

Transcription of Oral History Interview with Jason Inskeep

Interviewee Name: Jason Inskeep
Interviewer Name: Erika Groudle
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Abstract: Jason Inskeep lives in Chandler Arizona with his wife and daughter. In this oral history Jason discusses the way that the Covid-19 pandemic has affected his work and personal life, as well as the way that it impacted his wife's career and his daughter schooling. He reflects on the polarization of the United States of Americas politics through the lens of Covid-19 with the impacts of mask wearing and vaccinations. As well as his feelings of worry and the USA's 24/7 media cycle.

Erika Groudle 00:03

Hello, my name is Erika Groudle. And I am here today interviewing Jason for the Journal of the Plague Archive. I am in Monroe, Washington. Currently it is 10:39am. On May 4th, ay the fourth be with you [Star Wars reference].

Jason Inskeep 00:24

Yes. May the fourth be with you.

Erika Groudle 00:29

Alright, Jason, so if you wouldn't mind kind of sharing a little bit about you know, name any sort of demographics that you feel comfortable sharing?

Jason Inskeep 00:40

Sure. My name is Jason Inskeep. I live in Chandler, Arizona, which is just a suburb of Phoenix. I am 41 years old. White male, Caucasian, I guess. Yeah, I am married. And I have one daughter. She's 13. It's about, that's about all the interesting information, sure.

Erika Groudle 01:09

Sounds good. Aside from that, what are kind of your primary things you do day to day.

Jason Inskeep 01:19

So, I have a job where I work 12 hour shifts. So, I'm usually gone on my days, I work tw- about 13 hours. Getting up at 4:30 is hard. But because of that, I'm able to have three or four days off a week, which I'm pretty lucky because I worked shifts. So, my my work is in the semiconductor industry as a technician. I've been in the industry probably total for 15 years now. As a, like I said, a technician in gases, so all the different gases are used to make semiconductor wafers, I work on my equipment and the cylinders and, and in a leadership role on my shift and start up with new equipment. A lot, a lot of interesting, but boring things. Depends who you're talking to. My hobbies are reading, I like to read a lot. I tried to read at least 50 books a year, but I think this year, I'm way behind mainly fiction. I- Alongside with that, I love travel. So, I love traveling to England and Scotland, I was going every year or trying to go every year until the pandemic hit. So, I find myself reading more English literature books. This last year I've been reading a lot of Victorian literature, I really got into you know, your Charles Dickens, your Regency author, like Jane Austen like to read a little bit about and currently, I'm really liking Anthony Trollope, for that church perspective during the Victorian period, so kind of weird hobbies, other obviously, my other one is going to school for my MA, my master's in history, I call it the world's most expensive hobby. Because it is, so. So, basically work, family, and reading, and travel. Unfortunately, the travel thing, as everyone knows, was really impacted by the pandemic. So, it was really hard for me to not be able to go anywhere in Europe for two years during the pandemic. So, I finally went this past February to England. My wife couldn't go so she told me just to go, get out of the house. So, I went for a week by myself and traveled all over south southern England, saw some interesting museums and churches. So, that gave me get my fix for a while.

Commented [J11]: Sorry, messed that one up

Erika Groudle 03:38

Thank you. So, with the you know, travel being impacted, do you have any kind of hopes or plans for the future depending on how things are going? It looks like transmissions are are lowering, things are getting better? What does that look like for your future with travel?

Jason Inskeep 03:56

I don't know. I was planning on going-well, that's funny because I never-I turned 40 during the pandemic and my wife wanted to go to Germany and France. And obviously we couldn't go so I still have that trip in the back of my mind wanting to go this fall together. I'm not sure if that's going to happen just because she's a teacher and her school schedule is hard to plan around. But travel wise, it was actually way easier going into England then it was to go come back to the US.

I mean, I don't know if that's good or bad depending on your perspective on the pandemic, but I mean, I don't mind saying this. I had COVID I did not get COVID for two years. I finally got it like the month before I was going to England so it actually kind of worked out to travel, it was actually easier because all I needed was a doctor's note saying I had in the last month or so and just I just basically walked into England and didn't have to show anybody anything because they had got rid of all their travel- You know you couldn't travel if you had-unless you're vaccinated all that none that you didn't have to do anything going into England. So, it was super easy. I mean, I wore a mask and everything. But the opinions, they're way more laid back than I mean, occasionally you'll go to a store that asked to wear mask masks, but, and this is only what, three months ago, and they were pretty laid back about everything. But coming back to the US was surprisingly strict, you know, the plane, just getting in line having to show my doctor's note saying that I was previously had COVID in the last within the last 90 days. So, I currently don't have any plans to go out of the country. But it seems like other than China and other I believe some of the more strict countries are on the Asian continent. I'm not sure about South America or anything like that, but it seems to be the restrictions are lightening up. So, it's not a worry right now. But because I had my fix three months ago, I'm not really planning something right now. If that makes sense?

Erika Groudle 05:56

Thank you, sure. So, you mentioned you have a daughter, and you are a husband, has the pandemic kind of changed anything about you, as a parent or as a husband, the way that you interact in those roles.

Jason Inskeep 06:15

Um, I think well, my wife being a teacher, she had to teach from home for about a year, on for about a year, and my daughter had to, I only have a, she's with her, her birth mom the other half of the week, so I only have her half the week. But it's the days I have off. So, all three of us are home. And our house is relatively small. I mean, I've heard of other smaller houses, but we're over 12- 12 to 1300 feet. So, it was challenging to go to school online for me for my master's. And it was my first semester in 2020 going online for my master's. And my wife was teaching in one room and I'm in one room trying to write a paper I've never written before, my daughter's in another room trying to do Zoom and having issues. So, I wouldn't say my roles and parenting or being husband have changed much other than trying to be more patient and communicating better. You know, like, "hey, how about we switch rooms, because this one for this day or this hour and just trying to talk to each other?" We [inaudible]? We have like a weekly meeting where we, I guess that has changed since the pandemic, we do that now. Or, you know, what's bothering you this week? Or what can we do to make everyone feel better? Like a family meeting we didn't do before. So, I think that helps the three of us communicate. Because we're all- my daughter and I are very introvert and want to be left alone. And my wife's very bubbly and friendly. So, I think it helps to have that communication between all of us to how you feeling

and kind of just getting to know your love language. So, you know what, what drives everyone crazy in small spaces. So, I wouldn't-Yeah, I wouldn't say my parenting has changed. But with my wife, I think we both had to learn to even more about each other about how to interact with each other that makes everyone feel comfortable.

Erika Groudle 08:04

Great. You said that your first semester going back to school was in 2020? Was that a pandemic decision or was that already in the works pre pandemic? I've heard of some people just kind of like well there's a pandemic, I might as well go back to school.

Jason Inskeep 08:23

No, so actually I would my job I get a sabbatical every four years for a month, and I threw some vacation on I have six weeks off my wife, again, she was teaching interested, you should go somewhere for a week or two. So, I went to England in October of 2019. And as I said, I love England everything about it. I always have. So, I was sitting on Hadrian's Wall, which is the wall the Romans built in northern England. You know, and it was October, so not many tourists around. So, I literally sat in this wall in the middle of Northern England when nobody was around and just kind of looked out, you know, on a wall that was built 1000, 1000 years ago. Oh, actually, like 1400 years ago, and I went to the museum that they had on all these really cool Roman artifacts. You know, I did my bachelor's in history, almost 20 years ago. And I just felt like that moment of sitting on the wall with the breeze in my hair and nobody around and the history of it and the country that I love visiting and it's like, man, I need to, I feel like I need to get back in school and I really want to work in a museum like this or it has a subject matter I really love and care about. So, I kind of slowly started thinking about going back to school and I actually was trying to get into the University of Edinburgh because I love Scotland, but my ASU [Arizona State University] transcripts weren't great for the first time. [laughs] So, anyways, I ended up deciding to go back to ASU. And I did my first because it's like half seven week classes. So, actually started in January of 2020. And about the last half- for the last three weeks. I started you know, I'm a big news watcher... worrier so I was like, "Oh, it's just Wuhan stuff going on" and, and then at the end of my first class, we went to my wife, my daughter and I, we went to Salt Lake City to visit her sister, my wife's sister. And it was obviously getting more news on the 24/7 media and I saw my first kids getting on a plane with a mask on and we kind of chuckled like well "what we wear masks now?" And then within a week, actually, within three days, my daughter's school shut down and kind of went crazy. So, long story short, the pandemic, the school thing was not part of, of me choosing to do during the pandemic, it just kind of coincided with my first semester in 18 years of school, you know, with all the craziness, it was kind of bad timing. But looking back on it, it was a good choice

Erika Groudle 10:45

Sounds good. So, you in that answer, you mentioned the 24 hour news cycle and kind of hearing about, you know, the first signs in in China. Was that kind of your first experience learning about COVID? What was that, that like?

Jason Inskeep 11:02

Oh, yeah, I mean, I did, I think I had a watching, it was kind of mentioned on the news off and on since January. So, it was on my radar. And I think I even talked my life about a few times on what's going on with that. Because in my mind, I can't remember what year but maybe three or four years before there was a bit of a maybe it's three years Ebola outbreak around Ethiopia and some other areas in Africa, and one of the patients, you know, a couple of them are treated in, in America can't remember what state or what hospital but it's like, man, that would be crazy if that hit here and kind of joking about it. And then so that kind of stuffs always on my radar. But like I said, I will I read the news, way more than I should. I've always been that way. So yeah, it was definitely in the back of my head. But I I never thought it would turn into what it did. I mean, I was when I like when I hit Seattle, I was like, oh okay, and then I started hearing more and more cases, I was definitely worried about it. Because I used to be, I used to be an EMT, so I can kind of understand the busyness of hospitals. And because I had to do a couple rotations at a hospital as part of my hours for it to be an EMT firefighter. So, I know how busy nurses are. And just the idea of adding to that scope, I guess, or the amount of people was would be worrisome. So, I kind of went through the whole I'm just to evolve my topic- topic is I've always worried about the I mean, I always worry about people dying. But I've always worry about hospitals being overrun. And I think a lot of people ignore that part of it. They worried about oh, this is fake or this is this is just a flu. And they totally discounting the fact that if the hospitals have so many just like flu cases, quote, unquote, eventually they're gonna have to turn away people who they just, you know, car accidents or, you know, whatever heart attacks, what have you. So, I think- my mom was a paramedic, my dad was a firefighter. So, I have a weird perspective of, I worry about the I used to worry about the firefighters and how they dealt with the calls and the PPE. [Personal Protective Equipment] And I was lucky where I worked, where I worked, I went to a quote unquote, essential worker, but because people needed chips made because I work at software, I work at a semiconductor factory, one of the busiest in the world, I believe. So, we were deemed essential in Arizona because we were making chips that went in medical equipment, cars, computers, and everybody went working from home, right? They had to have computers, so we were deemed essential workers. So, we had to go work every day and stay, we have a job or you're supposed to have a buddy watching you do everything and how can you do that? From six feet away? We just had to adapt and evolve and find a way for a minimum number of people to work in an area that usually is way over staffed or not over staffed but way, way more intense in how close together you are. So, I guess my my ramble there, I lost track of the question, but I was definitely definitely worried about hospital shutting down. To summarize that.

Erika Groudle 14:08

Thank you, to kind of transitioning to your your work. Do you think that that kind of shift in the way that you functioned because of the pandemic, because of social distancing? Right? Do you think that will continue to have an impact on the way that your industry, the way that your job functions? Has it?

Jason Inskeep 14:32

So about three weeks ago, we just now got permission to stop wearing masks and they're still optional, but we were wearing masks for two years. So honestly, we were allowed to like eat with them off. And if you're in a room by yourself, you can take them off or outside if you're six feet away, but I mean, not to complain because nurses, nurses and doctors have a way worse but wearing a mask for 12 hours in Arizona is not fun. But you know, I did it willingly. And I tried to be a good example because I was in a leadership, like a supervisory role so, but it has lightened up a little bit and I could tell everybody's spirits are up. But I think that, you know, industry realizes, maybe we we can do things a little bit differently, we can have a little bit less people and we can we can buy things to help these tasks instead of being right next to each other, you can use special cameras to view something, or, or a laser pointing tools, know, because you're training somebody new, it's hard to train somebody on super complicated technical cabinets that have all these moving parts and pumps or, or valves. And I mean, you can't really be six feet away to a new person and pointed that stuff without using a stick or something. So, the laser pointing is a good option. I mean, but definitely we kind of have gone back overall to our, our pre-pandemic life, I think, but everybody is a little more mindful of maybe being a little bit further apart. Although the biggest thing was we had these when we ate lunch. Like visually, for me, it's kind of ironic, like, we went from my whole shift, we were crammed into one big table like 20 of us and it was ridiculously close, right? And then the pandemic happened and we were all sitting one person per table, and it's kind of a stark all spread out kind of weird, social dynamic. And then like, as soon as the mask mandate, that work was lifted about three weeks ago, I walked in the cafeteria and everybody's crammed in the same table again. I was like, ah, that's doesn't that doesn't look right. I feel weird. So, I'm sure we all have that moment where you feel like you should be wearing a mask and you're not or if it depends if you're wearing or not. But but business wise, I don't think I think everybody was relishing going back to the old way. I just- because the nature of our jobs is you have because of the danger of the gases and the amount of money you can ruin something if you open or close the wrong part. So, I think we're kind of going back to the good old days of the way it used to be right next to each other working. Hopefully that makes sense. I don't- need me to clarify anything?

Erika Groudle 16:58

No, that makes sense. Thank you. So, you mentioned the kind of weariness right or the feelings like something's wrong seeing all these people crammed into one table again? I don't know much about Arizona's, I guess you said that your work, specifically, the masking

Jason Inskeep 16:58

Right.

Erika Groudle 17:18

mandate three weeks ago? Have you noticed any kind of like outside of your work? That same feeling socially? Maybe, you know, in in the wild or within your social circle? Jason Inskeep 17:34

My daughter still- So her school as of, I think spring break, they didn't have to wear masks anymore? Or they're optional. And I have an interesting social, I guess comment is that. And I have no judgment either way, but I think it's ironic. She told me that all the kids in her she's in a couple of gate classes, which is like, I guess, middle school equivalent of honors. Two of them. And she pointed out that all the kids in her gate classes wear masks and I kind of chuckled like that's funny that she said that. I don't know what she was implying but I still find it funny. Not gonna speculate on that. But she is real, I don't know if scared is the right word. She's real cautious even to this day, like she'll wear masks to stores and, and I and I was like I said to about three weeks ago then I kind of got lazy and just like okay, I need a break from the mask thing. But my wife, like I said, she's a teacher too. But she teaches at a deaf school. So, her primary language at work is I mean, she's not deaf, but she's fluent in ASL. So, it was really hard for her to, to talk to kids she was teaching online or in person, because most of them are deaf. So, part of ASL is like inflection and the way you talk is facial expressions and putting hands on certain positions of your face. So, for her she couldn't even if she was nervous and scared about COVID, because she was, she couldn't wait to take her mask off because it would make the kids lives and her life so much easier to communicate because they were having I think a hard time communicating. She even bought some those masks that are like have a clear panel on the front but they kept fogging up it was she tried but there's different masks that were that were really hot and sweaty. They were more like I don't know like almost like a face shield. But Arizona is a very Republican state, err, conservative that's a better word conservative state. I mean, there are some areas pockets of of pretty liberal people but I mean it's not unusual to see a truck drive by with an American flag, a huge American flag in the back or walk into downtown Gilbert and you see a truck walk drive by with a Trump flag that's 20 feet tall on the back so it's not unusual to see you know, there was a lot of people going to school meetings and fighting with teachers and the school board about not wearing masks and mandates and things like that. So, to summarize the mask part of it, it has definitely it's definitely more rare but there are, it seems to be more children and elderly that wear masks in Arizona still. For me, my family does, my

parents do. They're, they're in their 60s, they're not. I don't consider them ill health or anything like that. But they're very careful about it. Except for immediate family. My in-laws are another story. We love them all. But they are very conservative. And they would be the ones that would not wear a mask and make a big deal, whether at a restaurant or a store, because they believe it's their constitutional rights not to, so not to speak too much on that. But I do have a good perspective on both points of view on that. So, I've seen 'em both. Hopefully, that answered your question. I'm rambling again.

Erika Groudle 20:50

No, I appreciate the rambling. What, to kind of change gears a little bit. Is there a specific pandemic related memory that you haven't mentioned that perhaps kind of summarizes or sticks out to you?

Jason Inskeep 21:12

You know, I guess it's like an overreaching overall memory, like, the time when I'm trying to do school online, and my wife's trying to teach, my daughter's trying to learn and it was very stressful for me, because I, I love quiet. And I have a hard time focusing, especially on a writing paper, if I hadn't done it, you know, in years, a specific type paper, it was really hard for me to focus on all that. And I was some days miserable and just grumpy. And, you know, it was, I'm a very anxious person. So, it was not easy. But looking back now, I guess my memory would be like that time we all had home together, I'm gonna miss it. So, if that makes sense, it's extra time that we wouldn't I wouldn't use to have my daughter and my wife. So, it's weird how your your opinion or your feelings change over time?

Erika Groudle 22:00

Sure. So, you said that you're kind of a, an anxious person or worrier? Has that kind of been a main feeling? Would you like to talk about that at all?

Jason Inskeep 22:15

I'm anxious in everything. However, I don't know why it just- [coughs] the pandemic itself wasn't it's not my stressor. It's, it's just like, work and school and housework. And just like everything I have control over maybe, or don't have, some aspects. But for some reason, with the pandemic, I was just like, well, this sucks. And I don't really have a choice. I'm just gonna, I'm worried about the future, but it wasn't like it was keeping me up at night. Or or, you know, it was in my mind, but it definitely does. Nothing could do about it, basically. So that's interesting that you point that out or making me point out, like a good therapist here. Yeah, I worry about everything. I'm a horrible sleeper. I'll stay awake at night thinking about stupid stuff from work

and family issues. But yeah, I never really. I was never- I wore masks and I you know, I'll say I got vaccinated because I didn't wanna get sick or but it was more about I didn't want to get other people sick. So, or my parents sick, or my daughter sick. So, I guess I wasn't, too, I guess we all have that sense of I'm invincible, maybe without realizing it. So, I was worried about other people or, or people at work. Like, if I took COVID to work, and we had 20 people get sick, and the company I work for would lose millions of dollars and people wouldn't have computer chips, it would have been a disaster. Right? So, but I wasn't like sitting here in the dark. Not trimming my nails, like [laughs] worrying about like Howard Hughes I was referencing like, sitting here worrying about my health. Now. I was just worried about how much basic life had changed in the inconveniences, I guess. Hopefully that makes sense.

Erika Groudle 24:01

Yeah. So, you mentioned that you're vaccinated. And you previously mentioned the idea of a little bit more conservative area that you are living in. Has there kind of been a, say outside of your kind of family, which you briefly talked about, big social issues in your community around that?

Jason Inskeep 24:31

I don't I mean, I read the news a lot. I don't I got rid of Facebook a couple years ago. So, I think that's one of the primary things people hear about neighborhood or community outreach is on what their opinions on that so, I definitely saw some posts on Instagram from family members or friends that were very against vaccine or even mask mandates and how dumb are you and this was, I don't know this is government control. I mean, it ranged from government control to Russia, I don't know just all these different conspiracy theories and being the person I am or who reads the news a lot, I'm pretty, pretty analytical thought I like to think so. I guess that's kind of ties into like, what what really bothered me about the pandemic is that any, any clown could post find some random information that showed there that tried to prove their perspective or their conspiracy theory like, because I think I read an article somewhere that during the pandemic, there was a website that posted, quote unquote, scholarly articles, but they didn't have any review. So, you could post a scholarly article and it'll get posted on this. I don't know what the word is like, a document, archive, I guess the word for it science, but anybody could post on there and it would just get approved because there's no scholarly opinion. So, there's all these articles that were, now this is all based on. I guess this is I don't have proof from my front of me. But I did read this an article, scholarly article. Anyway, so people could just backup whatever claim they wanted to, they just googled, you know, well, this post shows that I'm right. Getting off course here, but in my social area, definitely. Especially where I work. There are a lot of people who, because a company I work for basically said if if you're an employee of us, and you're not vaccinated by x date, you might have to work from home, have daily tests and not be welcome or not be able to come on site. So, people were thinking, "Oh, I'm gonna get laid off. Eventually, if I don't get this stupid shot, you know." On the flip side, they also gave us, I believe

it was \$200 If you did provide proof of vaccination, but some people also argue that this is like bribery, whatever, but hey, I'll take the money. I took it. [laughs] And other people, you know, the conspiracy theories, oh, they're making a list of who's vaccinated and who's not so they can fire everybody. But of course, none of that happened, right? We're all, far as I know, we're all still here. We're busier than ever. They were just trying to- because we make microchips that go into government computers, we have to we had to fall under the presidential order to- everybody's that a government contractor has to have a vaccination, or work from home. So, we fall we fell under that auspice, which, of course, was actually shot down by the Supreme Court. So that never ended up happening. So, the state in general, there was it just depends where you are. If you're in small towns, farming areas, nobody wore masks, but if you were in Phoenix or Chandler, or Gilbert, like the suburban areas, there was, there's a great there was a large amount of people who were I think about vaccinated and, and wore masks, but there was definitely little pockets of if you went to a school board meeting, you would hear people fighting and arguing with them telling me all this is un-American, this is unconstitutional. So, I'd say we're probably more conservative than most states, but my group of friends was pretty 50/50.

Erika Groudle 28:03

All right. And kind of with all of that being said, knowing what you know, what do you think that personal people, individuals, communities, our government, world governments should kind of keep in mind or possibly even learn for the future?

Jason Inskeep 28:28

Hmmmm well, I feel like the biggest worry, we talk about worrying and anxiety anxiety earlier is that for me, I guess, thinking thinking about it. Now, I wish I should have said earlier but I-My biggest worry probably is the healthcare system collapsing in the future or honestly, I kind of worry in the back of my head about the United States between protests in the last three or four years. And the political partisanship I mean, I'm only 41 years old, but I've never seen this bad to where political groups are using everything as a weapon against the other one. It's very- you liberal you're I mean, you hear horrible terms like Trump-tard. And you hear like, liberal I mean, it's just they, they, they find some offensive term, and they add the word Dema- or conserva- to it. And it's just like, so partisanship right now. And that kind of really worries me about the future. So, I just wish that there was a way for people to take the politics out of it. And not think the government's trying to control them and respect. Try to respect the science. I mean, you can doubt things and you can read up on it, but don't just Google the first thing you find and then accept that as as the truth. I mean, anybody can Google something or post something on Facebook but put a little effort into, into refuting claims I mean, I just wish, like, again, and people wouldn't be so political about it. And I mean, if we keep going on this path, I worried that we'll have another civil war over the next pandemic or the next racial protests or now abortion rights. So, I mean, I think we're kind of in this interesting area where a couple bad things could happen if the wrong fuse is lit. And I think the pandemic was a big stressor of that, because

politicians really on both sides, I'm not saying one side or the other, both sides of the politics, used it as a as a tool to get elected, or to get people unelected.

Erika Groudle 30:41

Thank you

Jason Inskeep 30:42

Again, that's my personal belief but I feel strongly about the worry about the US.

Erika Groudle 30:50

I think your not alone in that boat if that makes you feel better.

Jason Inskeep 30:53

Thank you [Laughs]

Erika Groudle 30:54

[Laughs] So I guess my final question, is to, to leave it up to you. Is there anything that we missed that you want on the record?

Jason Inskeep 31:11

Hmmm, don't think so, let me think for one second. I mean, talked about my worries and I wish we'd find a way to be peaceful but that's a little to hopeful but the other thing I'd like to say is that- I was reading an oral interview with somebody in Canada about the pandemic and this person pointed out how kind and respectful everybody was- now of course that's strange now with the trucker- They have the other things going on in Canada but it was interesting to see how in Toronto during the first six months of the pandemic that everyone was kind and respectful and avoided each other and gave each other masks and then she even referenced how Americans were just not stopping, complaining about everything and kept going out in public and it was just interesting. I wish American's were less, not nationalistic, that's the wrong word, but a lot of us, myself maybe even included sometimes think that America is the greatest country on earth and are kind of indoctrinated in saying that and it's not that we're not, it's just that we need to realize that other countries are important too. Not just America. So, maybe we can change that saying to "The world is great, America is one of the great countries." But just because we want to have a

good economy and good health doesn't mean that everybody else should suffer. We should find a way to balance that out a little more. That's it. That's my soapbox so.

Erika Groudle 32:41

Alright, thank you for sharing, I appreciate your time today, Jason.

Jason Inskeep 32:44

Thanks Erika, appreciate it, have a good day.