

Robin Casey

2020-07-21

LIZ BRADBURY: [00:00:00] So, yes, it's working. Going to start the backup sound. That's good. And I'm going to read you this thing. With this project, Bradbury-Sullivan LGBT Community Center and the Trexler Library at Muhlenberg College will collaborate on forty years of public health experiences in the Lehigh Valley LGBT community. Oh, I have to turn off my phone. Collecting and curating local LGBT health experiences from HIV/AIDS to COVID-19. My name is Liz Bradbury, and I'm here with Robin Riley-Casey to talk to her about her experiences in the Lehigh Valley LGBT community during this time of the COVID-19 epidemic as part of the Lehigh LGBT community archive. We are Zoom meeting, or meeting on Zoom, on Monday, July 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020. Thank you so much for your willingness to speak with us today. To start, can you please state your full name and spell it for me?

ROBIN CASEY: Yes. [00:01:00] Robin Riley-Casey. Liz, just so you know, I've been just going by Robin Casey lately for various reasons, if that's okay.

LB: Okay, sure.

RC: So, do you want me to go back and do that again?

LB: Yes.

RC: Okay. So, my name is Robin Casey. That's R-O-B-I-N,  
C-A-S-E-Y.

LB: Okay. So I will change that on the indicators. Will you  
please share your birthdate?

RC: 9-21 [year redacted].

LB: Okay. And are you in Allentown?

RC: I am.

LB: Okay. So, this is the consent part. Do you consent to this  
interview today?

RC: Yes.

LB: Do you consent to having this interview being transcribed,  
digitized, and made publicly available online in searchable  
formats?

RC: Yes.

LB: Do you consent to the LGBT archive using [00:02:00] your  
interview for educational purposes in other formats, including  
films, articles, websites, presentations, and anything else that  
might be available in the future that we have no idea about?

RC: Yes.

LB: Which could happen! Do you understand that you will have  
thirty days after the electronic delivery of the transcript to  
review your interview, identify any parts that you'd like to

delete, and/or withdraw from your interview, or withdraw the whole interview from the project?

RC: Yes.

LB: Okay. Now, this is the identity part. What is your zip code?

RC: 18104.

LB: Okay. And what is your age?

RC: Oh, my birthday is coming up, so that would make me...

LB: Okay. And how do you identify within the LGBT community?

RC: Queer.

LB: Okay. And that is good. So, [00:03:00] these are some things that we're going to talk about. I mean, you can say whatever you want here, but we start out with some of these beginning questions and, you know, you can say whatever you want. So here's the deal. The first question is, during the COVID thing, are you living with somebody, or do you have somebody else in your household, or are you by yourself?

RC: I do have someone with me right now.

LB: Okay, that's good. And so, talk about what you do and how you've been working and whether you've been working online or that kind of stuff.

RC: I work in higher ed, and I've primarily been working remotely up until three weeks ago. And I've been going into the office twice a week.

LB: And what are you anticipating with regard to how that's going to go for the rest of the summer and into the fall?

RC: They are anticipating that we will be coming back to [00:04:00] campus, and that my office, I will be in the office primarily every day of the week, and my assistant will be there three times a week.

LB: How do you feel about going back to work like that?

RC: I'm not nervous and I probably should be, but I'm not because my office is separate from the main campus. And anyone who wanted to meet with me would have to meet by Zoom or by appointment, and so I can control the number of people that come in and out of that space.

LB: That's good. What about in general, in terms of how that's going to affect people on campus in terms of your perception?

RC: It's interesting because I have been focused on the, I'm always focused on the needs of the students. And so many students want to come back to campus, [00:05:00] and yet I am aware that their safety -- they may not be thinking about their safety in the same way that perhaps they may need to think about it. And so I think students want to come back because this is

their life. And they want to enjoy all of it. And a part of that is experiencing a Western college experience and so being on campus, a college campus, is a part of that. So I've been focusing on their need to build relationships and that requires a full college experience. So my peers, my colleagues have asked me to start thinking about things a little bit differently. And so I have been.

LB: You mean thinking about it that way?

RC: No, thinking about it not so much in terms of the student's need to be in community with one another physically. [00:06:00] But more about how it may impact their health by being -- even though we're doing all kinds of measures, you know, in terms of trying to be thoughtful about how COVID could be spread -- it still may inadvertently cause harm to either those students, to other colleagues, community members in the Lehigh Valley, all those kinds of things. So beyond the students, to outside of that. So I've been considering that.

LB: That's tough. It's tough to sort of look at both sides of that. Because you can certainly see why kids want to come back, the young people want to come back to campus (inaudible) campus. But Trish was just at the doctor this morning for a checkup, and the doctor -- it was a specialist, actually -- said, "There's no

way that schools are going to open." She said it flat out. "Stop worrying about it. It's not going to happen."

RC: [00:07:00] And more and more people are saying that, including my colleagues. So I think we're preparing -- the college is preparing for students to come back, and at the same time, my colleagues are preparing for what it would be like to teach classes online.

LB: Yeah, it's interesting. So, let's see. There, at Muhlenberg -- because you're at Muhlenberg College -- have there been layoffs, or have there been sections of the campus that have been affected? I was just talking to another person at another college who talked all about all of the staff of the college, but didn't talk about like the food service providers and stuff. So, want to say anything about that?

RC: Well I mean, I think that our food service provider is considered a third party. And I know that those individuals worked all the way up until -- [00:08:00] so, we went remote sometime in mid-March. And those food service providers worked all the way into April. And it was a way to keep them employed, but also because we still had a number of students on campus. For various reasons, who were unable to go home. Their home was not conducive to them returning. International students who really could not go back to their home countries, and so there

were so many students at the time. I think when we went remote we had over one hundred students that were still on campus after. And then we actually allowed some students to come back because the conditions at home were not optimal. So there were a number of people that were in food service in particular that were still here, on campus. So I don't know specifically what happened [00:09:00] in terms of the numbers of people, how they managed that. But for students, for people who are, my colleagues, who are part of the Muhlenberg campus, they began to do shared work hours, where some people who could Monday/Tuesday. Other people would come Wednesday/Thursday, those kinds of things. That started to happen. They asked how many of us could do our job remotely. How many of us who were willing to do other jobs that had nothing to do with our particular area, but were willing to do other jobs so that we could continue to receive a paycheck. And so those kinds of things were offered up. So many students went home without taking their belongings, because they weren't prepared to do that. So many people stayed on campus to help box up those belongings, store those belongings. So that happened all the way throughout April and into May. So other colleges have done all kinds of things to try to make it so that people didn't have to go, what they call furloughed. Not layoff, but furlough.

[00:10:00] So that was happening in many offices outside of academic life, and outside of (inaudible) and Student Affairs, the department I'm underneath. To plan out housekeeping, grounds people. I'm going to say assistants. So they had a different kind of schedule that they were working under than other people. So I think now they are bringing those individuals back to more of a full work kind of schedule, preparing for the beginning of the academic year.

LB: You don't have students on campus now, though, do you? Or do you?

RC: We do. We do. Not many. I think we have maybe, maybe thirty? Thirty or so students.

LB: They were in that situation, they're international students or they're [00:11:00] in that situation?

RC: Not as many international students now. Now more domestic students. So those students who came back because they are working for the campus, they didn't have optimal living conditions and came back. Those kinds of students. But they are in a suite style living situation where they have a full kitchen, their own restroom, you know. That kind of thing. (inaudible) An apartment.

LB: Oh, that's good. Well, I certainly am fairly aware of all the different living situations there because of [Hannah



Mesouani?], my dear friend who I just talked to recently. And he's in a very similar job as yours, actually, at Wesleyan University, or Illinois Wesleyan. And it's the same kind of thing, where the college really wants to open but the faculty is talking about the ethics of opening. [00:12:00] And the concern for students and it's a very similar college to Muhlenberg in terms of size and the kind of students that are there, I think. Maybe not quite as culturally aware. Which is, you know. So are you communicating with people that you are friends with or family or something, a lot online and talking to people in other areas? Do you find you're doing that more now than what you would do --

RC: Yeah, I think I'm doing more of that with Allentown community folk. Well, No Promise Neighborhood. Some of the -- I almost wanted to say student action. Youth-led action groups around Black Lives Matter movement. And then our students, who have been so [00:13:00] you know, they're back home in their own communities but they're still pushing Muhlenberg to be more engaged. And so it's as if they never left. I mean, it's never been this busy in the summer in my eleven years here at Muhlenberg College. And so we've had so many meetings between the president, the provost, and the deans around how are we going to make this more an anti-racist, ethical space. And

that's from our indigenous community, our Asian community, our trans community. And certainly our Black and brown students who have really been really challenging our college leadership to be more proactive, and not waiting for the students to get back. You know, around our police security force, engage them and also engaging the Allentown Police Department. [00:14:00] I did share with them there was some conversation about whether or not they had been, at the APD, trained in work with trans and LGBT community members. And I said, "I'm pretty sure the Sullivan-Brad-- that they've been doing some work there." And they made it seem like -- they made it seem like they hadn't been. I'm like, that's not true.

LB: I want to make this perfectly clear. To say this, and feel free to pass this information on. I trained them five years ago. And the training was -- I mean, I've trained hundreds of people. I've trained thousands of people. I've trained 9,000 people in the last four years, and I trained them just before we opened the center. And they were not very good at [leaving?] that training. I would not consider them well-trained. That was five years ago. I mean, trainings have changed since then. Certainly drastically changed since then. [00:15:00] I didn't find that group of people perceptive, and I have to say that we have actually removed from our list of places that we've trained,

police departments. Because we don't want people to think that these police -- I also trained the Bethlehem police. And even by the very virtue of it just being five years ago, that was too long ago. I mean, you can't count that as a training. But I have to say that training police is very, very, very hard to do. And I can just say this. I trained every one of those police officers. I trained them in groups of forty or fifty over five different trainings. And several of the trainings, I had an intern with me from Pottstown, who was a social work intern. At one of the trainings, she actually came out of the training, got in the car, and cried. [00:16:00] And she cried all the way home. She told me she cried all the way, her drive home. And she was not part of the queer community. And she said, "I will never feel comfortable engaging with police again."

RC: Wow. Well, that's the work they're trying to do now. So we'll see. Maybe that's what the --

LB: I think that training the police -- and I've made a video, because we had a grant, and I made a series of videos which I have available, to train. And they would work for security, too. And they specifically were made to train police, because of this. Police said to me, flat-out, "We don't want to be trained by anyone but other police officers." So, the training that I made was that [00:17:00] I created a script. I used another

video that was made by the Prince Edward, what is it called. Prince George's County Police, outside of (overlapping dialogue; inaudible). And they have a very good training about -- that was made a long time ago. It was made about six or seven years ago. It was made by the National Center for Transgender Equality in conjunction with that police force. It's about training police to work with the trans community. But it didn't talk about, it only talked about transgender women and it didn't talk about LGB people. It didn't talk about gender nonconforming people, so you know, I filled that in and we had a police officer. We filmed the police officer doing the training. So we have four, twenty-minute trainings, about twenty minutes, where the police officer -- and one of them uses that video, and then the [00:18:00] other two talk about the other issues. They talk about cultural circumstances that cause LGBT people to be wary of the police. All sorts of things like that. It's a very good training.

RC: Yeah. I'm -- they're going to find that with our police officers too, given that even after the chief had put out that email recent, (inaudible) the chokehold, and then the next thing you know, it's a culture. The APD has a culture they have to really grapple with. This is going to take a lot of ongoing engagement on working with marginalized communities, and so I'm

not really sure they're ready for that or even open to it. So, yeah, I don't know.

LB: I don't feel comfortable about, unless there's drastic change in that police department, I don't feel comfortable. They had to force the people to come. They had to have a person sit there who was management, [00:19:00] an upper-level person, so they wouldn't call out rude things to me. I mean, it was ridiculous. It was ridiculous. I've never had another training that was like that, and as I've said, I've trained over one hundred and seventy organizations. Never had anybody do this. I took into consideration, I had done the trainings a little bit more drastically before I did those trainings, and I changed some of them in reaction to that. But I ended up training Lehigh County Health and Human Services, which is every person who works -- and that includes juvenile detention, court people. Social workers, everything. And people were concerned about those, because those were mandatory trainings, too. And I actually got contact from people who said, "I don't think that these people are going to receive these trainings well. They haven't liked other mandatory trainings. They're going to be tough on you." And I was very careful about how I did that training, but it was pretty similar to what I had done to train [00:20:00] the police. And as a result, I didn't have any

problem training the Health and Human Services people. They actually gave me the highest ratings of anybody that had ever had trainings there. And part of it was that other trainings were not as clear and useful. But in terms of training the police to be empathic, I don't think that'll ever happen. In terms of training them to stop using micro-aggressions and saying to them, "If you do use this language, you'll be fired." Maybe. Maybe.

RC: Right. It'd be interesting. I don't know, because honestly they have so many protections, particularly when people think that we're in the height of the moment. They have to both be someone who can step up to engage in an uncertain situation, and they also have to maintain a level of professionalism, [00:21:00] which is difficult in those -- I don't know. But that's what's happening right now, because our students really would love for us not to have an armed security on campus. And yet they don't want APD on our campus either, so all those things are happening simultaneously, and we will see how that shakes out. So I think that this summer has been nothing but, from the COVID-19, when that first hit, we were trying to figure out how to support students who were at home, who didn't have access to the internet. Families who were losing their jobs, and so food insecurity, housing insecurity, and all those kinds of

things. And luckily enough we had just started our financial hardship support system, resource system, on campus. And so we were supporting many students and their families, to make sure they had access to the internet [00:22:00] services, wherever they were located. California, Washington D.C., it didn't matter. Texas. So we were doing all that, and then also making sure that they had access to some funds to help them replenish their food stores. So all those things were going on on this end, to make sure they could make it through the semester. And then from then on, then George Floyd was murdered and then it's just been ongoing from then on.

LB: Yeah. And this thing that happened in Allentown, it's just extraordinary. I mean, because it's not -- I don't know if you've seen the whole nine minute video. Did you see the whole nine minute video?

RC: I did.

LB: It's not just one instance when he's trying to handcuff the guy. He does it again, later, when the guy's completely handcuffed, for no reason at all.

RC: I didn't understand (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) either. I didn't understand [00:23:00] what they were doing. I mean, it's hard to say if they were fearful or they just didn't want to intervene because the officers were present. I'm not

really sure what was going on there either, so it was really awkward and kind of mind-boggling about what they were doing or what they perceived themselves -- being a help to the officers? Or to the gentleman? I couldn't quite figure that out.

LB: If you look at the expressions on their faces -- it's hard to watch. And I've talked to people, and people of color, who've said, "I can't watch it. I don't want to watch it." And I understand that. But I have to say that based on my privilege, I've been in a position where I've watched every second of that so I can call it out. And then I do call out that kind of stuff, and one of the things is that the police said that in their statement, that he fell to the ground and the other people, the police officers, fell. It's a complete lie. [00:24:00] They kicked his feet out from under him and threw him to the ground.

RC: Yes, yes, yes.

LB: And you know, you can't just have it both ways. You can't say, "Well, we have to trust the police and look they're trying," and then they just lie to you. And you and I have been in situations where we've been talking to police officers who just blatantly will tell you something that isn't true, and it's very hard to not be very sensitive to that. And I can understand how -- I mean, I was talking to a young black activist who said, "When these things are defunded and stuff like that." I went,



"Boy, I hope that's true." And I know it should be. I know it should be. And you can see why we cannot send police officers out in a situation where there's a person who is sick or mentally ill, something like that. You could see why [00:25:00] that is ridiculous. If you look at that video and you look at the healthcare worker's faces, some of them literally go -- like, they're concerned for the guy. Who knows what they're thinking. I mean, that's an impossible situation.

RC: Yeah. Yeah, it's hard in too many ways, because I struggle on campus with being raised not to, what I call, bend my knee. You know? To authority. And yet I know young people in this generation are taught to just make it home alive. Make it home alive, right. So put your hands on the steering wheel, "Yes sir, no sir." And so I want them to make it home alive as well, but I struggle a lot with [00:26:00] not interceding.

LB: I know, I know.

RC: So at that moment probably the thing in my mind would've been how could I have helped that gentleman? So, could I go over and put my arm around him and say, "Brother, let me take you into the hospital." Or, "What do you need?" And try to speak to him. But I think that so many people look at the officers as, now they are in charge. They come on scene, they're in charge,

and so you give away all your power to them. Yeah. That's just not something that I'm comfortable with, so.

LB: And I also think that you know, it boils back to COVID-19. This was a person who was really potentially endangering other people because he was throwing up, he was spitting, things like that. So we are in that extra added level of fear, that is legitimate, you know. It really is.

RC: [00:27:00] It is legitimate.

LB: And in fact, he could've been sick like that for that very reason. And yet, well you know, all of those things. And I remember saying this to Trish. I said, "Yeah, they're making the statement and they're not going to do this." And then that happened. Like four days later.

RC: It wasn't unbelievable, but it was just so clear --

LB: A classic --

RC: We don't need another statement. No more statements. We do not need another statement.

LB: You can't say anything. And the thing and I was talking to Ce-Ce Gerlach and I said -- their resolution, I think their resolution that they made was very, very significant and very well done. I don't think, anybody with any sense couldn't argue with any statement they made. It's actually [00:28:00] the least that you could expect. But the whole thing about body cams

could've -- because we're still not hearing anything about that. And people are saying, "Well, you don't know what they're saying." Well, it doesn't matter what he's saying, but the bottom line is, yeah, I would like to hear what he's saying. Because some people are saying, "Well, this man was insane. He was a danger to himself." Other people, we have no idea. So why do we think that at all? That's not really the issue, but it certainly isn't the issue with regard to kneeling somebody's head into the sidewalk when he's handcuffed. I mean, that's it. That's it.

RC: Over the curb. That was just like, that was hard. You know, I was out at the fish hatchery and I was walking with a friend of mine and we had our masks on, so it was -- I wouldn't say at the height of the COVID-19 crisis, but it was when people were just feeling like they could start to walk outside in the park with a mask on. [00:29:00] This white gentleman is coming the opposite direction and he's walking toward us and we don't think anything of it, and then he stops us and he just says to me, "I want you to know that I believe that Black Lives Matter." And I'm like, "Okay." Thank you? And then he tells me that, you know, he was a part of the Civil Rights movement back in the sixties, and all these things. But he didn't do enough. And I'm thinking, that's interesting. And I said, "Well, what do you

mean?" He says, "You know, I kind of just got busy with my life." And I said, "We all do. We all get busy. Don't feel bad about living your life." He said, "But I realize now I should've kept pushing. And I want to push now." I said, "You know, I really appreciate you [00:30:00] stopping and telling me that"

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LB: That's very gracious of you.

RC: -- yeah. But (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) yeah. It was really kind of, it was awkward. At the same time, because we're all dealing with the COVID-19, we all keeping our distance. He was very respectful and aware that we had to maintain this distance, right, because of COVID-19. And yet you could see his desire to make a connection. I think that's the interesting thing, is that in the midst of this distance, there's still the desire for some of us to make a connection. And so I hope that he knew from me, I had no ill will against him. I didn't know this man from anyone. And yet he took [00:31:00] a moment to say, "I see you," and I said, "I see you. And I appreciate that you wanted me to know that we're in this together." And that's what I did. I said, "We're in this together. It's all of us. We've all got work to do." But my person that walks with me, the white woman who's just now starting to think about issues of racial inequalities, and so she's like, this is a white man,

she's a white woman, and I think she was thinking like maybe protecting me to some extent. Like, who's this white man approaching us on a dog trail? But it was really interesting and I didn't share that story with anyone because I thought, "Nobody wants to hear a nice, warm, fuzzy story." It wasn't that it was a nice, warm, fuzzy story. It was just that in the midst of so much, this damn COVID-19 that connections still could be made. And I probably wouldn't recognize that guy [00:32:00] from anyone. But it will stick with me, and I'm sure it will stick with him as well. Interesting.

LB: Good to hear that. But it still, I think, was very gracious of you to listen to his story about, "Oh, I really tried."

RC: "I really tried, but then I stopped."

LB: Well, I think it's gracious of you to do that. And I agree that, you know, yeah. I think people are trying. And I've talked to a lot of people I've talked to a lot of people of color in this, because I wanted to be -- I have to confess that I had to do ten interviews of people who were in the Lehigh Valley during the AIDS epidemic, and I talked to three women and seven men. And they were all white. They were all pretty privileged, to the point where they weren't really -- it was during now, it was during COVID -- and they weren't really negatively affected by COVID, other than just being concerned for people's health

[00:33:00] and stuff. They hadn't had it, they didn't know anyone who had died, that kind of stuff. And so I said to Trish, "Now I've got to do twenty COVID interviews," which is a lot, frankly. And I said, "I have to interview people of color or it's just going to look like the Aryan reaction to these things. It's ridiculous." So I tried to interview as many different kinds of people as I could. Also different age people, because everybody in the AIDS thing was all, you know, sixty or over. And so I talked to a lot of people, and one of the things that -- so this, I think, the eighth or the ninth interview. No, the eleventh interview I've done for the COVID things. And this universal thing -- because you cannot talk about this period of time without talking about Black Lives Matter, it's ridiculous to presume that you could separate that from this instance. And I said to [00:34:00] the folks, I've said to everybody, "What's giving you hope about this?" And a lot of people have said that this response, particularly by young people, in terms of violence breeds activism, that kind of stuff, has been a positive thing for them. And I feel that way too. The thing that's killing me is, I can't join in. Because Trish is such at risk. I can't. And so a lot of older people that I've spoken to have said, "I can't do this, and I hate that I can't do it. But it's wonderful to see a lot of young people, who are being

socially distancing and wearing the mask, but they are out there and they are doing what they should be doing. And that's the thing that's giving us the hope that we can grasp during this time." Because there's not a lot of things that we can be really, really hopeful about. [00:35:00] I mean, you can always be hopeful, but it's tough. So, what do you think, for you in general, what's your biggest concern with regard to the pandemic? So, when you're thinking about this?

RC: You know, I think a part of it has to do with that this is also the time when I'm hoping that in the next ten years or so I'll be retiring. And not knowing, I've never ever faced any worries about being laid off or furloughed or things like that. And so my retirement account, paying attention to the stock market because the college puts our money into the stock market. So I'm thinking about that and how to safeguard that money, because if I were thinking outside (inaudible), it's just to supplement, not to (inaudible). So that's [00:36:00] probably one of my concerns. I think the other one has to do with the way it personally, my personal concern. I don't have any concerns about my own health, which I think is really interesting. I've never really been unhealthy, so that's privilege and I'm aware of it. And I don't know anyone currently who's had COVID-19, and so that's also a part of it. But I have a dear friend who has

leukemia. She's in remission currently, but has had a scare so we're waiting to hear back some information. But she's in Ohio. So I'm not in touch with her physically, but so I'm worried that there's a kind of, the other ancillary things around it.

[00:37:00] That if I needed to get home to be with my family, and some sort of network glitch would happen and I couldn't be in contact because technology would go down. Or all of a sudden, my money, I didn't have access to it and I couldn't get home, to campus or somewhere. Or if I got really ill myself and all my family was at home and they couldn't get to me. And so in conversations I've been having with people in Allentown, we've been talking about what would an underground railroad look like now? Where people in need needed support? Whether that was food, whether that was housing, whether that was finances, whether that was care. Those kinds of things. Who in our community could we say, "We got you?" You know? [00:38:00] At one time, when there was a real scare here in Pennsylvania, you know that I was in the military at one time. And I can shoot a weapon. And I thought -- well, things got really, really crazy. It was when you couldn't go to the store and there was nothing at the grocery store. But in Allentown, people get crazy about like the snow is coming and you can't find any milk. I'm used to that. But it seemed a little bit different. And so you can't find



toilet paper, you can't find (inaudible). You can't find like the food stuff, and so we were talking about this underground network of support for people who were going to need things and they're also going to need someone to protect them. And one of the things I was saying is, I do know how to shoot a weapon. I haven't done it in probably twenty years. My eyesight has changed. But [00:39:00] I could do it if I had to. And if I had to train others, now's the time to start to prepare to do those kinds of things. So these are the kinds of interesting sort of ancillary things that's not COVID-19 specifically, how the virus may impact me physically. But what I would need to do if, in fact, it impacted the people that I love or cared about as a community, and we needed all the other things that could happen because of it. So, those are the kinds of things that I've been more acutely involved in. I've been worried about all the numbers and I've been in conversation with people who keep saying it's a hoax. (inaudible) Unbelievable things. And our governor is an idiot, you know. I've been trying my best to sort of help them understand, please pay attention. [00:40:00] But for me, it's the ancillary things or the fall-out, how COVID-19 can impact us in ways, our community, Allentown proper. I'm not talking about the west end. I'm really talking about the city as I think of it. Where people don't have access to things because

they don't have the resources. They don't have the insurance. They don't have finances to make sure they have food stores. Or lights, or those kinds of things. That's the kind of conversations I've been a part of, and that happened early on during the COVID-19 crisis. And that probably was an extension of so many students that I knew, were going back home to communities where their families and neighborhoods didn't have access to those (inaudible). So then that reconnected me to a community that I, really probably the closest I was connected to Allentown was when I was working the human relations commission. That was the closest I was to really knowing the people in the city proper. [00:41:00] and so through those students, it reconnected me to some of the work that was happening in the city.

LB: That's interesting. Do you actually know people -- because I have to say, this is a factor of who I know and all the folks that I'm interviewing are part of the queer community, for the most part, or tangential parts of the queer community -- and so there's very few people who like, think Rachel Levine is a bad person. Because she's really our hero, you know, and recognize that by extension Governor Wolf has been very, very good to the LGBT community in the state of Pennsylvania. And you know, both of them have been a real guiding light, compared to a lot of

other states where they're just, "Yeah, so what if everybody dies?" Kind of thing. We've been very lucky, I think, at least to have that level of leadership. [00:42:00] And I also think it's been a positive thing for our queer youth to be able to see that even -- you know, it's tough though, because I talked to somebody who said, "It is hurting our transgender youth to see Dr. Rachel Levine be attacked that way." They don't just look at this and say, "Oh wow, look at this wonderful, brilliant woman of science who is this very high level of the government and is saying all these intelligent things." The first thing that young people are seeing is all the attacks that they're going to, that she's enduring, and thinking to themselves, "Well you know, if I come out as trans or if I'm in public with regard to my gender identity, am I going to be attacked that way?" They're not going to think, "Am I going to be able to achieve what she has?" They're thinking, "Am I going to just be beaten up and made a mockery of constantly?" It's a tough thing for our kids.

RC: I saw that [00:43:00] whole thing with the dunking booth of someone dressed up as, supposed to be Levine. And he blatantly denied, it was not meant to be a mockery of her at all, meant to be just for fundraising. But yeah.

LB: It's hard, It's ridiculous. So, that was my next question, about Rachel Levine. So there you go. The next question is, are you spending time on any queer dating or hookup apps?

RC: I refuse! I just can't! I can't do it! I so miss the Michigan Women's Music Festival. My heart! I just refused to do it, and I think I've come to accept that probably -- I have some really close friends here. Women, all women, that when I head home, that's when I'm in my [00:44:00] granny shawl and my rocking chair. Perhaps I'll do it. But I have no desire to go through that route, because I tried it early on when I got here to Allentown and I struggled with the politics of it a little bit. My politics around it. And I guess I have this sort of, it's probably the old-school way of just thinking about meeting people. I'm sure it's just an old-school way, and it just felt so manufactured in a way that I just can't quite get myself -- and I've met people who've met lifelong partners, they have great relationships. I've met younger lesbians who, great partners, starting families. All these things. I just don't seem to have the time or the energy to go through that kind of a thing. [00:45:00] So yeah.

LB: I understand. Obviously this was not a question that was written by me. And interestingly, the demographic of people who have answered yes to that were not people who are in our age or

(inaudible) demographic, quite frankly. Because of that, I think it's tough to -- yeah, and especially now during COVID-19, it's the last thing that you would do. In fact, nobody has said to me, even the younger gay men who would say, "Well, you know I'm not a stranger to these things, but not now. I want to be alive."

RC: That's the focus.

LB: I mean, their response is, if there's somebody using this, what would that person be like? They would be exposing themselves in every situation. They'd be the most likely

[00:46:00] person to be carrying the disease. So I think that's a pretty interesting thing. So, are you limiting going out? Are you going to the grocery store or stuff like that? How is that?

RC: I have a dog. I walk him three times a day, at least four or five miles. He kills me. And I do go to the grocery store. I just started going back to work to the office. I do try to limit my contact with people as much as I can. And so luckily we have these great parks and we can do that. I wear my mask. Yeah.

LB: Yeah, we are lucky that we have great parks here, it's true. I feel, though, that in my -- I normally will walk for miles and miles and miles every day. I walk five miles every day. But I am paranoid of just walking out my door because every minute I see people walk right by on the sidewalk that are not

wearing a mask, [00:47:00] and I just, it's too much risk for me. And I don't feel like I want to drive to the park, because people (inaudible). While I was at the park, I walked around and then this person came up to me and tried to talk to me and they didn't wear a mask. And I thought, "I can't deal with it. Can't deal with it."

RC: The park is right across the street from me, so I have both the rose garden and Cedar Beach just right there.

LB: So great there, yeah.

RC: Yeah. But I've been going to the fish hatchery early in the morning because he gets up like around six, six thirty, so hardly anybody's out at that point in time, and that's nice. But I do think I'm going to have to start curtailing my exposure a little bit more, simply because the surge is starting to, and so I have to be a little bit more cautious.

LB: Yeah, yeah, I think it's true. And yet, you've got to move around, you know? And so I have [00:48:00] a bicycle desk where we have our garden. We have a bicycle desk, so I try to do ninety minutes of that a day or something like that. But boy, it's tough. I know a lot of people who've gained a lot of weight. I know a lot of other people who've been very concerned about it, and they've made a big effort to not become stagnant

and stuff. Because that's hard to get out of, too. You do that for a year, it's awful hard to turn that around.

RC: I mean, it's so easy -- and I'm an introvert, so it didn't bother me to be at home. That didn't bother me. But what I did find is, it's easy just to close your eyes to nap. And I like naps, so naps are good. But the routine of it. So I have to get up and get moving, otherwise it's -- yeah. The sun comes in the window and all that kind of stuff. The dog's sleeping, you know.

LB: Yeah. So, there's a question on here. And has it been [00:49:00] hard to be out? And that really is for young people how are in circumstances where they're with families that are not supportive, and I would wonder that you might be coming in contact with students that might let you know that they might be out on campus but now they can't be that way at home. Have you come in contact with anybody that's in --

RC: That's my biggest concern when we went remote, is that -- so we have our GSAs. And most students, when they come to college is when they really feel they can express themselves fully, if they haven't come out. Now they're at home, they're cloistered, they're in quarantine, and either they go back into this space where they're not fully able to express themselves, or they try to find a way to find community. And how do we do that virtually? That's a difficult one, because they're in a

situation where they have to maintain their safety because of COVID, so they can't be thrown out [00:50:00] on the street where they have no way to protect themselves physically, because of this virus. And yet they can't protect themselves emotionally and mentally, either, because they can't really express themselves fully as queer folk. So we've been struggling with trying to provide virtual spaces by GSA where they can at least find a way to be in that space of GSA queer students for support. And so I am worried about how many of our queer students have supportive family members, and are safe enough either to come out or will stay isolated for fear of being pushed out and nowhere else to go. Particularly now. They may not be able to come back to campus, or their immune system would even allow them [00:51:00] to come back to campus. That's the other thing. Some of our students can't come back because of that, so I'm very conscious, specifically, about our LGBT community because of that concern. That's a scary one, that's a scary one. And we were just beginning to, there's kind of a tipping point at Muhlenberg where more and more of our trans students know that before they even walk on campus, they can contact our registrar and say, "This is the name that I want on every single piece of documentation. I do not want to walk onto this campus and somebody call me by that name." And so they were



very comfortable with this information and sharing it, before even I would know. Which is great. I don't need to have that information. Now, what I'm finding is there's a few students [00:52:00] who I know who are transgender students who have not found a connection on campus and they're almost, I think a little bit of fear to let people know so they can make sure all the stuff happens earlier rather than later. And I think partly it's because there's a delay in their resources back home. That something's happening back home where they can't get the resources they need to make that connection on the other side, going into college. So I had a couple students who -- you probably have met a few of my students a few years ago, who had those issues at Muhlenberg where they actually quit. They came back a year later because they didn't want to be known by their dead name. They wanted to be known by the name (inaudible). Well, I don't know. I think our LGBT students are going to be, I hope that they're not subjected to violence. [00:53:00] Both physically or emotionally, because they need to be themselves and they come out to their family members.

LB: That certainly is a thing about going to college, where you can totally reinvent yourself. You can really explore (inaudible). You can totally be the gender you know yourself to be, and you don't have to answer to anybody.

RC: No one.

LB: And if there are people that have problems with it, particularly on the Muhlenberg campus, there are other people that are going to be your friends. And that can happen, but I think you get to a certain point once you've gone to college where when you go home you go, "Yeah, I can stand this at home for about two and a half days." And that's about it. Two and a half days, probably max a month for both me and my parents. I love them, they were great, but two and a half days max. And then I had to leave because -- and I'm always amazed at kids, [00:54:00] students who will say, college-age students will say they talk to their mother every day. I'm like, really?

(inaudible) No kidding. But I know that's much different now than it was then, when I was a kid and nobody talked to their parents about anything. Certainly not about sex. For heaven's sake, it's crazy. But good for them, if they can do that. I think it's wonderful, and it certainly makes families so that they don't have a maximum of two and a half days. Because (inaudible) be realistic, I think, but I think it's great. And I think it's great that there are colleges that are offering, and really supporting people. I mean, you're seeing it from the other perspective. From the way I see it, when people say things like, "Well, you know, is there a supportive college?" I can

say, "Look, Muhlenberg College has gender neutral housing, for heaven's sake." Has had it for quite a while. [00:55:00] So if you're saying, "Well, it's not up to date" or something, it's like, compared to what? You know, I guess, but I don't know. I think for colleges similar to Muhlenberg, they're pretty good. They're better than Illinois Wesleyan, I'll say that.

RC: Poor Illinois. Yeah, we definitely done some work. We still got work to do, but yeah. And always, always.

LB: And certainly, and now's the time to do it, I think. This is a good time to do it. I'm so glad to hear that students are demanding that kind of introspection now. It's a good thing.

RC: It is a good thing. It's tiring, but it's a good thing.

LB: It is really tiring. And young people want it now, too. (inaudible) everything right now.

RC: And then they leave us. They're gone. Yup.

LB: [00:56:00] So, so what's giving you hope, now? What's giving you hope?

RC: You know, just the new day. I think that every day that I'm not online looking at all the news is a good day. I think the fact that my friends are still healthy, I'm healthy. That November, oh God, please November -- I just hope, it was hard for me to see when John Lewis passed. When I saw that Ruth Ginsberg was back in the hospital, my heart.

LB: I know. I started to cry.

RC: I know, I love her.

LB: Both of those.

RC: So you know, I'm hopeful that these young congress people like Alexandria, Ayanna, and all those others, they are strong enough to hold fast, like Ruth and John Lewis. [00:57:00]

Because it's not like ten, twenty -- it's a lifetime. So --

LB: John was a lifetime of that. But I've got to tell you that when Ruth Bader Ginsberg was put on the court, she was pretty moderate. I mean, she was not seen as the leftist. She progressed. So we have that going for us, too. She may even roll back and become --

RC: But look at how -- oh God.

LB: I know, I know. I know exactly what you mean. People who are looking at this in the future, we're talking about the Supreme Court. We're just groaning about the Supreme Court.

RC: So I'm hopeful that we see more and more people that will run for city council. I'm glad Ce-Ce kept moving toward that direction. I thought she always wanted to be on the city council. She's on the city council. She's working with some very interesting people but she's on the city council. I want to see more young people take up that kind of [00:58:00] work. I've heard that human, what was our --

LB: Human Relations Commission.

RC: I've heard they're starting to move in a better way. I hope so. But they finally got a person who's actually going to be paid to do the job, after how many freaking -- yeah. So I think there needs to be pressure on that group, and I'm hoping that the connections that the college says they want to make to Allentown -- because what I said to Muhlenberg College is, I think the city needs to hold Muhlenberg accountable. I mean, they are in the city of Allentown. Honestly, the work they do is not enough. I feel like if you want to be seen as experts in different fields of study, that's all great and dandy.

[00:59:00] But if you want to be seen as people who can be servants to the community at large, then you're not doing the job you've been called to do. And I think I would love to see the city be able to hold Muhlenberg accountable to that kind of framework. And I think that's what students are calling Muhlenberg to be.

LB: Well, that's great to hear.

RC: So that would be a fantastic shift, if we could make that.

LB: I mean yeah, it's an integral part and it's not just like, "Don't go below Seventeenth street," kind of thing. You know, Adrian went there and he went below Seventeenth street and my first experience with him was him saying to me -- I don't know

if you know this -- but the first thing he said to me was, Patty Middleman had him call me because he wanted to get the college to include gender identity in its nondiscrimination policy. And he said he wanted to get a petition and have them, [01:00:00] and I said, "You don't have to do that because the city already has this law in place." The laws had been in place by the time he was a student -- I think it was in 2004 -- so we'd had it in place for two years. And I said, "The college has to follow it. You can't discriminate against -- so just tell them it's already in the law." So then he comes back with, "Well, the administration of the college said that because we're a not-for-profit, we don't have to follow the law." I said, "That's not true. That's ridiculous. What do you think, you think that the hospital doesn't have to follow the law, they can discriminate against black people? That's ridiculous." And he goes, "Oh, okay." And I said, "So, this is what you do. Don't worry about a petition. This is what you need to do." This is the last time he listened to me. Because he was, what, 18 then. So I said, "What you need to do is tell them that Lehigh already has the policy." (inaudible) on it like, you know, [01:01:00] two seconds.

RC: That (inaudible) going to be good.

LB: And that, and also it's the law. It's the law and you can't -- and he was saying, "Well, it's a religious college." I said, "It's not a religious college." If it were a religious college -- I said, "Look, frankly, there are colleges in the Lehigh Valley -- DeSales, for example -- that is a religious college. Or even Cedar Crest, which it's all about the mission. And the mission of the college, if the mission of the college was to follow Lutheran principles -- which it is not, the mission of the college is to educate young people. That's what it is. Or just educate people in general. It's an education. That's the mission, that's it. They're not saying, "We're going to only do Lutherans." That's not what they say. Cedar Crest College's mission is to work for women in education. And so technically they can make decisions about gender with regard to how they educate people or whether they've inclusive or not, of men. They can say, "We don't want [01:02:00] men in the dorms." Because it's their mission, if they want to do it. That's their mission. And DeSales has a right to say, "We follow Catholic principles," because they're a Catholic college. Everybody knows that. So Adrian then comes back, literally the next day and he has a meeting with the president. They had the policy changed in a couple of days. I said, "Just play the Lehigh card." And it totally did it.

RC: I can see Reggie Ham falling for that.

LB: Yeah, totally. Well, it was Taylor.

RC: Oh, it was Taylor! Oh, it was Taylor. I never got a chance to meet him.

LB: He was, you know, the other thing is that he would meet with Adrian because Adrian was so pushy, and he was successful in doing that. And I have to also that back when Adrian was -- and I mention this all the time when I talk about GSAs -- when Adrian was the head of the GSA, there were seven hundred students in the GSA. There were forty-five. He [00:45:00] was there, and then when he left there were forty-five again. But there were seven hundred, and the reason is he did really interesting fun, exciting events, and he just made that happen. He also made everybody go out and vote. It's a big deal. I think our college student vote is what will win this election for us, because that's the swing vote.

RC: I hope so, I hope so.

LB: That's why I do want them to come back, because Pennsylvania's a swing state and if they're in California it doesn't matter. Or New York, or D.C.. So, yeah.

RC: I'm trying to be positive. Just hold out hope.

LB: Try to be, try to be positive. Trying to be positive in the last election and we got kicked in the head. I know, I know. I



mean, yeah. Shit. So, anyway, I think that's everything.

[01:04:00] I did want to, so here's one little thing. There's a question here that says, "What are your frustrations and challenges?" And you've already talked about some of that stuff, but have you had any like one little thing that's an epiphany about your life that you figured out? Like, now I'm home all the time I realize this about myself that's kind of frustrating, and I'll give you an example. It's that Trish is extraordinarily frustrated by -- I mean, the world, we wake up every morning, we're concerned about the world. But she's frustrated that she cannot shop for herself because it is costing so much more money than when you can go to buy something on sale. She can't find any sales for food, so it's costing us almost twice as much money for food because we will order by the list. So she'll say, "Get this chicken," and stuff like that. She can't go to the farmer's market because it's so dangerous there. [01:05:00] And they won't do curbside pickup and stuff. Or a lot of the booths. And so she can't go to Elias Market, she can't go to Produce Mart because it's not really set up for that. And she said, "That's what's killing me. I need to get the sale on this thing." And that was the frustrating -- so has anything like that, where you started to think like, "Oh, this thing is the thing that's turning out to be so irritating for me?" I mean, in

the grand scheme of things we're very, very privileged and we're lucky that we have a place to live, and food, and a job, and stuff like that.

RC: I've been thinking; I realized that three years ago, when my mother died, that I was not going to waste time enjoying my family and friends, and then COVID-19 happened and my best friend, who has leukemia, I can't be around her. And so she could die. [01:06:00] And I would not be able to physically be with -- all this time, I cannot spend any time with her. And I wouldn't even, I wouldn't even want to be close to a human within six feet or ten feet. I just don't want the chance. So I think that that's the hard thing, is now when I finally realize don't waste time, time's all I got, that COVID-19 happened and I have no choice.

LB: Yeah, we're just waiting for it to be over. I know exactly what you mean. I feel like we're older. For younger people it's sort of an inconvenience and, might not be so true for college students, but that sort of millennial who's thinking, "Well, I have to work differently and I can't go out to the bars and I can't see as many people," and stuff like that. But for me, I'm thinking like, "How many years do I have left? And am I wasting twenty percent of them hanging around the house?"

RC: Yeah, I don't like that. [01:07:00]

LB: No, it's just (inaudible). We have to try to do projects that we wouldn't normally do, but we know they need to get done.

RC: Yeah. Like painting my house. I don't know, and those things seem frivolous, but I don't know. We'll see.

LB: That's what I've been doing, is fixing my house.

RC: But you're a fixer. (inaudible)

LB: I'm a butch dyke with two power tools, so --

RC: I have a lot of friends like that who are -- what's nice about it is that more and more young women that I've met, or colleagues of mine, have grown up being butch dykes but they're not. You know? They do all the things that I think they -- one of the scientists, and she just tore down her shed and built a new one. And it's this beautiful thing; she has all these tools, and all the tool belts and everything, and it's just like amazing. So I love these young women of today because they are who we were, (inaudible). So I think that that's cool.

[01:08:00] But no, that's the one thing I miss, is just not being with people that I really would like to be closer to.

LB: I think another thing that really sucks is that people who need help -- like I have a friend who, a good friend, whose aunt died and she's the executor and she needs to clean out her house and stuff like that. And she had to do it all by herself. I said, "We would've all helped you. We could've done this in one

day. We could've done this in one day, instead of you having to slog away with this. This would've been something." We knew the aunt. We just would've come in and done the whole thing. It could be all over, and we would've felt good about it. And instead you can't help somebody who's in that kind of situation. Can't come and fix something for you, or make you feel better, just make you feel less lonely. People who have had those losses [01:09:00] that we can't be with them, is really awful. Well anyway, it's wonderful to hear about really positive things. A number of the things that you said about the students are very heartening for me. I'm sucking out as much hope as I can out of this, because we all need to get that. So it's wonderful to hear about (inaudible). Well, and I just think that they're the ones that are going to save us in this world right now. And I think that this kind of circumstance is upsetting, but for young people they're not disillusioned. They're angry, and that's the way I want them to be.

RC: I agree. If they can use that anger for good, that's fabulous. Go for it.

LB: Because often, I don't know about you, but often I just think, "Ugh, could this be any worse? What else?" You know? (inaudible) It can't be -- oh, there's another thing!

RC: Oh my God, there's always something else, you're right.

[01:10:00]

LB: It's just awful. And it's in the way. And so I think young people look at that and (inaudible) "I want to do something. Got to march about this." And that's what I want to see them do, because they're not just sitting back saying, "Oh, this is so awful. There's nothing we can do about it." I like hearing that, and I like hearing when young people say, "If this doesn't work, we'll take it. We need to take this." And I like to hear them say that. Scary, but I have to hear them say it. Because that's where they need to be, I think.

RC: We haven't seen that kind of apathy yet, which I am thankful for.

LB: Well, good for you, Robin. Thank you so much for talking to me. It's been terrific, and I usually ask people if they want to say anything else to somebody in the, 30 years from now and going to look back and, no, you're pretty much --

RC: No, all I have to say is that [01:11:00] I was here and I hope that I made, this video is just to say that we all got work to do --

LB: It is, it is. And we're working, and I hope the people watching it in the future will say, "Yeah, it worked."

RC: That would be nice --

LB: But they know the future.

RC: Yeah. Only they will know.

LB: They needed to also know what you were doing in the present, and thank you so much for telling me about that and being, let's see if I can say the thing. And, to give me your time and thank you so much. It was great to talk to you. I miss talking to you, so --

RC: It's been a while.

LB: It has been a long time. Ridiculously long time.

(overlapping dialogue; inaudible) Thank you, and going to turn off the recording now.

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