more than anything, I kind of like, I operate it. Which means I'm here five days a week. It used to be six before the pandemic, but it's one thing I've gleaned from this whole thing. It was like, I don't want to work six days, it's dumb. So now I'm here five days a week. I roast. So, I'm the, I'm the roaster. I also kind of head up production, which means like, I make simple syrups, and do some things like make cold brew and bottle get that organized to be bottled. But you know, I have help with that. But then also doing like bookkeeping, ordering inventory. I mean, pretty much all of the above. And right now, our front-end managers kind of on a leave of absence. I'm also like scheduling and kind of handling more HR kind of things, which typically, we have her doing that kind of stuff. So right now, it's kind of most everything, but then I'm also a barista, and I help the crew close up four days a week. So, you know, cleaning toilets and things like that even and taking out trash. Yeah, it's kind of mostly everything.

Joanna Reese 06:25

What would you say your average weeknight looks like with your family?

Jeff Litsey 06:29

Um, yeah, it's not too bad right now. Um, I would say most days, I get home, probably a little bit before five. And then we, I guess it just kind of depends on what the kids are doing. Our son is in kindergarten, our daughter's two. Sometimes he has schoolwork, but rarely. And he's in person school right now to. When he was doing virtual learning, he had schoolwork every day to work on at home. So, we would work on that. But yeah, usually when I get home, we just kind of play. kind of relax. Sometimes we'll let the kids watch a show. If it's nice outside, we're usually outside in the yard. Sometimes, we'll often we take walks. And then we try to get the get dinner started around six or so. Get it wrapped up by seven if possible, and then try to get the kids in bed by 7:30-7:45. And, and then usually my wife Emily and I will just kind of depends. We usually kind of like decompress a little bit. We try to catch up with each other a little bit and then we'll usually watch some shows. Sometimes we'll do some other things like paint. She's also an artist, but usually watch some shows and try to be in bed by 10. 10:30.

Joanna Reese 07:51

What is her profession?

Jeff Litsey 07:53

She's a high school art teacher. This is her 15th year.

Joanna Reese 07:59

Was she required to teach her class online?

Jeff Litsey 08:04

Yeah. Yeah, at the beginning of the pandemic, yeah. They finished last year, virtually. Though this year, it's been all in person. They have, they've done it full on full bore at the beginning, and then they switched to hybrid. And then now they're kind of full on again.

Joanna Reese 08:22

How does someone teach art...through virtual learning?

Jeff Litsey 08:26

Oh, you'd have to ask her. Honestly, I, it's tough. Yeah, I don't really know. Yeah, that's a better question for her. Unfortunately, I don't have much for you.

Joanna Reese 08:40

And your son, he um, how's he adjusting with the changes?

Jeff Litsey 08:45

It's hard to say because he, this is his first year of school. So, I mean, he had preschool last year, but that was half days. He seems to be doing well. He, I think like most kids, like he's pretty adaptable. In particular, his mask wearing like, he's, he kind of wanted to know why he needed to wear a mask initially, but he doesn't. He doesn't really bat an eye at it now. Every once in a while, he's like, Oh, this one's too thick, and I don't like this one or the feel of it. But in general, like mask wearing has not been an issue for him. It, it's yeah, it's hard to say because we don't really have much to compare it to. But he he's doing he's doing well at school. And you know, obviously he's got a lot of support at home. Yeah, I think he's doing a good job, but it's hard to tell. He's, he's pretty, um, what's the word? He's got a lot of zeal. So sometimes I think like he gets excited about things and he doesn't know what to do how to like handle that energy. And then he also can get pretty tired. And then sometimes he just gets frustrated, but I think that would probably happen regardless. Yeah.

Joanna Reese 10:07

And your daughter? She's in daycare, then?

Jeff Litsey 10:11

Yeah.

Joanna Reese 10:12

How did that change?

Jeff Litsey 10:14

Yeah, so it's changed a lot in some regards. Historically, before the pandemic, I was, I would get to the shop and be to the shop six or earlier most days. And with kindergarten, we were going to

send our son to the same school, but we were going to do pre care...so...early. So, I could still kind of keep my schedule the same, and my wife was going to do that. But they're, they're not offering pre care this year because of COVID. So that kind of, that forces us into sort of this orbit around like, what his school needs, what he needs for school. So, before the pandemic we would take him to wherever it was, whether it was daycare, or preschool, like pretty early. My wife would do that. And then so our son, or I mean, our daughter would do the same, she would go wherever she needed to go all on that same trip. But because of the pandemic, and Leo's school, needing him needing to be there at like, 8:45. It basically I've adjusted my schedule, so that I can do that. And then I just take her to daycare around the same time. They her daycare was open from the beginning, more or less, but we didn't have to take her for a while. So, we didn't. I don't think we really started taking her until like late summer. And then, yeah, I mean, it's roughly the same amount of time, it's just kind of pushed back a little bit because of me needing to get Leo to school and not being able to get to the shop earlier and stuff like that.

Joanna Reese 11:59

Right. You live in Fountain Square?

Jeff Litsey 12:04

Yeah.

Joanna Reese 12:05

Can you tell me about that neighborhood?

Jeff Litsey 12:07

Yeah, Yeah, so we live like a half mile from the shop. So, I walk in most days. It's, I mean, the neighborhood's changing a lot. It's historically, like white working class. There were a couple blocks that were historically like black or Latino. And though, I think most of those folks got kind of moved out. The, I mean the coming of the interstate really kind of messed up the neighborhood in some ways. It broke it up into a lot of different chunks that it kind of exists in now. It was kind of notorious for being pretty rough, like the 80s, 90s, early 2000s, and I am sure there was legitimacy to that. And then we moved into the area in 2008. So, you know, as far as some people are concerned, we're pretty recent, but as far as like kind of what's happened, and a lot of the new people in the neighborhood, we've been there for a little while now. It's still an interesting mix of people who've lived there for a really long time, maybe some generations or their whole life. But that those people are, are few and far between, now I'm not seeing as many just. I'll break it down to our specific block because that's kind of easier for me to get my mind around. We have we have a few families or a few individuals who grew up in the neighborhood

or have lived there most of their life that are still around, but probably half of them that we got to know or were around when we moved on to the block are gone now. And some of them some because some people died were old and they died. Some people had some financial issues and had moved out. Some people were renters and were forced out because of somebody bought the house and flipped it and then they couldn't afford the rent. And then some other people were just like, you know, we're gonna move to a different neighborhood. And then there are a lot of new homes just even on our block, specifically, that are sort of modern to in design and they're selling for half a million dollars plus. And I mean, I would say I don't know many of those people. They don't have porches, they, which is interesting. I mean, there's one real, there are two real close to us. And we we've gotten to know those people just a little bit. One of them actually has a big porch, which is cool. So, we see that guy a lot. And then the other guy walks his dog a lot. But the other people we don't see very often, but also the house next to us is a really old house and there's a guy that's lived there as long as we have. He's a young dude and we never see him. But he's just kind of to himself. But yeah, it's changing a lot. Home prices are going up.

I talked to one of the neighborhood that, one of the neighbors across the street who grew up in the neighborhood. He's in his 60s, kind of asked him how he felt about everything. And he, he was really glad to see fewer abandoned homes and vacant lots. He was glad to see like less drug activity because there was a fair amount of that. But I gather too that he, he liked to see like more business and stuff, but he didn't feel like he could participate. I'm kind of reading into his comments a little bit with that. But I gathered that he didn't go to those places very often. I don't know if that was because different culture or financial or what, but he just didn't seem like he really participated in many of the new businesses and things like that. But yeah, it's an interesting place. I'm not sure how much longer we'll be in the neighborhood to be frank, but I don't like some of the changes. And even with the coffee shop, we've had a lot of neighbors who, in particular, were renters, who had been forced out because of higher rents. And that's kind of calmed down a little bit recently. But I don't know. Yeah.

Joanna Reese 16:30

I understand. We were looking for a house in Fountain Square and were unable to find one within our price range.

Jeff Litsey 16:36

If we sell our house now, which we've kind of thought about it, we will not be able to afford another house in the neighborhood. We'll have to move out of the neighborhood for sure.

Joanna Reese 16:46

What prompted you and your father to open where you did?

Jeff Litsey 16:51

Yeah. So, we moved in 2008, to Fletcher place, which a lot of people kind of lump into Fountain Square. So, let's, let's see, 2008 I moved with them. And then later that year, I actually went to teach overseas in Kazakhstan, to teach English. While I was there, my dad had the idea to start a shop in the neighborhood. And I, I don't, okay, whatever. I didn't know anything about coffee. He didn't. He'd never had a cup of coffee in his life. But he was researching it more and more. He basically it was it was his vision, not mine. Excuse me, he wanted to have a, like a place that was in the neighborhood, that was open to all ages, and then also welcoming to all people, whoever they were. And he just I think he appreciated the idea of coffee as being sort of a conduit for that. And he had been a pastor before and had quit doing that, oh, probably nine to 12 months before opening the shop. So, he loves people. He loves being around people. He likes being able to, I don't know, invest in people's lives. But he didn't want to do it as a pastor anymore. He wanted to do it in kind of a different way. So that's, yeah, that was kind of the impetus for the shop. And then he asked me if I wanted to be involved and over some months, I kind of thought about it, and I decided to come back and help out.

Joanna Reese 18:27

That's great. It's a great place to go. So, it's considered to be in Fletcher place, not Fountain Square?

Jeff Litsey 18:36

Yeah, technically. But if you're a Fletcher place resident, you really hope you cling to that designation. If you're not, you don't cling to it as much. So, I, I don't really care if people call us Fountain Square/Fletcher Place, it doesn't matter to me. But I mean, probably historically, the difference wasn't that big because the interstate kind of broke everything up. But now there is a very real divide because of the interstate.

Joanna Reese 19:04

Right. So, 12 years later, how many? How many countries do you have roasting now? And yeah, what services are you offering?

Jeff Litsey 19:16

Oh, that's a good question. I'm not sure how many countries we have featured. Currently, we have let's see, Ethiopia, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guatemala, Colombia, two Colombia's, Honduras. That's it, so seven, I mean that we usually have around six to seven featured. There's usually something from Ethiopia on the menu. Guatemala, oftentimes,

Columbia oftentimes. Yeah, so we didn't start roasting. We started roasting. 2000 Oh my gosh. When was that? 2016 maybe. So that's when we really started roasting in house. So, in a lot of ways, what we do coffee wise has evolved. I would say, when we first started, we were sort of on the line of like, specialty coffee in that, like, we, we cared a lot about what we were doing. And we paid a lot of attention. We got good training from a guy from like the first local roaster in the city from Bee Coffee. And took that role seriously. But we also, we had a lot to learn. And I think we've evolved in that regard a lot. Hopefully not to I don't want to be like, I would, I would feel like I had failed if people call us like refined or I don't know. There, there are certain like coffee lingo and jargon that I just that really rubbed me the wrong way, because I think they're exclusionary. And so, I think we've tried to strike the balance of having a really fun menu, having like, cool stuff that we do in house like roasting was one of those things that we wanted to add. Making a lot of like different simple syrups and like infused cold brews, and things like that. We wanted to add that and kind of keep evolving and keep honing our skills and keep improving. But all this at the same time, the goal is to be approachable, and make coffee like fun and interesting. But always like people first coffee second. Yeah, and obviously COVID has kind of changed some of that. It's harder to do that so much now, but still kind of doing the same thing, but with no seating. So, we can't like run, we can't run people's drinks to their table, you know, and like, say cheers, and they can't see the latte art that we poured on top unless they pop the lid off, you know, things like that. But yeah.

Joanna Reese 22:01

So how have you survived as a business the last year?

Jeff Litsey 22:06

I think initially, we had, well, you know, we were just kind of scrambling like everybody else. And so initially, I kind of was paying attention to what other people were doing, other businesses, and started talking to other business owners that I know. And then also talking to customers, who like really are invested in us. Had a couple of customers each separately of the other without the other knowing gave us, I think one gave us \$100 bill and one gave us two \$100 bills. And they're like, "Hey, I don't know, you guys are probably going to need this at some point. But we want this to go for the crew to have some money. Whatever happens." And so, from there, kind of had the idea to start a customer finance support fund. And we use that as like the initial funding for that. And so, we just put it out there like online, like, "Hey, we're laying everybody off, because we don't really know what else to do right now. We're gonna lay everybody off, but with the guarantee that they have their job back." And so, we just kind of put that out there on social media, and we set it up on our online shop through our website, so people could contribute. And that took off. I mean, it was over \$15,000 by the time it was all said and done that people contributed to our employees. So, we just gave it like, we consider that like a gift from our customers and would disperse that amongst the crew. And so that I mean, that took care of our crew in the meantime. So, I didn't I didn't lay myself off, but I kind of adapted our

like our online presence as far as like what we offer like through shipping and stuff. So, I continued to roast, and I started doing like a free local radius, like maybe two-to-three-mile radius, I would just run-in people's coffee to their, to their door. Nothing, no prepared coffee, but just like bags of coffee. And so, I kind of updated our website with some things. Like we'd never offered like even like ground coffee as an option through the website but did that with like special instructions. And then also too just like on social media tried to be really open and honest about what we were experiencing and what we were thinking. And, you know, some of our concerns, but also some of our like, trying to express our gratitude for people's support. I didn't want it to be like constant that, but I also wanted, I just wanted customers to have like a window into, you know, kind of what we were thinking and how we were feeling and how we were surviving. So just we were really honest with what was going on. And then too, like, from the, from the beginning, it was kind of like a constant conversation with the crew like what we're going to do, how we're going to do things. So then when we were able to bring everybody back in because we got the PPP that...the initial round of government assistance.

Well, I guess I'll, I'll go back a little bit. So yeah, we got the PPP. There was another SBA like urgent relief amount that we got, but it was, it was so weird, I had no clue if it got submitted, if it was received, how long it was gonna be. There was no like recognition, and then all sudden, there was \$8,000 in our bank account one day, like weeks later. I was like, what is this, but I kind of figured out what it was. And I was like, I don't know if this is a loan, if this is forgivable what it is. So, I was scrambling for grants, applying for grants, applying for all kinds of things like that. Got turned down for everything, which, you know, there was only so much money to go around. But we got turned down for everything except for the SBA urgent relief, and then the PPP. We didn't make it the first round, but we got it the second round. So, we were able to open up our doors again, we just did like, kind of curbside service where we just serve people from our front door. And it was from the beginning, it was kind of like you, we wanted the decisions to be made as a team. So, it was pretty much unanimous, unanimously agreed upon decisions, like how we were going to do things. We got together a couple times, I think. Well, a few times before we opened to do some cleaning and just some sprucing up and moving things around and talking through like how we wanted to do things and everybody kind of collaborated with their ideas about how we should set up, what would be safe, how, what would make them feel comfortable, what wouldn't.

And then then once we actually did open up there was just kind of this constant evolution of like, well, okay, we have Plexiglas here, but people can kind of talk around it. So, let's put some burlap bags up here so they can't and let's scoot things around. Let's, we'll keep doing that. And then I'm trying to think, Oh, yeah, we, we eventually we uh decided that, okay, we can let customers come in. And that was with the colder weather. We felt like, we need to be allowing the customers to actually walk into the cafe to stay out of the cold, and then they can exit. But you know, still no seating. When we again talked about that as a group, everybody was feeling good about it. I think everybody felt good once we did it, too. And it's nice to actually see people kind of in the space. Yeah, and then kind of just continued to tell people what we were doing once in a while on social media. And just not that long ago, I put out something about how we're still not sure when we're going to have indoor seating and got a lot of support. Got a little

pushback on Facebook, from a couple people. But you know, I just kind of ignored that. And generally, the, there was a lot of support from customers. And yeah, we I'm sure there are things I'm missing, but..

Joanna Reese 28:26

You mentioned the staff.

Jeff Litsey 28:27

Yeah.

Joanna Reese 28:28

So, do you were you able to retain the staff after that point, then or most of the staff?

Jeff Litsey 28:33

Yeah, pretty much we, we, when we retained, we retained everybody, we brought everybody back on with reduced hours. But we talked about like building those hours back up, which we were pretty much able to do there was I don't know if you remember John, but he phased his hours out mostly until he was just working Saturdays. And then he didn't really want to be on the schedule anymore, but was kind of like, I'll be around if you if you need me. But he didn't want to take hours from anybody because he didn't need it. He had like some side work. So, we basically just like he phased himself out. We and we were totally okay with that. Because at that point, we didn't. I mean, we didn't really need it. And so, in some ways, it was kind of a it's beneficial to us and the rest of the crew because if you wanted more hours, it probably wouldn't have been helpful. Yeah, and then it was kind of Sheila was really, she's you know, she's kind of a scheduler and she's good at checking in with everybody to make sure they feel good about their hours if they're getting what they need. So, there were times and people are like, well, I'd like to be a little closer to 32 or whatever and so we'd try to increase that and then come... Well then, we had a couple people are like actually just want to work like three days a week. And that was totally fine.

Come November, though, PPP ran out. And then it was, it was like, oh man, we're like the bank account is dwindling, and I have no idea what we're gonna do because Congress is still deliberating about what the second wave of relief is going to look like, and there's no end in sight for when they're actually going to come to any kind of decision. So, it was definitely getting concerned. So, I talked to the crew, like, hey, we need to start talking about this now, because I don't, I don't know what it's going to be like, going into the winter, because winter is. I mean, January, February are our worst months, every year consistently and with COVID, and us not

having indoor seating, I knew would probably be even worse. So, we started talking about like, we might need to cut some hours, and then at that point, we actually had two employees, that were like, we'll just we'll cut our own hours. And we're okay with that because we're okay right now.

One of those was Sheila, because she's, she's married. And so, her, her wife has regular income, and you know, all that kind of stuff. And then the other was Jack, and he just was wanting to work less. So, I mean, fortunately, they were willing to do that. And then we also got some, like rent relief through Indy Chamber of Commerce. And that got us through December, January, February. And then in that time, also, we got the second round of the PPP. So that that was super helpful. Though, we ended up ended up having a lot of turnover in staff, as we've kind of talked about that, in January, which has been incredibly difficult, in a lot of ways, but yeah, that's sort of unrelated to COVID. Well, I guess it's probably related to COVID. But yeah.

Joanna Reese 31:43

So, when you first learned about COVID, what were your thoughts? Talking back in March.

Jeff Litsey 31:49

Yeah, I, it just didn't seem real. It seemed like something that would, would stay across the ocean. And, and then all of a sudden, you're starting to hear like, Oh, crap, it's, it's in Washington State. It's in Oregon, California. Oh, there's somebody in Boston, oh, there's somebody in Marion County. And then you're like, okay, this is. Once it was actually declared, like a global pandemic. It's like, I, I know, this is bad, but I still like I can't, couldn't get my mind around, like, what that was actually gonna look like. And then it was a weird feeling when we decided to actually close the shop down. Because, you know, some, some businesses stayed open, which, you know, more power to them. Because, I mean, we didn't have to shut down, but it just felt like the right thing to do. So, I think, you know, you go from earliest. I went from feeling like completely uncertain, and totally like, this is a dream, this doesn't feel real to be in like, I don't know what else to do, but shut the business down for the safety of like, my crew and me and my, you know, thinking about the trickle-down effect of when somebody gets sick, like maybe, you know, you get somebody else sick, and yeah.

Joanna Reese 33:14

There was one time where you had to close because the possible positive? Right?

Jeff Litsey 33:19

Yeah, yeah. And so, we've decided to play it extra safe. So, we talked to our crew, like if you feel sick at all do not come in. So that happened a few times where people are like, I feel something I feel off. And that was actually one of our crew had gone to like a family get together in Michigan. She wasn't really excited about it because her family wasn't really taking things seriously, though. And she was though to her credit, she was she was very, very serious about like mask wearing and social distancing. I mean, you know, like, just general hygiene stuff to be safe.

But when she came back, she said she felt like she had the flu, or she'd been hit like a hit by a truck. And so, she, she thought she had it. So, she got tested. And we decided like, I mean, it doesn't, you know, who are we to say that how she feels so we better just take it pretend like or operate as if she does have it. We'll close down until we get the result back. And, I mean, it came back negative. So fortunately for her, and then, you know, fortunately for us, we opened up the next day that we found out. But yeah, we just kind of, it kind of sucks but you know, we're like we're losing out on revenue. We can't pay people that those for those days that we're closed. And it's you know, on one hand, it's incredibly frustrating, because you're out everything's so uncertain to begin with. But at the end of the day, it's like, well, it's not worth the risk.

Joanna Reese 34:57

So, we're a year in, how have your thoughts changed?

Jeff Litsey 35:03

Um, it's a good question I, initially I was, you know, just really uncertain what was going to happen. I, while I was roasting and kind of doing things on my own, during that initial period of us being shut down, I was feeling constantly stressed out and anxious about contracting it. Not because I was so worried about myself, but because I was like, because we were learning so much about it at the time, too. I was just worried that I was doing something wrong, and that I was going to spread it throughout the city, because of like, maybe I got it on a package or, you know, I, there was a lapse in judgment or something, and I'm sending COVID out in coffee bags. Or so I, you know, I looking back on that now, with the information that we have...and I think with what, like scientists and like health people have realized is like, there was actually what I was doing was, was enough to mitigate any risk.

But in that moment, in time, I was really anxious about it. And I was starting to feel kind of overcome by that anxiety. So much so that I actually talked, I called my doctor because I was having some like chest issues and some, some shortness of breath. And, and I was also just anxious. And I, I figured what I was experiencing was probably just due to anxiety, but I, you know, I wanted to be careful. So, I actually talked to her and she had me come in, did some heart

tests. Did kind of find out that I have some irregular heartbeat issues, but she's not concerned about that. But then I, it kind of helped put my mind at ease in some ways. And then that would kind of come in waves, where I'd feel like, oh, man, I'm going to get somebody sick. Part of that from being at the shop, but also, like, our daughter's at daycare. Maybe we shouldn't have her in daycare, but we have no financial choice really right now. And our parents are watching the kids still, like once or twice a week and my, my wife's mom and their, you know, my wife's parents are both cancer survivors. My parents both have some health issues. And so, it's like, am I killing my parents, you know. I mean, just kind of the weight of, of, like, having to work if, if I don't work if I don't work, the shop doesn't exist. And so, I'm feeling that kind of the weight of that, like, I'm responsible for my crew for their jobs, I'm responsible for the shop. And then also I don't want to be responsible for like the death of a parent or a loved one. So that was that was really heavy, the more I learned and the more like I didn't, you know, try to do a lot of reading about it and stuff and try to stay current with what we were supposed to be doing. And then just like talking through with people, I think I kind of came to a like a place of maybe contentment in like how I'm operating and how I'm doing things like A, at the shop, B with our family. And it still kind of creeps in some of that, like that worry or that anxiety, but I felt better, and I think we are operating very safely at the shop. And our family personally, we we've not done anything social with anybody other than my immediate family or my wife's immediate family. And we're always masked and or we're outside and we try to do things outside as much as possible.

We went to a, like a graduation party for a family or some friends of ours, their son. And I just was super uncomfortable the whole time it was outside but still like I just didn't like being there. So, we didn't stay very long. And now in this this point, like [family members redacted] are fully vaccinated. [Family members redacted] are fully vaccinated. [Family member redacted] has gotten her first round because she's a teacher.[Family members redacted], they're fully vaccinated. [Family member]'s fully vaccinated because she's a nurse. And but now I'm like, I'm the only one left almost other than my [family member redacted]. And so now it's starting to feel like oh, I don't want to get sick in this moment in time. I'm starting to feel this a little bit more of a of a fear of like, well, what if I get sick now, I don't have to worry about the other people as much. Now I have to like worry about myself and I've been reasonable like physical health, but at the same time you hear weird stories about people having issues and not making it. So, I'm starting to get a little bit paranoid and in a different way, but kind of all stemming from the same stuff. But I feel also with that, like a sense of like, I guess hope. Hope feels like a weird word in some reason, because I don't, I don't expect the pandemic to go away anytime soon, I think it's going to be probably something we deal with for maybe a few years. Or it's going to be like, we are regularly getting regular vaccinations, like we do flu. But, there still feels like there's a lot of uncertainty, but I also feel like, okay, now, most of my loved ones are vaccinated. A lot of people are going to be vaccinated in the very near future, those who choose to, we will probably reopen the shop for indoor dining when our crew has the opportunity to be vaccinated. And so, we're starting, we're starting that conversation now, how we're going to do that, and when. So that'll be fun. It's like, there are things to look forward to. So, I'm excited about the vaccine rollout. And it seems like it's going better and better and better. But that coupled with, like, I don't want to get sick.

Joanna Reese 41:21

Right. Did you have health concerns before the pandemic?

Jeff Litsey 41:24

Not for myself? Not really. Other than like, whatever the irregular heartbeat thing is, but not really. I mean, I'm in generally good health, fortunately,

Joanna Reese 41:40

Were you having issues with anxiety before the pandemic, as well?

Jeff Litsey 41:44

I've had them a little bit, but not like I've had before. And that's something that I never experienced growing up at all. And it was not until owning a business. And I don't know if it's associated with like the business or just like, I've gotten older, and, you know, the older you get, sometimes the more cares you have, or the more things you have to worry about or consider. Because before I, I was a responsible kid, but I didn't you know, there's not like, there's not so much riding on what you do. So, there were a couple times where I, I think I was verging on like a panic attack. And it was always, I don't know. Like I really like people, but I also can be really overwhelmed by people and I can get, like really dragged down by social situations sometimes where I just like, I don't want to be here, I don't want to be involved in this. I don't want to be around people at all. And both of those times were like being around like big groups of people where I was like, I gotta get out of here. I can't take this anymore.

And yeah, I mean, then with the shop, I've definitely felt that some and then what now that I have kids, I think that kind of opened up a whole new like, realm of like worry that I had never experienced in my life. Like I never cared if I got hurt. I mean, I didn't want to get hurt. I didn't want to have some kind of issue, but I just didn't care about it. Like, I did a lot of dumb stuff growing up a lot of risky things. And even when I got married, obviously I didn't want to like widow my wife, but the thought of like orphaning my kids is, is a lot scarier to me than, or like something happening to them is a lot scarier to me than anything I think I've ever experienced before.

Joanna Reese 43:38

Was some of the anxiety related to your business as well then?

Jeff Litsey 43:43

Like the pre-COVID anxiety?

Joanna Reese 43:46

Yeah

Jeff Litsey 43:47

Yeah, definitely. Yeah. Because, I mean, for a lot a long time. We, our finances were terrible. And we just never knew where, how we were going to pay for stuff or where the next like money was going to go. I didn't I haven't taken a paycheck for years. I mean, really regularly until kind of recently. And so, most of like, you know, money that I had saved up before we started and that was all gone. and you know, just even like issues with my dad like the way he does things or not the way I do things sometimes and, but yeah. And then just like worrying about the business and its survival. And then even too like with coffee, it's changed a lot in Indianapolis. So, then you're kind of worried about your, how you're perceived by people and you're worried about your reputation. Or like are you getting tagged enough on Instagram, you know, stupid bullshit like that. It's like, it's hard to, sometimes it's hard to shake and you kind of get easily sucked into like, oh, we need to be getting write ups or like reviews or like getting tags on social media. So that stuff would, can cause me some anxiety, minor anxiety, that kind of stuff once in a while, but I'm pretty good about anymore about shrugging that stuff off and being like, nah that's stupid. But just the general like existence of the shop. Yeah, I've had some anxiety about that on a number of occasions.

Joanna Reese 45:18

After seeing the support from the community, does that encourage you and what you guys wanted as your goals?

Jeff Litsey 45:25

Uh, yeah, I mean, without a doubt. Um, I mean, if I'm gonna be frank, I, I do have this view of like, consumers, that consumers are fickle. And I, I don't necessarily mean our customers, but I think just generally, there's the, the idea of like consumerism is, is based on like, fickle things that are kind of fleeting. So, I mean, you see that in the coffee world. You see that in the business world. You see that in Indianapolis, like food and drink scene. So sometimes I can get kind of

caught up in like, the, the stuff that's, that seems like, fickle in my mind, I guess. And yeah, I mean, I can kind of maybe get a little bit caught up in like, worried about stuff that's dumb, I guess. But, I mean, at the end of the day, we've had multiple occasions where our customers have helped us in times where we needed it even before this. So then, it's like, why, why do I doubt that? And then, yeah, just to have the response that people. I mean, the contributions that people gave, I just like, absolutely overwhelming. I mean, almost like, I don't know what to say about this. I, it's just incredible. And I, you know, in a time to where it's like I know people are, it's not just businesses that are struggling. Families and individuals are struggling, and still people are like, giving us like, \$5 here or like, \$500 there or whatever it is. And it's like, this is kind of preposterous in a really cool way. So, I mean, it's, it's absolutely encouraging. And I, yeah, I just, I, I need to, you know, constantly use that as sort of like a lens that I view what we do through.

Joanna Reese 47:23

Have you had customers reach out to you and make sure you're okay?

Jeff Litsey 47:27

Um, yeah, definitely. Yeah, I would say so. I mean, it, I would say it is more geared towards the crew than it is towards me, which is understandable. And, you know, I mean, sometimes that can be a little bit like, I don't know what the word is, a little bit of a bummer, I guess. But this sort of like comes with the territory. And I sometimes, I'm like, oh, that kind of bums me out, but at the same time, I'm like, what do I expect? That's kind of the way it should be. But then I have had a few customers, like, reach out or check in with me. And the other day, let's see. So, it's a guy, I haven't seen him for a while as a customer, but he, we know him, and he's been a customer for years. But he said something. I can't remember exactly what he said. But he came in, he got a latte. And he just like, on his way out, he said to me, specifically, and I. I'm trying to remember exactly what he said, but it was so encouraging. But he was like, "hey, I just want you to know that this like what you've done this year is like an accomplishment, like a lifetime accomplishment, and you need to be proud of yourself." Something along that line. I was like, Oh, dang. Yeah, I guess I'm not really thought about it like that. But it was so encouraging to me in that moment to hear that. But yeah.

Joanna Reese 48:52

How often do you see your parents?

Jeff Litsey 48:54

I mean, I see my dad most every most days because he comes to the shop for two or three hours and hangs out outside if it's nice enough. And then he'll come talk to me while I'm working if I'm

in the back. I see. I see my mom maybe once a week, depending. But it's usually like pretty short. We don't...as far as like us hanging out with them. That's probably more like once a month or so. And that's usually outside somewhere. Like we've tried to go for hikes regularly with them. It's probably less than once a month, but we see them enough that it's, it still feels like we're interacting regularly.

Joanna Reese 49:43

What about your wife's family in Lafayette?

Jeff Litsey 49:46

Yeah, so her mom comes down once a week and watches our daughter on Wednesdays. So, I see her. I usually don't see her for very long, but she'll be at the house. And then we've seen them socially, oh, probably once every couple of months. We'll go up there. They have a really cool house with some property in like a great porch that overlooks some, some woods. So, we'll go over there and hang out and do that kind of stuff or go. There's a state park kind of close to their house. So, we'll go there. We've done that a number of times.

Joanna Reese 50:21

When I talked to your wife, she mentioned that you like to go hiking?

Jeff Litsey 50:25

Yeah, yeah.

Joanna Reese 50:27

Where did that come? Like? Have you always been a fan of hiking?

Jeff Litsey 50:30

No, I, I've always been very active physically. And I love to be, I've always loved to be outside. So, growing up, I was like, if it was dry, and not like absolutely freezing, I was outside playing basketball with my neighbor, or just myself. So, we do that a lot. Or, like my church friends and stuff like that we were we were always playing outside doing stuff. Even when we were in high school and college. Like, like I wasn't a partier. My friends weren't partiers. We would just go like do stupid stuff, like climb trees, and climb roofs and see if we could get onto buildings and it

just weird things. And then we would, my parents both are from the West. My mom's from Nebraska, my dad's from the Pacific Northwest. So, every summer we would go on a road trip out to see family and do this kind of loop that would hit Nebraska first. And then we would stop in Salt Lake City area for the night. And then Idaho where my dad's parents lived. And then we would kind of do trips, different trips every year, kind of incorporating that loop. And so, we you know, some of those were like, through naturally beautiful areas. Or like, just to kind of drive through a national park for a day. And I always loved going out and doing that kind of stuff. Though we didn't really hike much. And we weren't a camping family at all. Like my dad, that's the most abhorrent idea to him is camping. But I was like, I think when I when I graduated from college, or like, I had to do my student teaching. I got my degree in Elementary ed. and I went camping by myself, I got really interested in the idea of like, camping and stuff, and I camped by myself in Death Valley for a week in the winter, and I just thought I was so cool. So, I wanted to do it more. I wouldn't say I love camping, but I love hiking. Yeah, so we try to do that as often as possible.

Joanna Reese 52:38

You mentioned bird watching. So, you bird watch while you hike too?

Jeff Litsey 52:42

Yeah, yeah. And that was cool too, because that was another element to hiking that I don't just kind of like, in...it deepens the experience, I guess. And I think I I've always loved animals, but I didn't really get into birds until kind of like around the time our son was born. And I think in some ways it was kind of like a way to cope with being a new dad because we...it wasn't super fun, and they can just sit there for hours. And we had we had put a bird feeder that my in laws gave us in our front yard and you'd be like, oh, that that's an interesting bird. What is that? So, I started getting more and more interested in it around that time. And then it's a cool way like you can, there are parks within you know, a 15-minute drive of us that you can see really cool birds and it's like wildlife viewing but in the city. Yeah.

Joanna Reese 53:38

What are your favorite birds so far?

Jeff Litsey 53:41

Yeah, I when I go bird watching the birds that I look for are the most excited to see are the ones that are not common or more difficult to spot. So, the ones I like in the spring here in the next in like six weeks or maybe less. I'll start looking for warblers in particular. And I mean, those are really fun to look for in the spring. But my favorite birds are the are like the more conventional. Like I love crows. I think they're incredibly smart, and incredibly interesting. And I like some of

the lore and mythology wrapped up with them like from like Tibetan culture and Native American culture, and I think that's fascinating. I love Cardinals, and they're just, they're really cool birds. And I, goldfinches are probably one of my favorite birds too. They're really lively little birds that bring a lot of color, especially in the summer. Oh, and then redwing blackbirds are probably that's probably those four I just love. They're very common, but there's something about their song and their call that evokes like wild open places to me. And they're just they're really striking.

Joanna Reese 55:02

I've seen a few of your paintings.

Jeff Litsey 55:04

Yeah.

Joanna Reese 55:04

How long have you been painting?

Jeff Litsey 55:07

Um, Painting in true, probably for, oh, 12-13 years, but I've always done art. And I, I just drew. That was my main thing. I, I drew and drew and drew, I mean, my whole life. I loved drawing animals. And then it was athletes. So, like, drawing my favorite like sports stars and stuff. And then I loved designing like tennis shoes when I was in elementary school. And then it was cars. And then I just loved drawing people. People and cars, through like high school and college. And I actually went to school for art originally, but then I switched gears my sophomore year. And then I didn't like painting. I thought painting was dumb. Because I just liked pencil drawing, I just wanted it to be black and white with shading and all that stuff. And then let's see, it was like, when I came back from Kazakhstan, I would do these things with color every once in a while, but it was more it was still kind of like a drawing-oriented thing. And I hadn't done much for a while. And my grandma, my mom's mom in Nebraska. She would always draw these little doodles on these letters that she would send us. And we were talking, and she was like, "don't like let go of your gift of art. Make sure you keep doing it." So, then I was like, okay, yeah, I should, I should do something. And that's when I started painting. And I realized I really like to paint. I don't know a lot about certain techniques and things. But my wife, she's, she paints and has painted for years. So, she's kind of a wealth of, she's a resource for me when I'm like, "I don't know what to do, or how do I get this to do that." But yeah.

Joanna Reese 56:53

That's wonderful.

Jeff Litsey 56:54

Yeah.

Joanna Reese 56:57

Have you painted more in the last year?

Jeff Litsey 57:02

Not necessarily. So, since our daughter was born, and I haven't painted much in general. And then it was, I think within the last four months, I started painting a lot again. So, there was just a long stretch of like, I think you're just like having two kids and not really feeling motivated to do it a lot. Some of it's a mind game, where it's like, I feel like I don't have time, but I'm like, oh, I actually have time to do it. Although I guess before I was working six days a week, I did literally have less time. But I mean, I have painted more in the last few months. Definitely.

Joanna Reese 57:41

What would you say you've developed as coping mechanisms for your stress and anxiety?

Jeff Litsey 57:45

Oh man, that's a good question. Um, I mean, hiking, it's always been a coping mechanism and just walking. I like to just walk as well, even if it's in the city. It's, oh man, it's been hard to do some of those things though, like alone. That's another thing I really like to do like birdwatching is a way to do it, but I don't have as much alone time right now and haven't since the pandemic in some ways. But I mean, just hiking, that's kind of the primary thing and being outside. I've been on this on my phone. And that's a negative coping mechanism. And I don't like that. I've been on my phone more than ever before. That's one thing I truly hate. It's, it feels like an addiction. Like I can't not like check in on stuff, you know, with some frequency. So that's definitely a negative coping mechanism. We've, we've done some like fun cooking stuff. I think that's been kind of fun for us to play around with, like, doing some. Like creating some routines around our breakfasts on Saturday and Sunday. Now that we have both of those days as a family. So, like, making Dutch babies. So, every, every Saturday, I think it's kind of fun for us to like have...we'll

have a sweet breakfast on Saturday and then a savory on Sunday. So, it rotates between French toast and pancakes and Dutch babies and then it's biscuits and gravy or omelets or like polenta and I don't know. It's been kind of fun to play around with that kind of stuff.

Joanna Reese 59:39

Do you know anybody who's gotten sick during the COVID outbreak?

Jeff Litsey 59:43

Yes

Joanna Reese 59:48

How would you say life has changed for them?

Jeff Litsey 59:52

Some people I've known loosely have died. So, it's changed ultimately. We've had some distant relatives; two distant relatives die of COVID. I didn't. One of them I'd met one. Well, I've met both of them. I didn't really know either of them very well. But I'm trying to think who else. I, well, I've known some people who've had it and who've, you know, it's, it's been just like, kind of like a minor illness. And then some other people who have had it, and it's been a much more severe experience. Most of, I would say most of the people that I know who've had it have either, it's not been that big of an issue, or that's been pretty rough. But they recovered. And then there have been a handful of people that I've known that a. have died, or have been like, hospitalized and we're fortunate to make it through.

Joanna Reese 01:00:47

How did that affect your perception?

Jeff Litsey 01:00:50

Um, it definitely. I mean, it brought it home in some ways. And then there was a period Oh, it's probably like, I think it was in the fall where it seemed like it was closing in on all fronts. It was like, my, our immediate neighbors had it. Neighbors a couple houses down had it. And, and then it was just like, you're hearing more and more people, like crew members, family members having it. Things like that you're like, man, it's like it's bearing down on us. So, it felt like, at one

point, it's like, it's only a matter of time before we get it. It just felt inevitable. But I mean, yeah, it makes it kind of freaky. And then I think it definitely made me feel like I'm not taking my chances with this. And I, we're gonna continue to be taking it really, really seriously and be as cautious as possible.

Joanna Reese 01:01:47

Let's talk about news.

Jeff Litsey 01:01:49

Yeah.

Joanna Reese 01:01:50

They termed they made the term doom scrolling. So where have you been getting your primary sources of news during the pandemic?

Jeff Litsey 01:01:59

NPR, and that's always generally part of my morning routine is like checking in on like social media stuff. And then like check, I check ESPN for some things, and I check NPR for news. I will say I've checked CNN more recently, this year, I think, because sometimes I want stuff that's that is a little bit more political. Or that covers a broader spectrum of political things than NPR does. But I yeah, NPR, and then like, if I'm in the car, I'll listen to NPR. Pretty much more than anything. I do get some stuff from Facebook, though, too. They're like, certain people that I know. And I'm like, I trust their judgment on things for what, what they're sharing. So, I'm usually pretty careful with that. Though, I will say I have some friends from like, yesteryear that I know, have certain political leanings that are very extreme. And I maintain that friendship because I'm curious. And I want to know what they're thinking and what some of those folks in that camp are thinking. But generally, yeah, I would say NPR is kind of my main thing.

Joanna Reese 01:03:13

How have your sources evolved since last March?

Jeff Litsey 01:03:21

I don't know if they've evolved too much other than maybe checking in on CNN a little bit more. But that was kind of with the election. I wanted stuff. I wanted to read stuff that was a little bit more. I don't know that covered kind of the things surrounding like, politics specifically.

Joanna Reese 01:03:44

Do you feel like you were getting the entire picture?

Jeff Litsey 01:03:47

No. But I yeah, not necessarily, then that's where I'd kind of like go back to NPR where I feel like they did a better job of giving you a broader picture of things. And then also too I would, I would intentionally check in with some of the stuff that was stuff that I absolutely did not agree with, or, but I felt like it was somewhat necessary. But it also then I kind of stopped paying as close of attention because it was a bummer.

Joanna Reese 01:04:21

Let's talk about government.

Jeff Litsey 01:04:22

Yeah.

Joanna Reese 01:04:23

So how the municipal leaders and the government officials in our community responded to the outbreak.

Jeff Litsey 01:04:29

Yeah, I think so, I think Holcomb, from my perspective, I think he's done a pretty decent job. I have, so I'm neither a Republican or Democrat, my political leanings would be very far left, generally speaking. Not one not fitting into one party or the other though. But I would say as far as like, like a Republican governor, I think he's done a really decent job. And I think he fortunately has probably been influenced by Illinois, Michigan, and Ohio, and hidden some of

his handling of that. So, he was maybe sort of like forced to handle it a certain way. I'm glad it was taken pretty seriously, fairly early on. And I'm glad Hogshead has done a pretty decent job of like, of doing things fairly early on, I do wish that both of them would be a little bit more. Oh, like, hold their ground a little bit more and not try to appease I think some of the more right leaning members of their constituency and not be so under pressure to open things back up. I think that's one of the main errors that I would say Holcomb committed was opening thing relaxing some of the, the regulations, a little bit too early and a little bit too, extremely. But I mean, honestly, I feel like they did as good of a job, or a lot better job than a lot of a lot of states that are run by a Republican governor. So, I am really grateful for that. And a lot of ways that I think he was fairly open about what was happening, I would, when I was running deliveries and stuff around, I would listen to his weekly address as much as I could on Wednesdays. And I found that helpful to hear, whether I agreed with everything or not, it was still nice to have somebody out there like talking about it and saying like, hey, this is what we're doing. And I think there's a Doctor Box. Is that her name? I she was like the main health official. And I think she did a really good job. I it seemed to really respect her. I kind of wish she probably I wish he would have been in charge of it in some ways. Completely.

Joanna Reese 01:06:53

I know you're thinking about the future.

Jeff Litsey 01:06:55

Yeah.

Joanna Reese 01:06:56

So, in what ways does this experience change how you're going to approach the future in your family life, or friendships or community?

Jeff Litsey 01:07:06

Yeah, I'm absolutely not working six days a week ever again. There's no reason to, especially if I'm not even like bringing home a paycheck. It's just dumb. So, I'm gonna, I'm gonna make sure that I don't do that. I, yeah, it's hard to say I our...like my family. We have good relationship, fortunately, and I think that's just kind of reinforced that. And then same with like, our both sets of parents, like we're pretty close. Yeah, I think I'm just thinking about the shop in particular, I think in this moment in time, there were some takeaways that we had where it was like we, we want to make sure we're taking care of our crew, more than we've ever done. So, we did like, we gave raises, once we got the first round of PPP, and we brought people back on, we gave everybody a raise. It was not like a significant It was like \$1. So, it wasn't like they were making

a crazy amount of more money, but um. So, it kind of brought to light some things I like, okay, I want to make sure everybody has a raise. And then we kind of had a conversation later on to where it's like, I want everybody to feel like they can contribute as an employee the way that they want to contribute. So, we started talking about creating some roles for people to if they wanted them, and I didn't want people to feel like they had to do it by any means. But with some people in mind, I was like, Well, here's some ideas that I have for some roles, based on what I know, of their interests and their, like passions and stuff like that. So, I mean, fortunately, one, one of the people that took on a role is still here. We had somebody else take on a role who just didn't end up wanting to do it. And I think they weren't. I don't know, it would. It would that was kind of a bummer because I created this role specifically for this person, and they took it and then ended up quitting like a week later. So, I was really I was really bummed. And it was really deflating, cuz I was like, oh, man, I really am investing a lot, like, into this and I want it to be like, I don't know, I want it to feel good. But at the same time, it's like that person, if they don't want to do it, they shouldn't do it. And that's okay. But that's something it's kind of a learning process and that I'm like, okay, I want to I want to do this for like people who really want to invest as employees in the shop in a deeper way. I want I want to provide that opportunity. So, we do have Emily, she's kind of taken on like an outreach role. So, she's connecting with, like Exodus Refugee Immigration and immigrant Welcome Center. We're they're like official coffee sponsors, and she's going to take on some other stuff. And yeah, I just want to make sure that our employees feel good. That they are paid a living wage. And so, with that to our goal is that everybody now starts off at \$13 an hour, but by the end of the year, we'll be at 15. And then people who have been here longer are making more than that, but and what. And then I but I want to increase continually bump that up. But yeah, and then just offer more incentives to like to really plug in and connect.

Joanna Reese 01:10:40

How would you compare what you've been through this last year to previous events in your life?

Jeff Litsey 01:10:47

Oh, man, it's really interesting. I, I, it's different. It's so like, all encompassing, which is, I think other events in my life have not been so. Like, they haven't affected things so comprehensively. So, like, you know, I've had some pretty, well I had a pretty serious leg injury and that, you know, that affected my physical health, and somewhat my emotional health in that moment, and things like that, but it wasn't like everybody else around me was also potentially sick or suffering. And then we've had some issues with like churches when I was growing up where people like, ran my dad out of a church, and it was like, my whole community then was kind of like thrown into a... basically just, like, shattered and disappeared. But so that that was very traumatic, in a lot of ways, but it wasn't like, also, on top of that, everything, everybody was sick. So, I mean, in some ways, this is definitely the most extreme thing, but it's interesting that everybody's experiencing that too. But yeah, I mean, the combination of like, health, fear of

health, with like real health threat, like kind of all around, people getting sick, people potentially dying. But then, like, having, I don't know, like trying to operate the shop, having people quit, like all within like a month of each other, three people. It's been a wild. I mean, it's definitely been and I, I think, I think all three of the guys quit because of COVID, in one way or another. I think they were experiencing some burnout related to, well probably related to the shop, but you know, they'd all been here well, at least for a fair amount of time. And this was not like their end goal. We weren't working them too hard. I know that because things were pretty chill for a long time. But at the same time, I think they just were done and needed to go like just for their own sake. And so, but I think COVID I don't think they'd necessarily would have gone at that time had it not been for the pandemic, because I don't know, if they would have had the opportunity and the time to like, experience, like a more slow pace, more like, you know, working a little bit less hours. So, I think that's kind of what brought it on for them. So, in some ways, it's probably a blessing. But yeah, I mean, just, yeah, I've never experienced anything. So comprehensively, like, significant, I guess.

Joanna Reese 01:13:42

Now there's a foundation associated with Calvin Fletcher. Yeah. How active is that?

Jeff Litsey 01:13:48

Um, fairly active, I guess. I mean, frankly, I don't do a whole lot with them. My mom is like the president and there's a board that meets. They meet once a month, maybe. And they you know; I get their emails. They do stuff. But I don't I don't keep abreast of what they're doing a ton. I need to do more. But I don't have, honestly, I don't have the mental capacity to really pay that much attention.

Joanna Reese 01:14:19

Right. What advice would you give the future communities and governments? What would you want them to keep in mind?

Jeff Litsey 01:14:30

Oh, man, that's a great question. I think first of all, these are like big sweeping statements. Everybody deserves health care. Everybody deserves a home. Everybody deserves a living wage. So, I think in this moment in time, you know, some of the inequities are exposed. And I think it's absolutely ridiculous that not every single human being in America, that they don't have health care, I just think that should be a human right. And I think you see how connected we all are to each other. So, everybody, everybody stands to benefit if everybody is covered. That's my belief. And, and I don't, you know, I don't think it boils down to money, I just think it boils down to

compassion. So, and then with that, too, like, everybody deserves a home. And this is sort of unrelated, but I think it's still connected. Like if everybody's housed, and preferably, if everybody can own in one way, then I think you'll see less issues related to health and stress, and certain income inequities, and discrepancies. And then living wage, obviously, similar things. But certain people are impacted by a pandemic more than others. It's weird to have some people that can work from home when they're making three or six figures. And it's been no problem for them. And they can, they can go to a lodge in the mountains, if they want. They can do whatever they want. And they have everything that they could ever hope for. And then you have some people who have to work in a meat processing factory for like poverty wages, simply because they have no choice. And I don't. And for some reason, our society doesn't value what they do enough. So that's a bummer. But I would, yeah, I would hope that future politicians, policymakers, whatever, future me myself, would hear that too like, pay employees more, invest in them more. And then make sure everybody can get health care. But, yeah, then too, I mean, you think about like, everything that's going on, like racially in our country recently, too. And yeah, I mean, there's some stuff that I just I can't believe that that happens. But you know, I grew up in a very conservative, very white community, very evangelical community. So, I kind of understand that mindset somewhat, though. I'm fairly far removed from it now. But yeah, I don't know. I just, I just will hope that policymakers because probably most of them are still white will listen to people who are non-white. Yeah.

Joanna Reese 01:17:50

As we round out the interview, is there anything you'd like to say? Or add?

Jeff Litsey 01:18:02

Not off the top of my head, I probably, we'll end the meeting and I'm like, oh, yeah, I wish I would have said this, but I yeah, nothing's coming to mind immediately.

Joanna Reese 01:18:11

Are you feeling hopeful?

Jeff Litsey 01:18:13

Yeah. You know, I kind of said this earlier, I would say I would say yes. It's a...it's sort of a restrained hope. I'm feeling like, I don't feel like there's a light at the end of the tunnel in relation to COVID, because I don't, I don't think that's accurate. I think I'm looking. I don't think I'm being pessimistic. I think I'm being like, realistic about it. But as far as, like being able to hang out with my, like, family inside the house, without a mask, I feel hopeful about that. And being able to open up the shop, and have customers in again, like, maybe even this summer, I feel

hopeful about that and that's it's exciting. So there, there are some really practical, like small things that I feel hopeful about. And then too, I mean, honestly, I think anytime there's like this significant amount of suffering, like given if enough people are suffering, if enough people are struggling. Unfortunately, it takes a significant amount of people. But if enough are I think enough people get mad and enough people resist some things. So, I do think that there are some pretty cool things to be excited about. Like it's slow progress, but there's been already some like policy change. I think that's been, I think, beneficial to non-white people. And I don't know I'm excited about some of those things, and it's been cool to see just like the significant unity in resistance that's kind of come from some of the like the police killings and stuff like that. I mean, it's been I don't know, I think we'll look back on this era and be like, dang, that was a significant moment in time to live through. So, in that, some of that stuff I'm hopeful about definitely.

Joanna Reese 01:20:21

Right. Well, I appreciate your time.

Jeff Litsey 01:20:25

Yeah, thanks, Joanna. I appreciate it too.