

Stephen Libby & Gary Gaugler Jr.

2020-07-29

LIZ BRADBURY: Here we go. And now I'm going to turn to back-up recording, because I'm anal retentive, and it's a good thing I am, because I've got a couple of recording issues, including that in the middle of Ollie's thing, it went off. And I don't know whether it was his or mine, but I had a strong signal the whole time. I have no idea what -- never happened. That was my twenty-fourth interview, and you guys are -- actually, it's more than that. No, it's more than that, because the one after it is -- it was my twenty-eighth interview. So you guys are twenty-nine for me. And I had never had that happen, and I've been on lots of other Zoom calls, too, and it just disappeared completely off the screen like it was never there. It froze for a while, and then it just disappeared. So I hope that that doesn't happen again. But I don't know. Well, anyway. So, let me read you [00:01:00] this stuff. So, can you hear me okay?

STEPHEN LIBBY: Yeah.

LB: With this project, Bradbury-Sullivan LGBTQ Community Center and the Trexler Library, Muhlenberg College, to collaborate on forty years of public health experiences in the Lehigh Valley LGBTQ community, electing and curating local LGBTQ

health experiences from HIV/AIDS to COVID-19. My name is Liz Bradbury, and I'm here with Stephen Libby and Gary Gaugler Jr., to talk about their experiences in the Lehigh Valley LGBTQ community during this time of COVID-19 pandemic as part of the Lehigh Valley LGBTQ community archives. Today is July 29, 2020, and we're meeting on Zoom. So, and I have to check to be sure I'm recording for sure. Okay. And I've pinned you, so that's good. Thank you so much for your willingness to speak with us today. To start, can you please state your full names and spell them for me?

SL: Sure. Stephen Libby. [00:02:00] S-T-E-P-H-E-N. Libby, L-I-B-B-Y.

GARY GAUGLER JR.: Gary Gaugler, Jr. G-A-R-Y G-A-U-G-L-E-R, junior. (Laughs)

LB: All right. And, could you please share your birth dates.

SL: March 27, 1964.

GG: July 8, 1983.

LB: All righty. So, and I wanted -- we have to do this just for the location stuff -- what town are you in? And you're in Allentown. Is that correct? Good. So, this is the consent part. Do you consent to this interview today?

SL: Yes.

GG: Yes.

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

SL: Yes.

GG: Yes.

LB: Do you consent to the LGBT archive using your interview for educational purposes in other formats, [00:03:00] including films, articles, websites, presentations, and other formats we may not even know about today?

SL: Yes.

GG: Yes.

LB: Do you understand that you'll have thirty days after the electronic delivery of the transcript to review your interview, identify any parts you'd like to delete, and withdraw your interview from the project if you so choose?

SL: Yes.

GG: Yes.

LB: Okay. So, I need to ask you what your zip code is there?

SL: 18103.

LB: Okay. And what are your ages, it says on this sheet? Sort of redundant.

GG: Yes. Thirty-seven.

LB: I didn't get yours, Steve.

GG: I'm sorry. Fifty-six.

LB: Okay. Let's see. How do you identify within the LGBTQ community? Transgender, gay, lesbian, bi, pansexual, blah blah blah.

SL: Gay.

GG: Gay.

LB: Okay. And Cis-gen?

SL: Yes. No. Yes. Yes.

LB: And I can say that because I know you, so it's not like I'm making a presumption.

SL: Right.

LB: So, [00:04:00] you know, I sent you these questions already, and there are things to consider. If you don't want to talk about these things, I'm perfectly fine with that. You talk about whatever you want. But let me just ask you right up front, because we're asking everybody, who's in your house with you? I mean, so you look -- you guys both live there, but what else? Is there anybody else there?

SL: We have two cats. We have Tigger and we have Nugget. Yes.

LB: There you go. So that's good, because some people are all by themselves and it's very hard. So, have you both been working? And tell me about what you each do, and how you've been working during the pandemic and that kind of stuff.

SL: Okay. So I'm a social worker for a hospice agency. And I typically go out and do emotional support for patients, their families. That could be visits, phone calls, and work with the rest of our team, which includes nurses, aides, chaplain, [00:05:00] to provide the best care for people at end of life.

LB: Would you say that you are part of Lehigh Valley Health Network? What's your organization?

SL: No. Bayada.

LB: Okay. Gary, you want to...

GG: I work in trade compliance. And that's dealing with imports and exports of our company's material. I work in a manufacturing facility in the Lehigh Valley.

LB: So how's it been for work? Have you both been going regularly to work? Why don't you start out, since you started on the first part?

SL: Yeah, sure. So when this first hit, I wasn't happy with the response from some people in my company, which tended to make me panic a little bit. And so, I started to do as much as I could do from home, [00:06:00] which led to me being moved to per diem, and then led to me being furloughed for two months. And then was hired back part-time a month ago. And now I am going to be leaving that position. Friday will be my last day.

LB: And are you done there and you're looking for something new? Or...

SL: Yeah. I'm looking for something new. I am -- I think of the questions later, but just for a natural flow, I am, you know, just very concerned about going in to visit COVID positive people in COVID positive facilities or homes. As a social worker, I don't feel like I have the training, like a doctor or a nurse might, for this kind of epidemic. I'm just not really comfortable doing that.

LB: [00:07:00] Yeah. I can see that. What about your work situation, Gary?

GG: We were all sent to work from home in late March. And my work has been very, very aggressive in their summoning us back. We were told in mid-to-late-May, and Pennsylvania was at its peak, that we should come back optionally. But June 1<sup>st</sup>, they wanted fifty percent back. July 1<sup>st</sup> was one hundred percent back. And we were told, when we all were back on July 1<sup>st</sup>, that they would not be sending us home again, no matter how bad it got, because they were so disappointed that when they told us we could optionally come back, that nobody did. And since [00:08:00] then, we've had a couple of people leave because they've gotten COVID. And the governor has released a statement that -- an order -- that if you are able to telework, you must do so. And the

company has refused to acknowledge that, and many people have reported them to the Pennsylvania Department of Health. And I've not heard anything. I'm sure they're quite swamped with what, you know, the reportings that they get on different businesses, because I doubt my company is the only one that feels they're above the law. So my workplace has become very hostile. Somebody brought in a doctor's note yesterday that said they should be able to work from home, they're high risk. It was immediately handed back to them, and they were told, [00:09:00] "We can't allow you to, because anybody that's at high risk will want to work from home, then." And she said, "Well, we're all supposed to be working from home right now." And the response was, "Well, we're essential." But my understanding of the governor's and Dr. Levine's press conference, now two weeks ago, was it was not essential or non-essential. If you could telework, you were not to go to work.

LB: I know hospital workers working from home that are absolutely essential, but they're working from home. I mean, I guess the definition of "essential" is that you have to be on-site, but if you can work from home, you're not essential for that.

GG: Yeah. Right.

SL: And Gary's business is kind of twisting the definition, or stretching the definition of "essential."

GG: Yeah. When this whole thing started, my company is the world's largest [00:10:00] global manufacturer of pipe fittings. And one of things that they also produce is sprinkler heads for fire protection in hospitals and hotels, anywhere where you see fire sprinklers. And so they wrote to the governor and said, "We are essential. We create life-saving devices," and that was all true. The Forks facility -- oops! Our facility in the Lehigh Valley has never, ever manufactured a sprinkler head. They're all manufactured in Leland, North Carolina. Oops. So, yeah, it's -- they've kind of been twisting everything from the beginning to make this work out in their favor, and creating this series of --

LB: I mean, is there a circumstance where, if you're working -- I mean, I have to say that we've been working from home, and I've done more work than I've ever done. [00:11:00] I don't waste my time walking to work, you know. And, like, when you're at work, you feel like, "Well, I'm at work," whether you get work done or not.

SL: Yeah.

GG: Yeah.



SL: Well Gary -- Gary said that after he was working at home for a few weeks, his supervisor came back, or his director came back and said, "You know, we're tracking productivity, and productivity is higher than it's been for a long time with all of you guys working from home." But then, it seemed like -- I'll let you speak for yourself after I say this to lead into that -- is that you were saying that it seemed like they were just scared that once the pandemic was over, that people were going to want to continue to work from home. And so it seemed like that sent a panic through upper management, and then a rush to get people back into the office.

LB: It's such a weird thing, because what this -- what we're all seeming to learn throughout this, from this pandemic, is that the way we all work [00:12:00] can really be different. It doesn't need to be this way at all. You know?

GG: I agree. And you know, my -- the method to my madness when this whole thing first started, because my company is so old fashioned, and very truly old fashioned, not just with working from home options. But I knew that this was a rarity, and so my thought was, I'm going to, while I am home, I'm going to, you know, really overachieve so that -- I don't want them to think that we're slacking. And so I really wanted to do more than I usually do. Because, as you

said, you go into work, and you're like, "Oh, what say (inaudible) say today? What time did (inaudible) say today?" You know, and you're in your own TMZ before you know it. It's just this spiraling, you know, whatever. So I really wanted to make a point that it was something that could be done, and I was not taking advantage of the [00:13:00] situation. I don't -- I can't speak for all 800 employees in, you know, office space that they did that, but I think it works for some people. Doesn't work for others. And I don't know why, after three months, they felt -- there should be a way to measure. If you're not -- if you're less productive, you have to come back and be watched. If not --

LB: I wonder if they get, like, a huge write-off or something for having a big building. You know, because it's hard to justify having a huge building if you only have 35 --

SL: So ,well, also, not just that. Our CEO is friends with Pat Toomey, and they golf together regularly. And I've been informed that he is going to ask for the maximum amount of money back in whatever it is, emergency [00:14:00] relief or whatever, because we are so essential that we're the only company in the Lehigh Valley that has 100 percent staff back daily.

LB: Oh I see. So you won't be able to say that if everybody's home. Okay, there's a -- that's an interesting point of view.

SL: It's always -- It's always been -- as a gay man, it's always been very interesting to work. I've worked at this company for just under 14 years, and it's always been very interesting, not just towards gay people, but towards Black people, towards Hispanic people, towards women, even, I mean, it's very cripplingly old fashioned. And so this is really the worst it's ever been.

LB: Really makes you aware of it, it really shows.

SL: [00:15:00] You know, you go into work for a business or a company knowing that even if they say, you know, employees are number one, you know the company's number one. And you understand that. You're working for the company. You want the company to do well as much as you want yourself to do well. But somewhere along the line, I feel like, at least for me, I feel like -- I said from the beginning of the pandemic, and I know I'm just talking and talking, but --

LB: That's okay, except for Steve.

SL: I feel like, not just with companies, but with people, you're really seeing people for what they really are. And it's brought out a lot of good in people and a lot of

caring in people. But it's also brought out a terrible, really awful side of people and businesses, and presidents.

LB: (laughs) You know, you see this during war, too. Where people, I mean, in World War II, [00:16:00] I think, in particular, where people were rationing because they needed rubber for the --

SL: Yeah. Sure.

LB: And then people were stockpiling and hoarding it, and they were black market, and they were, you know, jacking up prices, and companies were profiteering and stuff. And then there were -- most people, frankly, this huge number of American, or people in the country who were just doing everything they could. You know, raising victory gardens and collecting rubber, and not -- and rendering fat, and doing all sorts of things like that, that every minute of every day, because they were thinking about people who were fighting and what they were fighting for. And people who were victims of war and oppression in Europe at the time. And, you know, it is -- I think this does show, in this kind of thing, how much are you willing to sacrifice? Well, nothing at all. Won't sacrifice anything, you know.

[00:17:00] I want to be totally like nothing has happened, even though everything has happened. And then other people who will say -- so, as I said, this is my twenty-ninth, of

twenty-nine people I've interviewed -- I did the first ten were HIV/AIDS folks that lived through the epidemic. Was a different group of people, but I also talked to them all about COVID, too. Everyone has said the same thing, all the people that I've interviewed have said the same thing, that what you're saying -- is that people -- a frustration, and I probably would ask you about this, too. But the frustration of people just acting like -- not pulling together at a time when we really need each other, you know. So are you communicating with other pals on the phone? Or are they coming over to swim? Or are they, you know, what's the deal?

GG: (laughs)

SL: When we -- I'm going to let Gary tell [00:18:00] his story. He tells it very well. When he tells the story that you tell, when you first brought your mom into this home.

GG: About having people over to swim?

SL: No. Just that he brought his monitors home, and he said he was telling people to work, or maybe his mom on the way home on a phone call, "Oh, you know..." Because there's such an age difference, and we have a lot in common, but there's a lot of things we don't have in common, especially maybe hobbies and downtime and movies, you know, video

games, stuff like that. So he goes, "Well, wait and see what the hell this is going --"

GG: I was very excited to ditch my forty minute each way commute. But, yeah, as I drove home with all my work stuff, I thought to myself, "Oh, my God, I don't know what working with him at home, living with him, like, all full time is going to be like." [00:19:00] And we kind of got around her question. But I'm going to finish. Okay. For us, I found, I think he's found (laughs) I don't know. The whole time that we were home, at least before I went back to work, we got along maybe better than we ever did. And we got along very -- I mean, we get along very well. I think we're a pretty solid, functional couple to begin with. But, yeah, we really -- I think we've taken this whole pandemic so seriously, -- and really don't go out. We don't socialize. We don't have people here to socialize -- that we rely on each other. And I think that, kind of knowing that kept us from the usual stuck inside for a snow weekend or whatever, kept us from reverting to, "Oh my God, it's you again."

SL: Yeah. We made -- So we talked with other medical [00:20:00] professionals in the beginning of this, when I was per diem, and then when I was furloughed for two months, and Gary was already working from home. And so we had a good two months, a little bit more, together at home. The room

that we're sitting in right now is kind of our big great room that they added on to the house between the main house and then going out to the back yard. So Gary had this room all to himself during the work hours during the day. I would work in the living room inside the main house. And I think we both, after talking with those medical professionals, came to the same conclusion, that we only wanted to go out if it was absolutely necessary. And then that was also what was being told to us by our governor and by Secretary of Health Levine. And so that's what we were trying to adhere to. And I would make a list and go to the grocery store and spend 500 dollars, [00:21:00] and that would last us for a month. And I didn't want to go back there again until we absolutely needed to go back. We didn't visit any friends. We started a Zoom happy hour on Friday afternoons, late Friday afternoon. Then we started Zooming with, or Facetiming, whatever, with his family as well. And they all live local, but we didn't have any of them over. They didn't have us over. Then we started Zooming with my family in Maine. Then we started Zooming with friends in Florida, with friends in Tennessee. And we kept that up, especially the local guys that are mostly on our kickball team, you know, on the Friday nights. So we

did that, and it seemed like some of them kind of got tired of it after a few weeks.

GG: When we went to yellow and green, everybody -- we were the only ones that were still serious about it. (laughs)

SL: Yeah. And so, that was okay. I mean, you know, they can do what they want to do. [00:21:00] And then we just started doing it more with my family on Friday nights. And then what we did do when we opened the pool, is that we had, we'd been having Gary's parents over. And they sit a good ten feet from us at another table. We have our own table. They'd bring their own food, they'd bring their own alcohol. They have -- So this back room has three doors. They have their own door to go immediately into the basement to change and/or use the bathroom. And when they leave, we just wipe everything down, we keep everything closed. And that's what we've been doing for the last few weeks, when it's been, you know, nice enough on a Saturday, and they'll come over for a few hours. And that's how we -- that's really our only live socialization.

LB: Yeah. Wow. Well, I can't --

SL: Again, we're going to the grocery store. I [00:23:00] don't think we've done -- we go for a three-and-a-half-mile walk. I still do that every day, even since Gary's gone back to work. And we were doing that pretty religiously every day



if it wasn't raining or whatever. And a little bit of -- we don't have a home gym, so a little bit of a workout that I learned some stuff from my sister, who teaches physical fitness training online, so (inaudible). And I've been working on the magazine for two issues. Yeah.

LB: Yeah. It's pretty intense.

SL: Oh, and we have a vegetable garden that's much healthier and pretty soon, more than the one we had last year. We planted more flowers.

LB: Everybody's garden is way better than it's ever been.

SL: Right! Yeah. And we've done some home projects. I painted the bedroom. And, you know, things that we didn't -- [00:24:00] that we were putting off, procrastinating since we moved in.

LB: Yeah. Yeah. It's interesting that world that biggest divided that stays it divided between people who really did a lot of projects and found out that they just weren't going to do any projects, even though -- Melinda Kohn said to me, "You know, I had always thought that -- I'd always planned that when I had time, I would work on these big projects because I was so into them. But apparently, I'm not." (laughter) Couldn't do it. And I talked to two other people who said stuff like, "I said I was going to do stuff and I didn't." I just say that I've been maniacal about

doing stuff. So, like, I took all the nuts and bolts and stuff in the basement and divided them. And there's like hundreds of jars with little labels and stuff. That's really anal retentive. I was building things and -- crazy.

SL: You may get a cat's ass in a minute. This happened the other night.

LB: Yeah, get this. Hi, buddy.

SL: Hello. That's Tigger.

LB: Tigger. Yeah, [00:25:00] I could tell. We have a lot of stray cats in our yard. And apparently, there's a lot more stray cats in the world in the 'burbs and stuff, Tigger, because -- Tigger (inaudible) are cats. Because restaurants are selling food to people that they take it away, and throwing the food away in their garbage cans behind the restaurants, restaurants where cats hang out. And so it really changed the patterns of most kinds of animals. They're seeking out houses and stuff to hang around (inaudible). It's scary.

SL: I think we also found out, you know, like, that we are taking -- we're at one end of the spectrum.

GG: We are -- We're extreme.

SL: We're pretty extreme, we're finding out compared to other people, friends, relatives. Actually, our relatives are pretty good, but our friends, you know, are going on

[00:26:00] vacations, Outer Banks, stuff like that. Posting pictures, no masks, no social distancing.

GG: No masks, cheek-to-cheek.

SL: And we're like, so then -- we don't want to invite them over to the pool. We don't want to really -- we haven't even gone out. We haven't done any kind of carryout, which we feel bad about because we want to support places. But I don't know that I'd be able to enjoy it. We found that we both like to cook more than we thought we did. We have build your own pizza night on Friday nights for the last eighteen weeks.

GG: Nothing Trish level yet. (laughs)

SL: No, but we have done crab meat pizza. We've done (inaudible) loaf pizza. We've done a bunch of things that are fun.

LB: That's wonderful.

SL: Made some fun desserts. Gary's been making vegetable scrambled eggs almost every Sunday. We didn't get tired of those for a long time. The last two weeks we didn't do them, but sixteen or seventeen weeks, so....

LB: What do you have in the garden?

SL: So, you want to answer that? I've been talking for a while.

GG: [00:27:00] Tomatoes, cucumbers, zucchini, radish, beets.

SL: Pumpkin.

GG: Pumpkins. And flowers. That's it.

LB: Wow. Great.

SL: Oh, and then we had mint, and we inherited from the previous owners a huge raspberry bush, which just keeps tipping over a little bit more and little bit more each year. So that was great. We got about, I would say, eight or ten cups of those. And then, you know, the neighbors on either side, so the young couple on this side with a two-year-old. And then we have an older couple that's mostly retired on this side. And, you know, we've noticed that they're doing things totally differently, too. They'll have family over, not really social distancing and stuff like that. And again, people would probably look at Gary's parents coming over. We're not wearing masks, but I mean --

GG: [00:28:00] They're far away.

SL: They sit far away from us.

LB: I have to say that of all the people I've interviewed -- I've interviewed twenty-nine people -- they have been extraordinarily -- they'll all like you. And Trish and I are even -- we don't even go to the store. We don't go to the grocery store.

SL: Do you order? So you're ordering out? You're ordering delivery?

LB: We were. And then we have a young person in our life who was in -- came back from college and had COVID-19, and it was serious, but she has totally recovered. And so she has a lot of antibodies. They tested her through the Lehigh Valley Health Network. So she shops for us, and we don't even have to feel guilty about the fact that she might get this, because she is less likely to get it. She's got the highest level defense that one could have, as long as that lasts. She's going back to college in a couple of weeks, and then we'll have to go back to either ordering stuff or doing what we're doing. And, you know, we wanted to get -- like Trish loves to get chicken from Mr. Bill's, [00:29:00] but Mr. Bill's will not order -- like, we can't pay them in advance and go pick up stuff. They won't do drop off, and we've been their customer for thirty years, thirty-three years. And they won't even, like, bring the stuff -- they have a door right behind their booth. Just call them, say we want eight chicken breasts, here's the money over the phone, and we'll just come and get it. Why would they not do that? I mean, you know, it's very upsetting, because that, not being able to shop, is just driving Trish crazy, because she does everything based on, you know, bargains. And she said, like, "I could be getting a flat of strawberries at the farmers' market and canning, you know,

one hundred jars of strawberry jelly. And you could get it for ten dollars. You can't get that anyplace else. I could be getting it, but I'd have to be there, and I'd have...." She did that every year for -- she just canned thirteen jars of [00:30:00] grape jelly from the grapes in the backyard.

SL: Wow. Cool.

LB: But, so anyway, what's your biggest concern in the pandemic, you know, for your personal biggest concern? And then also, just sort of for the LGBTQ community, if you could (inaudible). So what do you think about that, guys?

SL: My biggest concern -- well, so I would say my biggest concern personally would be for our families, obviously. And then also for myself, because I have smoked for years. I've had different ailments. I usually get bronchitis once or twice a year. I mean, all these other things. And when I was doing hospice, you know, you would find that everybody that you go visit is also treating it differently. And that can depend on something as stupid as politics, you know. I got into a conversation with a woman who, said, "Oh, and so I'll be wearing a mask. [00:31:00] Will you be able to wear a mask when I visit?" and she said, "Yeah, well, you know, -- wearing masks. And she --"

LB: I've lost the sound for you.

SL: Oh, I'm sorry. What did I do?

LB: What happened?

SL: Hello.

LB: There you go. That's good.

SL: So she just said that she felt that it was all overblown, and it really wasn't, you know, "Don't you think we're making too big of a thing out of this?" and I said, "Well, you know, I have to go and visit other patients after I visit you. I also have to come home. And so, I'm asking if you can wear a mask, you know, it would be appreciated." And so she did. To her credit, she did. But, you know, a lot of what she was saying sounds like what we're hearing, you know, out of our leaders, some of our leaders. So it just is concerning. You now, when we are taking this very seriously, and then we go [00:32:00] out to the grocery store or whatever, and you realize, well, jeez, not everyone's taking this seriously. And yet, could we slack off a little bit? I guess. But I don't know why we would, really.

GG: It's frustrating because we did this thinking it would be gone, like the other countries, in a few months. And so, to see it continue on when we've been doing what we were told to do from the beginning is frustrating.

LB: Right. I mean, in England, where they shut down every single household, you could not leave your house for three months. And it's gone. They have, you know -- They're shooting television shows with audiences full of people, and they're safe because they've all been tested and they all know that there's no danger and stuff, because they -- you know, and they, for 90 days, they stayed inside. Not one single person went outside in the entire country under penalty of law. And then it's okay. [00:33:00] And then they're now -- we're (inaudible) still going to be a little careful and stuff like that. But for the most part, they've tested enough to really know, it's not there anymore.

SL: Right. Right.

LB: You know, that's the other thing, too, is that we haven't had that adequate testing, and that could have been something that could have really controlled this all along, too.

GG: But, Liz, Liz hear me out on this. The more you test, the more cases you'll find.

LB: I know.

GG: (laughs)

LB: But for people in the future that are watching this video years from now (laughter)...

GG: Sorry. I should have --



LB: The leader of our country said that the problem with -- that we all don't hold in high regard -- said that if you test people, there will be -- they will find more cases and the numbers will go up of the people who have had it. So then he didn't want people to be tested.

SL: Well, and if for people that are watching this in the future, if you don't get a pregnancy test, you're not pregnant.

LB: (laughs) Yeah, that's right.

SL: I mean, the logic follows.

GG: [00:34:00] And so I'm going to -- so, to your question, I would echo exactly what Steve said about concerns for obviously myself, my family. As a smoker as well, as a family of half and half smokers, and just some old people. (Laughs) But for the LGBT community, you know, I want to say I don't know if it's the administration, I don't know if it was because, God forbid, we asked people to stay inside for two months. I don't know if I'm just blind to what I thought we were as a country, but, you know, we've seen this whole outbreak of racist nonsense with Black people and lynchings and nooses hanging from trees and, you know, white lives matter, all lives matter. [00:35:00] And I look at Steve, and I don't want to sound ignorant, I really don't, and if I am, then I'm sorry. I always think

we're good. Like, we're good, all of us, because I guess I put myself in a bubble where I don't associate with, or people like that don't associate with me, these people that feel this way. And our administration has felt this need to tell these people that I didn't really think were around anymore, to speak their minds and speak out. And, you know, as somebody that's studied history in college to be, you know -- at one point I wanted to be a history teacher. I know that the Blacks are cursed, and it's just going to spiral on from there. It's going to be the Jews. [00:36:00] It's going to be the gays. It's going to -- it's certainly, it's trans. Trans has never gone out of style for being prejudiced against. So I just worry that we're the next in these peoples' freedom of speech to bash and go after their rights.

SL: Liz, I think I lost your audio.

GG: It's hers, I think.

SL: Okay.

LB: I turned it off because I had a call.

SL: There you go.

LB: So you've talked about communicating with people around, and in some ways, I feel like I'm communicating a little more with people far away than I used to. [00:37:00] So have you been doing any other sort of queer activities? You

told me you were working on the magazine. Talk about the magazine, Steve, because I think that's an important thing.

SL: So, yeah. The first issue that we worked on, so that would have been the summer issue, when the pandemic started, I couldn't bring myself to ask anyone if they had money to advertise in that issue. So that was an online only issue. We still produced it. It was still thirty-ish pages. My designer still worked on it. We still paid him. We posted it on the website. It's a beautiful looking issue. I really wish that we could have printed that. It came out -- we had some great artists and photography, photography work in there, and great interviews. And all the contributors, including you, always come up with interesting, informative, entertaining content. And so that issue is online only for now. And then I started [00:38:00] working on the fall issue. And I thought, well, you know, people started doing curbside and carryout and all this other stuff. And I thought, all right, I'm at least going to put it out there, in case people do want to advertise. And, surprisingly, we got quite a few advertisers that came back, admittedly, probably about a third of what we usually get, but I was surprised that anyone came back. And so we talked with the printer about what paper options we had. You know, we thought maybe we had to change out paper to

save a little bit of money because paper costs have been going up over the five years that we've been doing the magazine. And I think I had one ad rate increase in those five years, and we had paper increases, gosh, probably every, I don't know, four or five months. So I only passed that on once. And then she sent me some samples. I looked at some of the samples after wiping them all off with Clorox wipes once they arrived in my mailbox, [00:39:00] because that's what a freak I am. And so I looked at those. And, anyway, so there was one, a non-glossy option that I thought was actually pretty good. So we talked about that. We talked about the money that that was going to cost. And so we're going to print 2,000 copies of that. And, because of that, and because of a couple of late advertisers, who were actually going to add some pages from the -- actually we were going to add some pages anyway, because we're doing coming out stories for the first time, and we have over twenty people that volunteered to tell their coming out stories. Then we had the Black Lives Matter movement, so we have a couple of interviews. And then we have a centerfold with photos from the Black Lives movement protests from Philly and Lehigh Valley. And then we had some transgender-- Corinne Goodman's writing something about [00:40:00] trans black lives mattering, and deaths, and

it's so far this year. And so then I thought, well, you know, there's some stuff in the summer issues. Maybe we can include that. So we added a few more pages. And we're going to include some of the stuff from the summer issue that was, you know, some of those great photos and artwork and stuff like that.

LB: Yeah. Good.

SL: So we're going to still have the glossy covers, and then the interior will be a non-gloss paper. And it's seventy-four pages plus covers instead of our regular forty-eight pages.

LB: Do I need to do an article, or did I do one already?

SL: You already did one. You did it about the -- You did it about the Supreme Court --

LB: Yeah. The Bostock kids, yeah. Good, okay. That was smart of me. (laughs)

SL: No, you have to do it, and our deadline is the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August. (laughter)

LB: I would do it. You know, you and I --

SL: I know, but no, no, no. You're good.

LB: You know, they're interviewing me for the archive, [00:41:00] for the oral history now. And Mary Foltz is doing it, and I said, "Mary, you know, I can't tell this story in one gig." So it's actually been like, I think,

five sessions. And one of them, I was talking about how when we did the Valley Gay Press Press, how some of us can just, like Trish, would research her article for days and days and days. And they were so meticulous with research. And I said, "Yes, Steve and I would spend about one day." I'm like, "Steve, you forgot to do your article." He said, "I'll get it to you in a few minutes." (laughs)

SL: Every once in a while it would work.

LB: And I said, "Trish and I don't know anything about pop culture anymore because that's the only way we ever knew anything was, oh, this was that person Steve was talking about."

SL: Yep. I'm not going to belabor the point, but Gary's even thought about maybe writing a fourth book in his series, and so -- which I would love to see. And he actually had -- someone wrote to him the other day about, "Is there another book coming out?" So that was kind of cool. And, anyway, he doesn't like to talk about it, so we won't.

GG: You probably heard me go, oh my God, under my breath at him. So you can edit that out. (laughter)

LB: I think that it's really important for people to know about creative work that people are doing. I think that's a good thing to do. And I was just thinking, maybe I should write another book. I've got a few. I'm working like a maniac for

the center, but I'm also doing a lot of stuff to the house, and I'm doing a lot of art because that's going to be a highlight through the Pride Festival. We're going to have this really interesting thing at the Pride Festival where, because it's virtual, you know, it's going to be on television and everything like that. But there's also a way to have booths where we're using a platform where it looks like you're walking into a gallery, and then each (inaudible) in the gallery, you can maneuver through the gallery. Each painting is like the booth. [00:43:00] And then you go to that booth, and all their information is there, and then you can click through to their website. So it's actually got a booth component to the festival. And so, I was the first one. I said, "Well, give me a booth and I'll do art, and then maybe we can, you know, I'll do that." So then I said, "Trish, now I've got to do a whole bunch of paintings so I could do this gig." You know, because we don't --

SL: Right.

LB: And I have been, because I have to make this worthwhile. I'm too old to just blow off two or three years, you know. I don't have that much extra time.

SL: Right

LB: It's true for older people. So have you known anybody that's been sick? Or more than sick?

SL: No. Right.

GG: Well, a couple of people. For me, people on Facebook that, you know, you know how Facebook works. It's not [00:44:00] direct friends necessarily. It's -- a couple of people on Facebook that we know have had it. But nobody close to me.

SL: No.

LB: Did you say there were people at work that had it?

GG: Yeah. Again, nobody close to me.

LB: Uh-huh. Yeah. I guess that's one of the problems is that, right now, anyway, in the pandemic, there are lots of people who don't know anybody that's had it. We know some people, and I'll tell you about that later.

GG: I just want a quick add onto the that and just say, he's very nice. We had somebody over to work on the pool a couple of weeks ago, and he said to me -- I came to the door wearing a mask -- and he said, "Oh, are we doing that?" and he's about seventy years old. And I said, "Yep. We're doing that." And he goes, "Well, you know, Hillary just concocted this whole thing so the Democrats would win." [00:45:00] And I said, you know, he's here to do a job. I'm like, "Oh, okay." (Laughs) I'm not about --



LB: How do you do that? I mean, she's not even running for office.

GG: I know. I'm just -- I'm just so -- I've come to the point in this term that I can't -- you can't convince anyone anymore. There's no logic for some people. And so I just said, "Okay." And I left it at that. And he went on this tirade about how, and he goes, "Do you know anyone personally that's gotten this?" And I said, "Not personally." I said, "But I know -- I know people that are close to me in their lives that have someone in their family or a close friend that have had it." And he's like, "Exactly. You don't know anyone, though. Nobody actually knows anyone that has it." I'm like, "Okay." [00:46:00] (Laughs) I just -- I'm so young to be over it, but I'm not arguing with the nonsense anymore. (Laughs) I'm just not. You do your thing, I'll do mine. But if you're on my property, please wear a mask.

LB: (laughs) I think that's reasonable to say. Yeah. So that's probably a big frustration. And that's one of the things we have on here, frustrations, fears, and challenges. And I think we already talked about some of those things, but. Is there anything else?

SL: I think the frustration is, people, you know, that we're taking it at a different level than other people. Because --

GG: We know we're taking it more seriously than most. We know that.

SL: But it's still frustrating. Because, again, if it was like you said about England, and we all took it as seriously as each other, and we all shut down, we'd be over it in three months.

GG: We made it -- when they announced it, everybody else saw it as this prison sentence. And we [00:47:00] immediately took the high road and said, "This'll be cute. This'll be fun. We'll buy ingredients, we'll do all this cooking. We'll have our own little, like --" and he's way more social than I am. And I was like, I wanted to make sure that he was engaged, so we were doing, like, game night things, and different movie theme nights, and we're Zooming with all these different people. And I never felt like it was that big of an ask to not go out and spread germs for a couple of months. Honestly. (Laughs)

LB: And had we all -- had every American, so to speak -- done that, done the right thing, we'd be done. We'd be done. We'd be back at work. We'd be back kicking the economy and stuff like that. But it's a shame. So, would you say that

your mental health has been pretty good during all this fun? You guys seem like you're in pretty good shape.

[00:48:00]

SL: I think when we talk about it with someone like you, I think we're in pretty good shape. I think, you know, there's anxiety when Gary comes home from work because they're still -- they're actually being way more aggressive with getting people back to work, telling people if they leave, they're going to consider that their resignation if they're concerned about safety and all this other stuff. So I think in some ways, it's gotten a little worse anxiety-wise for us. And to the point that I, you know, quit my job. It's not (overlapping dialogue; inaudible). I'm not really like an -- I'm not like really fighting with the people that are my supervisor or directors. We've known each other for years. But we've had conversations, and they're really just toeing the line from above them. Just like Gary's supervisor that's toeing the line. Because they're both [00:49:00] global companies. I think Gary's is probably a much larger global company than mine. But Bayada has offices around the world, and you know, there's somebody else that's up here that's telling everyone else what to do. And I feel like if you -- you know, everyone has to make their own decisions that are what they feel are

best for them. So I think there was, when I was furloughed, I felt great. I didn't really feel much anxiety, except when I had to go grocery shopping. And when I went back to work for this past month, it was high anxiety a lot, because I didn't know if I was going to get called to go in to see a COVID patient in a COVID facility, when different people telling me what different PPE to wear. And then, again, the same thing with Gary's work. Some people are wearing masks, some people are not. They're not enforcing it because they are looking at it the other way. You know, people are complaining, "It's against my [00:50:00] freedom. I don't have to wear a mask. I shouldn't have to wear a mask. You can't force me." Versus looking at it from the other perspective that everyone should be wearing a mask so that we're all safe. And, you know, they don't look at it that way.

LB: You know, as my friend, Laura Battered said, "You know, people are forced to wear things all the time." We wear clothes.

SL: Right. Exactly.

LB: We're forced to wear clothes. I was talking to Steve Ziminsky, he's one of the people I interviewed, and he said that they had some really interesting insights about the way Allentown schools are, and how they really can't open.

And one of the things is they're not air conditioned. A lot of them are not air conditioned. And September, they could be so hot, what they do is, they take all the kids, and they bring them down into air conditioned, like, auditoriums, and just cram them all into the auditorium. So they won't be able to do that. So what are they going to do? Leave these kids up in that one hundred-degree [00:51:00] temperature? They're all going to pass out. So they can't do that. So that's -- They haven't put enough money into this school system to be able to accommodate this kind of circumstance. But he was also talking about his roommate, Liam, and I don't know if you ever knew that guy that lived in Steve's house, and he had a pretty serious heart condition, and now he's in a nursing home. And it's not Country Meadows, it's one that's in -- just over the one in Allentown. It's a pretty big nursing home. And I can't remember the name of it. But it's one of the big ones we have right here in the Lehigh Valley. And he has serious, serious heart condition. And he got COVID. A hundred patients in that place had it.

SL: Lehigh Center.

LB: Was it?

SL: Was it Lehigh Center? I mean, that's what it sounds like.

LB: It was a nursing home that had one of those names that we recognize that's like Country Meadows.

SL: Oh, like Cedarbrook?

LB: Yeah. It was Cedarbrook. Cedarbrook. And Cedarbrook, [00:52:00] they had 100 cases. They had a whole floor where they moved everybody onto that floor. And, you know, they're not telling people who's dying, because they don't want to tell, "By the way, there's six people down the hall that just kicked off." But you know, Steve was in touch with him, and it's hard to be in touch with him, because they don't have enough platforms and stuff for people. He said, you know, "I haven't seen him. I haven't seen any of these people, but it's -- all these people had it." So it was very, very serious. And it's not like it's not happening. They had hundreds and hundreds of cases in Allentown. It's very serious. But, so you're already talking a little bit about Black Lives Matter. Do you want to say anything else about that? Or anything else about -- well, you've already talked about that. I mean, we can't really talk about this pandemic without talking about Black Lives Matter, and without politics.

GG: [00:53:00] I just think it's very disappointing that we're even still having the conversation.

LB: Yeah.

GG: Really, all I have to say about it, I guess I live in a delusional world where all of this does not matter anymore because people are smarter than this. But....

SL: Well, and I also think it just complicated, you know, having COVID happening while Black Lives Matter protests were happening. You know, it really complicated things because, again, I didn't feel comfortable going out and taking part in marches and stuff like that. I mean, we live vicariously through Facebook and what we were seeing on the news, and friends of our that actually did go out, that either have young African American -- you know, adolescent African American children that wanted to go out and be part of this, or witness this, or be part of history. And so [00:54:00] yeah. I mean, there's -- it's all just really hateful from -- I don't know. I really feel like it's from -- it's always been around, but I also feel like those flames get fanned by our administration that's in charge of the country. And so, I feel like that's the same with trans lives. I know that trans people were being killed before this administration, but it seems like it's increased.

GG: It's emboldened people.

SL: Yeah.

LB: It has.

SL: And not in a good way.

LB: No. No. It's really true. Well, what gives you hope now, besides your kitties? Each other?

GG: Kamala Harris as V.P.

LB: Okay. That sounds like a good deal.

GG: Well, so yeah, I do think maybe Joe Biden gives us hope. I hope that the country -- [00:55:00] I hope that there's enough people that maybe couldn't vote for Hillary because it didn't -- that didn't excite them, that are disappointed enough to vote for Biden. I mean, I really think that realistically, that's what we're looking at.

LB: I saw a meme about Biden, and he had a picture of him, and he said, "Well, let me read you my platform." And then the bottom of the meme said, "You had me at let me read."

GG: Right.

SL: (laughs) Well, Gary has said this since day one after Trump won.

GG: I mean, I'll vote for the garbage can if the garbage can gets the nomination. Like I'll vote for anything. I mean, I -- he was my last pick. But he still towers about what's there, so...

SL: Biden.

GG: Biden.



LB: And we really hope, [00:56:00] too, that -- you, person who is in the future watching this -- we're really hoping that Biden is smart enough --

GG: He worked out. (laughs)

LB: Well, I mean, a whole cadre of people in his cabinet, and as his vice president and stuff, because we've seen really terrific people that we could build an enormous super administration out of. If it -- It doesn't just have to be one guy. And so, you know, there's the Secretary of Health, and the Secretary of State, and the Secretary of Education, and we know the terrible people that are in there now. They could be great. What if they were great? You know. So, that, you know, we've got all that opportunity. And if you start to think about it, it's a dream team. So that, I think, would bring a lot of people out to vote. A lot of young people out to vote.

SL: I hope so.

LB: Very, very important. That's what everybody says. Have to say that none of us are very, very, very, very confident. None of us are.

SL: I was confident when I went [00:57:00] to bed that Tuesday evening....

LB: I know. I know.

GG: The cat threw up at about two in the morning, and Steve got up to clean up the cat vomit. And I reached over, grabbed my iPad, and I went, "Oh, my God." And he goes, "I'm half asleep. Don't tell me. Don't tell me anything."

SL: "I need to be able to go back to sleep."

GG: And there were still, at that point, there were still a couple of states -- I didn't do the math. I was half asleep myself. I don't know if we could have made it at that point or not. But it was not good. And...

LB: I know. I know. I haven't slept since that night.

SL: Right. Exactly.

GG: You're right.

SL: We had a --

LB: Well, actually, it was about six months before that when I started to begin to worry about it. So anyway.

GG: Well, and I hope somebody has written, like, not a big, long history book, but just like, [00:58:00] almost like a good *Chicken Soup for the Soul* kind of thing, but not. Where it just -- what he did each day. Because we keep looking at each other and going, "It's something every day." And we keep forgetting because your brain needs to make room for the new things. And so, there's just so -- every day he says or does something that makes us go, oh my, oh my God. (laughs) Very depressing.

SL: And that's what I think, you know, of the pandemic on top of three years of that. You were asking about, like, mental health and all that stuff, I think that that was just another kick in your balls, you know. And then Black Lives Matter. And trans people being murdered. And Jesus, God, you know. And I'm just glad we haven't seen the orange wasps or whatever the --

GG: (laughs) Killer hornets.

SL: The murder hornets. I don't know. And so, hopefully, we're not going to see those.

GG: [00:59:00] No, but every time I see one of those cicada killer wasps in the yard, one of those. I'm like, is it? Is it? (laughs)

LB: Oh, I saw one of those. We had that in our yard, too.

GG: They're terrifying looking.

LB: They're not bad, though, are they?

SL: They're not bad, but they look bad.

LB: They are huge and they have -- they're wearing that, like, orange jacket.

GG: And they're not afraid to break social distancing rules. They will get close to you, and it's like --

SL: But they're so dressed up. Like, what's that? (laughs)

LB: Fabulous. I took a picture of one because it was so fabulous. I -- yeah, but they aren't bad, because they get

the bugs that will eat all of our leaves. So I guess  
(inaudible). Well, I have had a wonderful time talking to  
you guys. I'm going to turn off the recorder, and then I  
want to say a couple of things to you offline.

GG: Sure.

SL: [01:00:00] Okay.

LB: Is there anything else you'd like to tell the future? And  
say, you know, here's what the story is about this now, and  
we hope you're doing this --

SL: I don't think so. Just, you know, say hello to your  
president, Rachel Levine, in the future. (laughs) Because  
she's doing a great job right now.

LB: From us. Yeah. One of the things Ollie Reilly just said  
was, "Yeah, this is what I want to say to the future. If we  
can work this hard during a pandemic, you better have fixed  
it."

SL: (laughs) Yeah.

LB: I thought that was a really good thing to say.

SL: Yup.

LB: I think that's really true. We're trying to manage all  
these civil rights and social concerns in the midst of a  
pandemic.

SL: Oy.

LB: It's very hard. And so, you know, you don't have to be in pandemic, you should be doing really well. Well, so I'm going to turn off the record thing. Thank you very much, guys.

GG: Thank you.

SL: Thank you very much. Thanks for including us.

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