

Roberta Meek

2020-07-15

LIZ BRADBURY: There we go. There we go.

ROBERTA MEEK: Okay.

LB: Hi. Okay. And I'm going to start the audio recording. And the recording is working. So I'm going to read you this -- oh, I have to turn off my phone -- I think I did that already. Yes. And I'm going to pin you.

RM: You're going to what?

LB: Well that's a Zoom thing that I didn't learn until the fifth video, where it pins on you so that no matter what I say, it doesn't flip back --

RM: Oh.

LB: -- to me.

RM: Right, right, right.

LB: Because I tend to go, "Uh huh." And in the first videos, every time I went, "Uh huh," the picture came back to me. And I'm like, how do you make that stop? So now I know. Okay. And, let's see, I did that -- turn off phone, turned on recording. Okay. Good. With this project, Bradbury-Sullivan LGBT Community Center and Trexler Library at Muhlenberg College will collaborate on forty years of public health experiences in the Lehigh Valley LGBT community, collecting and [00:01:00] curating local LGBT health experiences, from HIV/AIDS to COVID-19. My

name is Liz Bradbury, and I'm here with Roberta Meek to talk about her experiences in the Lehigh Valley LGBT community during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic, as part of the Lehigh Valley LGBT community archive. We are meeting on Zoom on July 15th, 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?

RM: Roberta Meek. Roberta is R-O-B-E-R-T-A, and Meek is 'M', like Mary, E-E-K, like Kenneth.

LB: Thank you. Will you please share your birth date?

RM: November 24th, 1956.

LB: And what town are you in? You're in Allentown. Is that correct? [00:02:00]

RM: I live in Allentown, Pennsylvania. Yeah.

LB: Okay. So this is the consent part -- do you consent to this interview today?

RM: I do, Liz Bradbury. (laughter)

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

RM: Sure I do.

LB: Okay. Do you consent to the LGBT archive using your interview for educational purposes in other formats, including

films, articles, websites, presentations, and possible other formats we don't even know about today?

RM: I do.

LB: Do you understand that you will have thirty days after the electronic delivery of the transcript to review your interview and identify any parts you'd like to delete and/or withdraw -- or withdraw the entire interview -- from the project?

RM: That's great.

LB: I hope you don't do that, but, you know. Okay. This is the identity part. So what is your zip code?

RM: 18104. [00:03:00]

LB: Now this says, "What is your age?" You just told what year you were born, but it says, "What is your age?"

RM: I'm sixty-three.

LB: Okay.

RM: I'm going to be sixty-four this year.

LB: Me too. (laughter) So this says, "How do you identify within the LGBT community?" So that can be any way that you identify, however you want to say.

RM: I identify as a woman, I identify as a lesbian woman.

LB: Okay. And one would say cisgender?

RM: Cisgender. Yes.

LB: Okay. So I sent you a list of things to think about. We certainly don't have to talk about all of those things. You could talk about --

RM: Oops, I didn't look that up.

LB: Doesn't matter. I will just mention them as we go along. So one of the first questions we ask everybody is, who's in the house with you? Are you by yourself -- I know that's not true. So who are you seeing regularly, and who's in the house with you?

RM: Who's in the house with me is my daughter -- a grown daughter [00:04:00] who shares the house with me. And who I see regularly is my son, daughter-in-law, and their four children.

LB: Okay.

RM: We've basically made it so that we're one household, even though we are living in two spaces.

LB: Yeah.

RM: In terms of true interaction, it's only us interacting, even though they see some other people -- like her family. But they see them from a distance -- they socially distance with them.

LB: Yeah. Okay.

RM: So that's the only people I see up close and in person.

LB: Yeah. So the reason we ask these questions is because people are really affected by how many people they're --

RM: Absolutely.

LB: -- closely related to. And so we've been asking people if their employment has been terminated -- or what are you doing now, in terms of that kind of stuff?

RM: Well I'm in a phased retirement, so I'm only working part-time. [00:05:00] But no. I haven't been terminated. I teach at Muhlenberg College, and actually I went online before they did, but we went online around the same time as everybody else -- mid-March -- and finished the semester that way. And I intend to teach online until, you know, until we have safety precautions for me and my family.

LB: Sure. So you're teaching part-time then?

RM: I'm only teaching part-time. I only teach two courses a year, and the way I've spread it out, it's one course per semester. And I've also done teaching online before, so it wasn't like a shock to my system, like it was to a lot of people who had never taught online --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- or, I should say, we went remote, because we were not doing online teaching, because we hadn't constructed our classes that way. But [00:06:00] I did not freak out over that opportunity.

LB: So people may be looking at this someday way in the future, and they may not understand what you mean by "remote."

RM: Yeah.

LB: And I don't know. So (laughs) could you sort of describe what that's like, and what that looks like, and how many people, and that kind of stuff?

RM: Well what happened with the pandemic is not -- let me backtrack a little bit. When I taught online, I taught online the previous two summers. And at Muhlenberg, which is a small liberal arts college, we went through a semester-long preparation for doing that so that we would really be teaching from the perspective of a liberal arts experience, not kind of a disconnected kind of learning on your own kind of thing that many online programs -- at least in the past -- had been. I would say that even schools that are not liberal arts schools are certainly doing that better than they used to. But [00:07:00] Muhlenberg is actually being recognized nationally, now, because of how well we do this. So I had that experience -- one that I had been resistant to for a very long time. But the experience was really mind-blowing. I mean it was such a fabulous experience. I had students who were more engaged in the online class than they'd ever been --

LB: Huh.

RM: -- in a face-to-face class. Because it equalizes the playing field, in terms of discussions, and those kinds of things --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- which happen in various formats. So when this started to play out, it was starting to be of concern right before spring break. And then after spring break, you know, people came back. And over spring break, I had decided I was taking my class online --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- because I was not going to step back on a campus when I'm in a phased retirement. [00:08:00] I'm not going to go kill myself (laughs) for the one class that I need to give to this --

LB: Right.

RM: -- institution. And I also felt that, from an equity standpoint, that -- I don't know if any of this is relevant -- but from an equity standpoint, I really felt that we had gotten some emails saying that as we return from spring break, that we, as professors, needed to be open to the idea of having some students learn through remote kinds of possibilities, because they might be, you know, immunocompromised, or those kinds of things. And when I read that, I was like, "I have no idea if anyone in my class is affected by this. But what is that going to feel like for the one student in a class that might have to do this? First of all, it outs them as having an illness, which is really their prerogative to not share."

LB: Yeah.

RM: And so I explained to my students that, you know, the school hadn't decided yet what it was going to do, but I had [00:09:00] decided that, for fairness -- not just because I was afraid to return to campus -- but I was like, "We should all be in this." If one student has to be quote-unquote "disadvantaged" by that --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- let's make it an advantage for all of us. So they accepted that. And I taught my first online session the day that Muhlenberg announced that within that week they would be sending students home. And they were one of the early schools to do it -- they were on the cusp of everybody else doing it. So I was really proud of them for actually making that decision. But what it means to teach remotely when you have not taught remotely is -- and I got most of this feedback from students, because I would do a check-in every -- we actually were going to do it asynchronously -- meaning that nobody had to be on talking to one another -- because, you know, I didn't know where students lived, I didn't know what their home situations were like.

[00:10:00] But I had students who said, "We really, really, really" -- especially first year students -- who wanted to meet synchronously -- meaning that we would have Zoom sessions.

LB: Yeah.

RM: And so I made it so that we met twice a week, normally, in the evening -- because I taught evening classes, rather than during the day -- but to traditional-age students. And because of what they wanted to do, I said, "Fine. We will meet twice a week, and whoever can show up can show up. But nobody will be penalized if they are unable to show up -- that the work that gets done can get done asynchronously. But our discussions, I will record" --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- "and so they're available to everybody to try to make, you know, again, equity, you know."

LB: Yeah.

RM: And so, you know, I did not record the first, let's say, ten minutes of each session, because I wanted to give students a chance to say -- kind of what you're doing with me --

LB: Yeah. [00:11:00]

RM: -- which is, "How is this impacting you?"

LB: Yeah.

RM: "What's happening? How are you feeling?" And a lot of them expressed concern and frustration, because having all of their classes online, with few teachers who had taught online -- which meant that most of their professors had, you know, two days of training or whatever. And so a lot of faculty didn't understand

that you can't just translate from what you do in-person to online.

LB: Right, right.

RM: So this was not online teaching, in the sense of what I had been trained to do for the summer.

LB: Right.

RM: But there are some basic tenants -- like it does not mean that the workload can be the same --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- particularly under the circumstances. It doesn't mean that, you know, the expectations can be the same -- that there needs to be some flexibility. And a lot of professors did not get that -- which I don't blame them. They had no idea. It was like teachers [00:12:00] across the globe were (laughs) forced into this --

LB: Right. Yeah.

RM: -- remote form of teaching. And you really have to alter things, because the kinds of things that people get face-to-face -- you know, it depends on the students -- whether they're visual learners or oral learners or tactile learners, you know -- all of those things change in cyberspace.

LB: Right.

RM: So remote learning, for me -- I can't speak to everybody else who was teaching across the globe. But, for me, what it

meant is -- I'm fortunate that I teach media and communication, Africana studies, and history courses. And so this course that I was teaching in the spring was "Media and Social Movements," which was really apropos, as those students were leaving that class and Black Lives Matter exploded. They should have some tools, based on my class.

LB: Right.

RM: But anyway, what that meant is -- I'm fortunate that -- unlike a math or a science [00:13:00] or those kinds of classes where you have to get through a particular amount of material so that the person can go to the next class -- I don't have those restraints. So one of the things I was able to do is, you know, this was supposed to be "Media and Social Movements" that would take them from like post-World War II essentially to the present. I usually only get to about the eighties or nineties, (laughs) but I told them we're probably going to get to the seventies, if we're lucky --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- because I don't want to overload you with, you know, reading upon reading upon reading -- and reading in lieu of what we might do in class --

LB: Right.

RM: -- those kinds of things. So I really altered everything. And they were really appreciative of that. And I would say I

still had at least about fifty percent of my class showing up on a Tuesday and a Thursday --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- to talk. And in my mind, if you take [00:14:00] something away from my class -- if you learn something -- that's really what I care about, right.

LB: Yeah.

RM: And so I do feel like they got a lot out of the class. But they also got a lot out of that because of the fact that they had the opportunity to just say what was going on in their lives, right.

LB: Yeah.

RM: Versus an online class, where I know, the student knows, everybody knows we're going to be doing this in an online format --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- and you design your class --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- in a way to have robust discussions, even though people may not be face to face. Because the classes that I taught were asynchronous, so nobody ever met, you know -- and yet, as I said, you can have a really, really wonderful experience in spite of that. But that's not what we were doing in --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- the pandemic. And when you think about education -- again, certainly across the United States -- but across the globe -- [00:15:00] what an absolute shock and culture shock this was for people. It's amazing that we made it through --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- to be honest with you. Yeah. So that was remote versus online. And I will be teaching online for the fall -- meaning designing my course for that purpose.

LB: Yeah.

RM: And, in my mind, I intend to tell them I will do that until we have a vaccine, really.

LB: Right, right.

RM: I'm not going to take that risk. And I have next year, and then my final year of my phased retirement is '21, '22 --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- 2021, '22. And, you know, possibly online by then too -- but certainly through next year.

LB: Yeah.

RM: There's no way I will step foot in a classroom. I think, unfortunately, education in general -- certainly higher ed -- is really [00:16:00] in dire straits, because, you know, Muhlenberg -- like most of the colleges in the country -- not all, but most of the colleges -- particularly small colleges -- are trying to bring students back, because their existence depends on that.

LB: Right.

RM: But, unfortunately, because we live in this capitalist society, it means -- that should not be the basis upon which people are returning --

LB: Right.

RM: -- especially when you've trained faculty, now, to be able to teach online -- that's what you should be doing, because it is not safe.

LB: Right.

RM: It is not safe.

LB: Right.

RM: I mean at eighteen, nineteen, twenty, I couldn't have given a shit about what anybody told me the rules were.

LB: Right.

RM: I would do what I wanted to do. And why would you be at a small liberal arts college and not really socialize with your friends? It's just not even remotely realistic.

LB: Right. Well it's like [00:17:00] (laughs) daycare, you know, in the same way -- you take your kids to daycare, they're going to get sick.

RM: Right.

LB: Kids at college are going to get sick.

RM: Right.

LB: I got sick every year I was in college.

RM: Well, and they -- right. And, I mean, when you think about the health protocols under normal circumstances --

LB: Right.

RM: -- with -- whether it's the flu, or norovirus, or why students have to get particular inoculations going to college that the average public doesn't get -- because of the environment of living in dorms.

LB: Yeah.

RM: And even if you supposedly -- what they're calling this now -- "de-densify" the campus -- I'm sorry, but those students -- even the most paranoid of them, I just cannot imagine -- you know, that's when you have sexual awakenings, you have social awakenings, you have racial identity awakenings. That's what the on-campus, small liberal arts college experience -- and even the bigger universities -- [00:18:00] that's why you pay the big bucks to do --

LB: Right.

RM: -- that.

LB: It is.

RM: And I cannot imagine that at that age, when you think you're invulnerable --

LB: Sure.

RB: -- that -- you know, and I don't fault them for that. I mean that's what they're supposed to do, you know. So it really

frightens me that they're -- I can't imagine that they're going to successfully stay open with the arbitrary deadlines that they have for, you know, "We're going to come back a week early, and we're going to end before Thanksgiving" -- what? Who told you that, you know, something isn't going to attack you in the meantime? Come on. Be realistic.

LB: Yeah.

RM: And that college students won't leave the campus between now and November. (laughs) I mean it's like come on.

LB: No kidding.

RM: Yeah.

LB: That it could work out that way. And then there's still that sort of system circumstances -- like physical infrastructure systems that have to do with legionnaires, [00:19:00] you know, or the cruise ships, or something.

RM: Right.

LB: There are older buildings there that have air circulation that have --

RM: Absolutely.

LB: -- absolutely no idea how that circulates. And we know that people on cruise ships where every single person was infected, you know. How could that not happen in a dorm building, or a building that was converted from a house into a dorm, you know, that was one hundred --

RM: 1940. Right. (laughs)

LB: -- if they could do that. They're not going to rush in and put a HEPA filter on every single system.

RM: Right. And where's the money going to come from?

LB: Yeah. They're not going to do that. It's a terribly complicated thing, and yet --

RM: It really is. And it's really particularly complicated in the United States, where we are -- I swear to God -- the most selfish humans on the planet --

LB: Yeah.

RM: And, you know, it's exposed [00:20:00] every problem.

LB: Yeah.

RM: Like every problem that many of us have known existed -- like it is out in the open --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- you know. This whole argument about essential workers, and --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- heroes. Essential? It's called underpaid --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- unable to live on their "living wage" --

LB: Right.

RM: -- people who are literally sacrificing their lives. And that one percent -- those billionaires -- cannot exist, right. The whole system falls apart.

LB: Right.

RM: The whole -- excuse my language -- fucking system falls apart.

LB: Yeah.

RM: The moment that there's a threat to those quote unquote "illegal immigrants" --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- those underpaid human beings, right -- all of that is really just exposing how really sick we are. [00:21:00]

LB: Yeah.

RM: And that's not going to turn around, and the capitalistic system isn't going to be able to turn around until they actually get treatment and a vaccine. And yet, you know, the push is on to be back to normal. There is no normal anymore.

LB: No.

RM: There's not even a new normal anymore.

LB: Yeah.

RM: Anyway.

LB: Yeah. This interview, you know, you can talk about whatever you want -- and I don't think we can separate Black Lives

Matter, or the political circumstances, or poverty, or anything from what's going on with COVID --

RM: You cannot.

LB: -- and I hope that people in the future will look at COVID-19 and see the vast differences between statistic-- just if you look at the statistics between --

RM: Absolutely.

LB: -- other countries and our country --

RM: That's right.

LB: -- and why it's like that.

RM: That's right.

LB: And it's like that because of capitalism, and it's also like that because of leadership right now.

RM: It's because of that, based on [00:22:00] leadership, capitalism, racism --

LB: Right.

RM: -- structural inequality -- I mean it has shown every fracture in our system that has been there all along, with, you know, people not wanting to recognize that. But, I mean, this didn't happen to us because we're some unlucky --

LB: Right.

RM: -- group. This happened because of the way systems operate.

LB: Yeah.

RM: And they absolutely cannot be separated --

LB: Right. Yeah.

RM: -- you know. And one of the things, again, that I kept saying to my students -- and to my family -- it's like, "We are absolutely blessed and lucky that we can social distance -- that we can stay in our homes and be safe." I mean, that is an absolute privilege (laughs) that we have that opportunity. And the most that we have is inconvenience. So like when people are whining and bitching about whatever, it's like, "You are inconvenienced. That's the extent" --

LB: Yeah. [00:23:00]

RM: -- "of what is happening to you" --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- "because it is an absolute privilege that you have the opportunity to make a choice" --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- "to not be out there risking," you know -- I am absolutely privileged that I don't have to step back on that campus. And, frankly, if they forced me too, I would say, "Fine, I'll go into full retirement right now." So I'm at a stage in my life --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- where, you know -- going back to COVID, you know -- and it hasn't felt as impactful to me as it might have 15, 20 years ago --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- in terms of where I am in my life, you know. The people that I care about, I get to see. Now I can say, if my daughter was still in D.C. and kind of trapped there and hadn't returned home, or if I was unable -- like in some countries where basically you literally could not see my son and his family because you weren't allowed [00:24:00] out of your own home --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- I would probably not be doing very well at all. But because, you know, I am really, really fortunate to be able to continue, you know -- in our little circle it hasn't felt hugely different than (laughs) life before.

LB: Yeah.

RM: But for my grandson, who, you know, was supposed to graduate from Muhlenberg -- with no graduation, with no ability to have senior week, to probably have no ability to find a job anytime soon --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- you know -- that's a whole other space to be in. So this is really something. I mean every day I wake up and think, "I'm living in the upside-down world. What in the hell is this?"

LB: Yeah.

RM: And, "It's a nightmare." And, "It must be changing by tomorrow," you know. And it's not. It's just getting worse,

because of the fact that fools -- [00:25:00] or a lack of leadership is there. And not only lack of leadership -- that evil leadership is --

LB: Yeah, right. Right.

RM: -- in place in this country.

LB: Yeah. I agree with that. And no president to be ready for any of the things that are happening -- I mean people have talked about this sort of as a hypothetical, "What if this terrible thing happened?" And I actually -- in all of the art history classes I've been talking about in the last few years, I've been talking about the flu epidemic of 1918. And we talk about that over and over and over again, way before we came into this. I talk about it all the time, because my grandmother died during it.

RM: Oh.

LB: And it affected every single family. I mean fifty million people died during that. And one of the things was was because it was World War I, there was the Sedition Act -- that no one could mention that people were dying, [00:26:00] or you would go to prison.

RM: Yeah.

LB: And so that's why we don't know very much about it. And it's one of the reasons that I'm really glad we're collecting these pieces of information now, because there isn't a lot of --

there's certainly not any public information -- there have been journals and stuff that people had written, saying, well, you know, Hilda Doolittle -- who was a famous Imagist poet, who worked with Ezra Pound, and did all sorts of significant things -- and she was from Bethlehem. She was very famous. And she was absolutely distraught by the fact that her brother and her husband had both died of the flu -- one of them it had been a thing from the war, and then her brother died. And, you know, and then she got it, and she nearly died, and it influenced her life. And yet, when you read that, you don't really go, "Oh, yeah. Because everybody had it." Everybody had it. One out of three people in the world had it.

RM: Yeah.

LB: It changed the world.

RM: Everything. [00:27:00]

LB: And, you know, one of the interesting things about the history of plagues is that the plague in the Dark Ages -- the Middle Ages -- actually -- (laughs) -- this is a terrible thing to say -- but it elevated the positions of poor people, because so many poor people died, that workers could charge more to the rich people who hadn't died. And it literally was like, you know -- it wiped out half the population --

RM: Yeah.

LB: -- and most of the people who died who were poor, because the rich people could hide -- just the same --

RM: Yeah.

LB: -- as it is now.

RM: Yeah.

LB: And so suddenly, like skilled workers -- and it also wiped out skilled workers. So if you had people who were like stone masons -- suddenly there weren't any stone masons. So they could say, "Well, you know, yeah, I'll do this for you, but I'm charging the big bucks." And, in some ways, people can say, "Yeah, we'll do this for you, but I'm not working for minimum wage anymore" --

RM: Yeah.

LB: -- "this is ridiculous." [00:28:00]

RM: Yeah.

LB: And I have to say that the interviews that I've been doing for the HIV/AIDS folks -- all of those people are our age, or older.

RM: Yeah.

LB: Well people who are our age often are more likely to have figured out their lives -- not everybody --

RM: Yeah.

LB: -- but all of the people that I interviewed are either retired, and they have an income, or they're in a job that

they've been in in a long time, or they own their companies -- some of them own their companies. So their financial circumstances were stable --

RM: Yeah.

LB: -- compared to young people. And also, because of HIV/AIDS, these folks were extraordinarily careful -- so they haven't known very many people who had been sick and died of COVID-19. But now you're the sixth interview of COVID, [00:29:00] and every one of the first five people that I've interviewed had essential workers in their family, who were in terribly stressful, nervous situations, very, very at-risk, and had multiple people that had died in their families.

RM: Yeah.

LB: Most of them were younger, and they were all people of color, and they all had a variety of -- larger families -- and they had more uncertainty in their lives. And it was so significantly different. It's been vastly different --

RM: Yeah.

LB: -- compared to the other guys that I interview -- which is good for me, because most of the people I know as my friends are in that older age groups, so it's --

RM: Right.

LB: -- like you, you know -- I'm thinking, well --

RM: Yeah.

LB: -- [you live?] at home, and she's -- you know, that kind of stuff.

RM: Yeah.

LB: But when you start to talk about people who are in their --

RM: That's right.

LB: -- forties or thirties or twenties --

RM: Yeah. [00:30:00]

LB: -- they're in tough, tough, tough situations.

RM: Absolutely.

LB: And some of them are very cavalier, and you want to go,

"No. Don't take this level of risk."

RM: Yeah.

LB: And, just like you said, you can't say that to an eighteen-year-old --

RM: Right, right.

LB: -- you know. That's why they send eighteen-year-olds to war. (laughter)

RM: Yeah.

LB: It's true.

RM: It's true. I hadn't thought of that, but that's true.

(laughs)

LB: Because they think they're invincible, you know.

RM: Yeah.

LB: And in fact there's a whole proven strategy of that.

RM: Yeah.

LB: So I'm talking too much. So you've been talking about work, and that's been really fascinating. So are you talking to lots of other people -- we're talking a lot about whether people are using video -- Zoom -- and certainly you are for work -- talk about how you're using technology to be able to talk to people.

RM: Absolutely. It's actually been a godsend, because, first of all, I proposed -- and it's happening now -- where my siblings and I talk [00:31:00] every week on a Zoom call. And my sisters and I talk frequently -- certainly not once a week, but frequently. But my brothers, as much as I'm close to them, I typically might talk to them a couple times a year or whatever, you know -- not very frequently. And this, you know, we talk to each other religiously, except if there's like Father's Day or Mother's Day or something like that -- we've skipped that week -- which is absolutely important to me. Because it's not just a phone call, and it's not where each of us is calling each other -- we all get to see each other --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- through our Zoom call.

LB: Yeah.

RM: I've also been in touch -- like my best friend from childhood, who I always feel close to, no matter how many years we don't talk --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- we've talked. Other friends who I haven't talked to very often, just because life gets in the way, [00:32:00] you know -- I've reached out, because it just feels really important to stay in touch with particularly people who are not close by, or who, you know, you don't get to be in communication with often. And, again, phone calls are great, but there's something really comforting about being able to see the other person, and see their face, and their expressions -- and, you know, even though you can't visit, you feel like you visited, to some degree. So I've been using Zoom a lot --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- and FaceTime.

LB: Yeah.

RM: Now, FaceTime isn't possible for everybody, because everybody doesn't have an iPhone. But Zoom is easy no matter what kind of technology they've got, you know. And for a while, for example, my oldest brother (laughs) could not get anything working -- but he was still able to call in --

LB: Yeah. [00:33:00]

RM: -- to the Zoom call. And now we can actually see him, because he figured some shit out. (laughs) But yeah, no, like I can't even imagine what that must have been like in 1918, when --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- you know, it might take two weeks to get a letter, let alone, you know... Can't even imagine, you know. Because it really has made things really comforting, to be able to speak to people -- or, like my daughter-in-law's family -- I haven't seen them, but, again, it doesn't happen every week, but I think we do FaceTime with them.

LB: Yeah.

RM: And, you know, the grandkids actually get to, you know -- before, they actually -- because in the beginning of this, like my son's family didn't go visit at all. But now the other grandparents -- [00:34:00] they built a whole, beautiful playground for these kids -- the little kids -- in their backyard, which is huge. And so, you know, they get to go and socially distance. So they've been able to see them. But before then, they couldn't. And, you know, with -- my younger grandkids are four and two -- almost two -- tomorrow will be two --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- I mean how quickly they could forget who somebody is, right. So yeah.

LB: And you really miss things with little kids. So are you taking care of the --

RM: I am. Four days a week I watch them.

LB: Okay.

RM: Wednesdays are the day I have off. (laughs)

LB: Oh. (laughs)

RM: And that's one of the reasons I wanted to retire, because the world was literally falling apart, and it's like the one thing that keeps me sane and happy are the younger grandkids, who don't have any clue what's going on, and, you know, that innocence -- and also it gives me the inspiration to [00:35:00] like just keep fighting -- because, you know, you've got to for them. So yeah. So I've been actually watching them -- I didn't watch them four full days a week until recently -- but, you know, that was the plan for me. And it's been great, because, you know, their family -- which is two older boys -- one who just graduated from college, and one who's going into 12th grade -- and two working parents -- there's no way they could get any work done --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- if the little ones were at home. So they actually come to my house --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- four days a week, so that, you know, their household can actually function. (laughs) And I get real happy by them being here. So yeah.

LB: Yeah. That's great. I definitely miss kids. (laughter) So we've talked a lot about some of your concerns, but what's your

biggest [00:36:00] concern -- pandemic-wise, what's your biggest concern? I mean I don't know if you can separate that from other things, but --

RM: I can't totally separate it. And my biggest concern is, first of all, are they going to figure this out, because of the leadership that we've got going on, and the fact that we are less and less and less connected with anybody else in the rest of the world --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- you know. The fact that we're not collaborating with -- as others are doing and working together to try to figure out a solution -- that, you know, those nightmare horror movies that you see where people are fighting over this, that, and the other -- whether it's water, or whatever the resources are -- I mean we literally could be in that position because of how we, as a nation -- not certainly we as certain individuals --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- but we, as a nation, have positioned ourselves, based on [00:37:00] the absence of leadership or anything other than evil at the top.

LB: Yeah.

RB: It also really worries me about what will happen with the November election, because, you know, there's all kinds of ways that this could be rationalized to fuck that election up --

LB: Yeah.

RB: -- if we're still in -- we're not going to get to a second wave, because we're not going to ever get out of the first wave --

LB: Right.

RM: -- with the way we've been behaving, as a nation. But the point is, it's going to get worse as flu season approaches -- whatever you call it -- another wave, or a surge, or whatever. So I'm really, really worried about how this is going to land for -- I mean certainly the globe -- but certainly for the United States --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- because I think we are already essentially a failed state (laughs) --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- and I think that that exercise in destroying [00:38:00] what, you know, the completely imperfect democracy that we were to begin with, I think --

LB: Right.

RM: -- we are on the verge of complete destruction. I mean yesterday I was reading in the news how the federal government is insisting that, you know, the CDC not be the ones to collect data.

LB: Yeah. Right.

RM: And that's just happening. Like along with all the nonsense that we see, there's all of these insidious, nefarious things going on that are happening at the same time that people -- including the media -- does not pay attention to, because they're worried about whether or not, you know, Donald Trump is wearing a fucking mask.

LB: Right.

RM: I mean, it's ridiculous. So I'm really concerned about our ability to survive -- as a [00:39:00] political entity for sure -- but what does that mean if we already see these disproportionate ways that it's affecting certain communities? What's it going to end up? So I have a lot of fear about this. The one hopeful thing, I will say, about the pandemic honestly is that the largest protest movement ever in the United State's history is happening.

LB: Right.

RM: Now, it's getting a lot less coverage, but it's still happening.

LB: Yeah.

RM: So how sustained that will be -- I don't know. But this is pretty amazing that it's been, you know, more than a month of every day -- in some localities, every day -- protests happening. And that could not have happened without the pandemic. So, you know, there's got to be something positive

that comes out of everything, in my mind. So some silver lining. And that is the silver lining. Because people were home, [00:40:00] people were, you know, not watching football or baseball or whatever the hell we would have been watching at this point in time -- basketball maybe. I don't even know what fucking season. (laughter)

LB: Me neither.

RM: But the point is that there was nothing to distract people from the news, so that George Floyd was not an anomaly, as many, many white Americans think it was.

LB: Yeah.

RM: But it was visceral --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- and it was seen by many people who wouldn't have paid any attention.

LB: Right.

RM: And people wouldn't have been able to be in the streets everyday if they had to be in their offices, or working wherever. So that's my glimmer of hope, is that the pandemic has actually allowed this protest movement to flourish in a way that it would never have been able to if we had been in a normal, you know, grind of work and all of those things. I don't know if that's enough to [00:41:00] overcome, you know, the devastation that's being done to really all of our institutions and systems.

LB: Right.

RM: But, you know, I just saw RBG is in the hospital again, you know -- Ruth Bader Ginsburg. (laughs) I'm like, "Come on" --

LB: Yeah. Yeah.

RM: -- "you've got to make it past November, and you've got to make it past us" -- I mean, unfortunately, Trump is not going to go away immediately -- it doesn't matter if he's defeated or not. But him being out of office will be at least a hopeful step towards something different and better.

LB: Yeah.

RM: But yeah. I mean it's like, you know, no one could have imagined that we could be in the spot that we are in.

LB: Yeah.

RM: I am not one who does not see all of the horror of who we are as a nation. [00:42:00] I predicted this when Trump got elected in 2016 -- and people go, "Oh, we don't have to worry. He's not going to win." I'm like, "You all need to open your eyes, because this is really possible, and this is going to be a nightmare." But, I would say, as much as I thought of the horror story, I could not have envisioned this combination --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- of --

LB: Who could ever?

RM: -- horrific opportunities of to be just in complete free fall.

LB: Yeah.

RM: But, as I said, that's the one glimmer of hope -- that's a big deal, you know. That's a big deal.

LB: It is a big deal. Yeah. It's interesting. I have sort of been thinking a lot about the incredibly stupid things that Great Britain did when it was a world power, you know -- the sun never sets on the British Empire. They, in effect, owned everybody and colonized everybody, and were horrible about it.

[00:43:00] And there was this enormous one stupid mistake after another, where they just kept doing it, and kept doing it and doing it. And, you know, I'm sure that a lot of Americans today think the United States will never be not the power that it is.

RM: That's right.

LB: And that's what people thought about Great Britain in the 1920s. And now, you know, they've got that in the Falklands, (laughs) you know. And they have changed every single thing -- every single circumstance -- with the exception of the queen --

RM: Right.

LB: -- every single circumstance in their -- and they did change, but it took, what, decades and decades and decades. And --

RM: But the reality is, we --

LB: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) perfect.

RM: Yeah. We need to change. So that's not the problem. But the problem is that -- you've hit the nail on the head -- which is, again, as a historian, is just always so troubling -- [00:44:00] that, you know, we live with blinders on, as a nation -- we live in our own mythologies. And, I mean, a few hundred years, in the scope of human history, is nothing.

LB: Nothing, yes.

RM: Empires -- and we are an empire --

LB: Right.

RM: -- have fallen -- pretty much all of them fall --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- right. And I think that's one of the things that really worries me about, for example, November, you know -- that this "solution" is to elect somebody different. One of the things that has frightened me for years -- but certainly once Trump was elected -- is that, again, that's a mindset that's assuming that we have some stability, right.

LB: Yeah.

RM: And that's assuming that, you know, a change of leadership is going to be the solution. The problem is things have been so bastardized --

LB: Yes. [00:45:00]

RM: -- so bastardized for decades, but definitive-- like Trump didn't come out of nowhere, right.

LB: Right. Right.

RM: He's come out of -- at least since 1964 -- what the Republican Party has been moving towards.

LB: Yeah.

RM: So it's been decades of concerted effort to mess up the systems. And so, you know, to always think, "Well, all we need to do is get him out of there, 2020." "Or 2018, let's get, you know, things" -- who would have thought --

LB: Yeah. [It's ridiculous that they said that?]. Yeah.

RM: -- that it does not matter what he has done, said -- it doesn't matter. Like his followers are not moving off of that path because it's not grounded --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- in rational anything.

LB: Right. It's not rational. Yeah.

RM: It's grounded in hatred, it's grounded in xenophobia, and homophobia, and racism --

LB: Yeah. [00:46:00]

RM: -- you know. Fear.

LB: Yeah.

RM: And -- I don't know. And so the pandemic could be the way we see a way out of that tunnel, or it could be the rocks falling on that tunnel --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- and, you know, unfortunately historians can't predict the future, so I can't say which that will be. I don't know where it will land. But --

LB: We're talking to the future right now, and, you know, I always think about -- I've mentioned this a couple of times in some of the other interviews -- when you watch movies about World War II --

RM: Yeah.

LB: -- there's a few kinds of movies, and one of them was the movies they made during World War II, where they didn't know we were going to win or not, and how, in some ways, they were very different than the movies they made after World War II --

RM: Yeah.

LB: -- which actually were more critical of the United States and stuff -- the during World War II was just about morale, and just saying, you know, "We have to keep fighting, and we have to keep fighting, [00:47:00] but let's not say anything that's negative that's happening" -- and there were all sorts of horrible, horrible things that were happening -- the internment

of Japanese, and, you know, all sorts of stuff like that -- the Holocaust was happening during --

RM: Yeah.

LB: -- the time -- that people weren't acknowledging, even though some people were certainly aware of it. And yet, you know, we're in the middle of it -- and, in fact, we're at the beginning of it -- because it's only been a few months --

RM: Exactly.

LB: -- you know. People need to understand that. I mean even the 1918 flu --

RM: It's not going to be over in a few months.

LB: No.

RM: This is a long haul. Yeah.

LB: It's interesting -- the flu epidemic of 1918, there were two things -- one of the things was at the end of fifteen months, it disappeared -- it literally ended. And some people think that it's because the flu mutated -- because mutation can be good, as well as bad. And so we don't know what that's going to be -- it could be mutating so it's not bad for pe-- you know, it doesn't make people sick anymore. And the other thing that happened was that [00:48:00] one out of three people in the entire world had had the disease. So there was a, you know, herd immunity, because --

RM: Yeah.

LB: -- huge, huge numbers of people had had it, and they either died -- like the fifty to one hundred million people -- or they developed a resistance to it. And so, you know, we can look back at that now, and one of the biggest things we see about it is that almost nobody knows anything about it.

RM: Yeah.

LB: They don't even talk about it, you know. They sort of say little bits about it and stuff like that, but that was a million times worse than this pandemic. It hit young people, and all sorts of things. But we don't know what's going to happen with this. We're in the beginning of it. We have no idea what's going to happen. It could get one hundred times worse as we go along.

RM: Yeah.

LB: And it's shocking. [00:49:00] I haven't spoken to anyone who wasn't furious at people who were not acting responsibly.

RM: It makes no sense to me.

LB: Yeah.

RM: It makes no sense to me. But, again, unfortunately, a lot of that is rooted in it being politicized. But even so, you know, when we went out to the fish hatchery with the kids -- and there's huge signs everywhere that say, you know, "Because of COVID-19, make sure you're wearing your mask. Blah, blah, blah." We were in the minority --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- of people. And it's like, yeah, I might be able to be distant from you, but when you're walking along those things where the fish are, I can't guarantee you're not going to be close to me. Like it makes no sense.

LB: Yeah.

RM: No sense whatsoever.

LB: Yeah.

RM: Yesterday [00:50:00] we were at the park with the kids, and, unfortunately, we were foolish, and we had our, you know, masks on our wrists --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- because we hadn't been near anybody for quite a while. And this young woman and her boyfriend -- we were at one of the little bridges at the rose garden --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- because we had been throwing rocks in the creek --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- and we were standing there one last moment with the kids. And I said to them, you know, "Can you just hold on?" Because if we can walk away, and whatever, and they were staying -- and she goes, "Oh" -- and she's talking the whole time, right -- so it was like, "We're just going to walk over here." So she's like walking and talking behind me, and I'm like, "Are you

fucking kidding me?" But then I have to blame myself, because I didn't have my mask on at that moment.

LB: Yeah.

RM: But the reality is, my mask -- needs to have her mask too.

LB: Yeah.

RM: And [00:51:00] everybody else had been as they should, you know -- they were polite, and everybody says, "Thank you," as people wait, you know --

LB: Sure.

RM: -- and the kids are even -- I mean, my four-year-old grandson now knows, you know -- he waits until people walk by, and therefore he's not -- what was wrong with her? And I didn't want to have an argument with her, because it would have meant more back and forth with the spit, you know. It's like --

LB: Yeah. More air.

RM: I mean the lack of compliance -- and I have not been in any place except my home, and my son's home.

LB: Yeah.

RM: I pick up things where it's curbside pickup -- and they throw things in my trunk -- so I literally (laughs) had no contact with other human beings. I haven't been in a store -- I've been fortunate that I haven't had to be in a store, you know. And it really doesn't take -- I mean if we're lucky enough to be able to do this, what is wrong with people?

LB: Yeah. [00:52:00] I don't understand.

RM: I mean my daughter keeps telling me -- I'm not mentioning names, since this is going to be recorded forever -- you know who they are -- but, you know, she laughs at me, because I keep ordering new masks, you know --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- got some kind of cloth ones, some whatever -- because it's going to be around for a really long time.

LB: Yeah.

RM: So it's like a fashion accessory -- like Michael Jackson. You know what I'm saying? So I'm going to be wearing them for a long time. So (laughs) they've got to be cute, and they've got to be a lot of them. (laughs)

LB: I know. I was talking to -- I said, you know, "Start getting your kids used to wearing masks. So buy them like superhero ones -- like lunch boxes, you know." Like, "Oh, I get the coolest mask, you know, and" --

RM: I just got two in the mail yesterday with Spiderman on them.

LB: Yeah.

RM: We both had them on, because they're going to have to wear them.

LB: Yeah.

RM: They're going to have to get used to it. And even they're not school age, they're going to have to get used to it. And then if they go to school, let's pray they keep them on. But oh, God, I don't know.

LB: Well we have a friend, you know, [00:53:00] who is a pediatrician. And she said that, you know, she's got all these moms saying, "Can I send my kid to daycare?" And she said, "Well let me ask you a question. When you send your kid to daycare, do they get a cold, you know? Don't they get everything from the other kids at daycare? So if you do it, they're going to get this. So you have to decide. If your kid gets this, what's it going to do to them, and what's it going to do to everybody else in your household? Because you're not going to be able to keep them away from you" --

RM: Yeah.

LB: -- "you know." And she said, "You just have to stop and think. I'm not going to tell you. I'm going to tell you that. If you send them to daycare, they're going to get it."

RM: Right. And if they don't get it, they'll be, you know, could be silent carriers. Who knows?

LB: They're going to get it.

RM: I mean that's why I just feel like this is so much more important than me staying, working full-time, is the fact --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- that, again, this is a privilege and a blessing
[00:54:00] that, you know, between my daughter and me, we have
been able to have my son and daughter-in-law never have to send
their kids --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- to daycare. Now, you know, the older one, who's four,
was in preschool. And unfortunately he's not going to have that
interaction. But thank goodness he has a younger brother, so
he's not going to be totally bored.

LB: Yeah.

RM: But that just is not worth the risk.

LB: Yeah. Yeah.

RM: You know, he loved preschool, but he's not going to be
going back in the fall. He can't.

LB: It's [just?] --

RM: You know, she has a -- I don't know -- seventy-six-year-old
grandmother. I mean he'll never be able to see her if that's the
case.

LB: Yeah.

RM: So I realize that there are people who don't have those
options --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- and that's how you de-densify, is (laughs) that you have
people who absolutely have no choice. But if I have a choice --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- not only do I want to keep [00:55:00] my family safe, but it keeps their family safe -- because it's less people in that space.

LB: Right. Right. Yeah. Well we feel the same way. We haven't been out of the house, except for a couple of doctor's appointments. And, you know, they'll say to me, "Can you go over to the center and fix something?" I said, "Well, I'm going at Sunday morning at six o'clock, and I don't want anybody to have been in there for two days." And we never have more than one person at a time in the building, and they wipe down -- I mean they're very, very careful. But I don't want to be in the building, even if there's somebody there the day before. And I'm not --

RM: Right.

LB: -- going to be in the building when anybody else is there -- in fact, I don't even like to go out of the house. I really don't.

RM: Right. (laughs) I don't know if that's going to change. I said I'll probably need therapy to actually get back to being a human being who will interact with people. I get so paranoid. If we take a walk, you know, just to get out in the fresh air --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- like if I see people a block away, I start to get

[00:56:00] --

LB: I do too.

RM: -- anxious, you know -- a little anxiety.

LB: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) I haven't walked anywhere. I have a bicycle desk, which I get exercise on, and we work in the garden. And that's all we do. We haven't gone for a walk. I'm not going to -- you know, Trish, now, she's in great shape, but she has interstitial lung compromise --

RM: Yeah.

LB: -- as part of her lupus. Now, it's not serious, but she has it. And she's --

RM: You're not taking that risk.

LB: -- sixty-five years old. So, you know, she's great. She works hard -- she built a rock garden and everything. But if she gets this, you know -- I mean we're all over 60. For heaven's sake --

RM: We're in the age group that's a risk -- which is weird, but it's true. (laughter)

LB: I know. Because I think I'm so -- like I was talking to somebody yesterday who was in her twenties, and she goes, "Well, you know, my grandmother's really at risk," and stuff. And I said, "How old is she?" And she said, "Sixty three." (laughter)

[00:57:00] She goes, "She's really spry." (laughs) I go, "Yeah. Oh, yeah."

RM: And we think, "Damn, that's us." Yeah. (laughter)

LB: I'm spry. I walk five miles a day, kid, (laughs) you know. For heaven's sake. Oh, God. We're really spry, Bert. (laughs)

RM: Oh my God.

LB: So one of the things we have that we're very lucky with, I think -- in the state of Pennsylvania -- is we have Dr. Rachel Levine. And, you know, I don't know if you've seen her speaking or anything, but it's a plus, I think.

RM: I think we're one of the states that has leadership, period --

LB: We do.

RM: -- you know.

LB: A good governor.

RM: New York, us, you know -- there's a few.

LB: Yeah.

RM: And yeah. I mean, first of all, it's just with such pride to think (laughs) that she is leading this -- and, first of all, that we have her in that position --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- is a big deal.

LB: It is.

RM: And, [00:58:00] you know, just thinking how many years ago
--

LB: Right.

RM: -- anyway. It's just really --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- I love hearing what she has to say. I love reading that,
you know, she's leading this, that, and the other. Yeah. I think
we're really, really fortunate to have -- and especially someone
who also -- I mean obviously is not part of the community,
obviously -- but who can understand the scope of the kinds of
issues --

LB: Right.

RM: -- that could come up for the community.

LB: Yeah.

RM: Obviously, you know, she is not only representing the
community --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- you know, which always becomes a thing when --

LB: Sure.

RM: -- folks are Black or trans or whatever -- that somehow
that's their only interest. But having that perspective I think
really is helping with making certain decisions. [00:59:00]
Unfortunately, again, the economy has driven some of those
decisions so that we didn't even follow our own guidelines for

when we went from damn red to yellow to green. Because what has translated, for many people, is green means things are back to normal.

LB: I know. Trish was saying, "What a stupid thing to call it, to call it 'green'" --

RM: Yeah.

LB: -- "because it just sounds like that means 'go'. And it's not" --

RM: We should have just stayed in yellow. We should have never been able to go beyond yellow, if you're going to talk colors --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- so that people understand yellow at least means "caution," you know.

LB: Yeah. Or they could have --

RM: And green means, "Hey, everything's back to normal."

LB: Yeah, yeah, yeah. We should have started with a different color, then gone to red and yellow. (laughter) Because there's more levels than three, really.

RM: Yeah.

LB: And we really aren't out of the yellow phase. It's ridiculous. And people are like --

RM: We're not going to be out of the yellow phase until there's --

LB: That's right.

RM: -- a treatment or a vaccine. I mean that's what [01:00:00] Americans need to understand -- or, you know, reading about returning to school, there was an article -- and I can't remember if it was *The New York Times* or *The Washington Post* -- it was one of the two of those. And it was talking about what can we learn from other countries -- because of course it was riffing off of stupid comments about how everything has opened in other countries, and blah, blah, blah, and they haven't had -- it's been perfect, you know. But, when reading that, it was like, "All of this is great. But it's meaningless in a country that hasn't followed any of the things they should have followed." Those other examples, you know, were on complete lockdown, or they were on -- like they had compliance across, you know -- obviously not one hundred percent -- but they had real compliance --

LB: Right.

RM: -- with whatever it was. They had governments that might be democracies, but they're social democracies -- so that social safety net was there for pe-- like there's no comparison. Like we can't learn from them, because we're not [01:01:00] in that position.

LB: Yeah.

RM: We're not in a position where, as a nation, we don't have to worry about the fact that we're still in the first wave, and

we're going to be in the first wave. Because, unlike other countries, you know, we haven't moved off of this. We haven't gone like this, and then a second wa-- we've gone like (noise) --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- you know. (laughs) And so I'm just like, "Stop acting like we can learn from anybody else until we learn that we're not -- we have to stop being stupid, as a nation."

LB: Yeah.

RM: And Americans have a really hard time not being really stupid.

LB: I know. Why is it? Well, yeah. Oh. Ugh. Yeah. It's --

RM: COVID parties, so that you can -- and then dying.

LB: And then dying. (laughter) Yeah.

RM: I mean, come on.

LB: Yeah. And then people saying, "Well, that wasn't me." I just talked to somebody who was saying, "Well, you know, now that you can go to restaurants" -- and she was making some good points about, as a young person, buying food weeks and weeks in advance -- [01:02:00] so like buying food once every two weeks -- and how she really just wasn't equipped to deal with the concept of buying food -- because fresh food doesn't last, you know, over that time. And she wasn't really a cook. And she said by the end of the second week, "I don't want that food anymore."

And so she said that they're going out to eat. And I'm in my mind thinking -- going out to eat, to me -- so somebody (coughs) that I know on Facebook that I know personally said that he'd gone out to lunch -- he'd taken his mother and his sister out to brunch. And the wait person came to their table and wasn't wearing a mask. And Trish and I said in unison, "I would have gotten up and walked out of the place, just right then." And he ended up staying. And she said, "Why did he do that? Why didn't they just leave?" Because [01:03:00] --

RM: Right.

LB: -- I mean that person was coming in contact with dozens of people who, because they were eating, weren't wearing masks. So how could that person possibly be not potentially infected? And, in fact, wait staff people are absolute-- they're essential workers, making no money at all, and they're at such risk, that it's a horrible, horrible situation for people who are working in restaurants. And we know lots of people who work for restaurants, and they do that, you know, and they make an okay salary, if they can work all of the time -- if it's a nice restaurant, they can do okay. But places are telling them, "You have to come in and work. If you don't come in and work, you can't work here anymore." It's --

RM: Exactly. Right.

LB: And because they're essential workers, they can't get unemployment anymore, because we're open. [01:04:00] It's an awful situation. So let's see. Oh (laughs), here's a good one -- are you spending any time on queer dating or hook-up apps?

RM: (laughs) No. (laughter) No, I gave up on that a long time ago. (laughter) If you know --

LB: No --

RM: -- any good apps, you can tell me what they are. But --

LB: No. (sighs) Actually, I was just talking to somebody -- a young man -- who was saying that he, you know, would look at the things, and if the person was saying that they would hook-up, he said, "Why would I do that? That'd be crazy." (laughs) He called it the "Hi and bye" apps. (laughter) It was like that's what Grindr is, is "Hi and bye." (laughter) But he said, like, "I'm not going to say "hi" at all if the person is saying, you know, "I don't care about the thing, you know, I don't care about COVID." Well, bye -- [01:05:00] so he said, "It's just 'bye' for me." He was (laughs) great about that. I said, "Did you just make that up?" He said, "Yeah. There's another name for it" -- which I don't know, of course -- but I didn't think it was appropriate for the video, so I made it up -- "Hi and bye" (laughter) apps. (coughs) So you're talking about --

RM: It feels like even if I were -- I mean I really haven't bothered with dating sites for a long time -- but even if I were, this would not be the moment for me to be doing that.

LB: You know, I --

RM: I understand that for many, though -- like in some ways I can imagine if you're younger that those sites -- assuming that you're not doing the hook-up thing -- it can be a way to actually get to know somebody --

LB: Sure.

RM: -- which a lot of times -- especially when you're younger -- you don't bother to do before you hook up. So that there could be some utility. I don't know if people are smart enough not to, you know -- if you want some grins, [01:06:00] look at -- I think it's NYC dot gov -- the New York City --

LB: Oh, yeah.

RM: -- Twitter account has a whole thing about hook up stuff.

LB: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

RM: Hilarious. I mean, I'm like, "This is a government site saying all of these things." It's hilarious.

LB: [our people?] Adrian worked with the city and the state to adopt a lot of the information that New York had. Parts of it was a little too edgy. But we put it on our website, because, you know, it's specific --

RM: I mean it's great information, but it's hilarious that the language that is on there is on a government site. (laughs)

LB: But, in some ways, it's kind of brilliant, because it's more likely for people to read it. It's not stodgy. It draws people to it (laughter) to actually read it and go, "Oh yeah, I see it." (laughter) So Adrian said, "I can see why the glory hole thing is not making people comfortable" (laughter), you know. [01:07:00] And he said, "They wouldn't use the word 'rimming' in the thing that I wanted to" (laughter) --

RM: Right. (laughs)

LB: But (laughter) --

RM: They did actually, though. They did.

LB: In New York, they have it -- but they won't use it in PA. So --

RM: Oh, okay.

LB: -- he rewrote it to make it more, you know --

RM: PA-friendly. (laughter)

LB: I guess. And part of that is because we're getting a lot of pushback from Rachel Levine. So they don't want to have it seem like, you know -- you know what I'm saying [and stuff?].

RM: Well there's the problem --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- which we have -- whether it's Barack Obama as the first Black --

LB: Exactly.

RM: -- president, or the first trans person -- is you don't want to seem like blah, blah, blah. But it also means that that creates a problem for the community that you do come from --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- because, in some ways, you've got to distance yourself from that [01:08:00] so that you don't --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- seem like that's your key constituency that you're worried about.

LB: Yeah.

RM: And, you know, it's one of the things that we joked and kind of didn't joke about with Barack Obama -- that, you know, Black people were better off under, you know -- whether it's Lyndon Johnson or whoever -- because --

LB: Right. Yeah.

RM: -- you know, whether it's white people or white guilt -- same thing that I had at work when we had a particular person in a particular position --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- where it was like, we were better off with the white guilt that was at the top. Do you know what I'm saying?

LB: Yeah.

RM: Because we could get what we needed better --

LB: I see.

RM: -- when --

LB: I can understand that.

RM: -- but it really is -- it presents a real quandary at times
--

LB: Yeah. Sure.

RM: -- when what you're talking about affects the community
that you come from --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- that, in a marginalized group -- that, in a political
situation, you've got to act as if you are not worried about
those folks in the way [01:09:00] that you really are worried
about those folks.

LB: Yeah. I think you've talked about most of the other
questions that we've had on here by our just chatting. There's
one question on here -- do you know anybody that's had it -- had
the disease -- or anybody who's died?

RM: I do not know anyone who has died, personally. I don't even
have anybody, thank God -- knock on wood some place -- within my
personal circle --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- who have become ill. Like my sisters, former
brother-in-law, you know, had it, and recovered. But, for

example, one of the young men who was in [Hype?] many years ago
--

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- actually was written in the -- there was an article in
the paper about his family -- the one who had multiple people
die --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- in their --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- family.

LB: Yeah.

RM: So, you know, reading it was like, "Oh my God. I know who
they're talking about."

LB: Yeah.

RM: But I have not had [01:10:00] a lot of personal experience
--

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- with people -- but, again, that's because I'm in like
this bubble --

LB: True.

RM: -- and, you know, some of my siblings have children who
have to continue to work -- and thank goodness they've stayed
healthy. But it's not like everybody is fortunate to not have to
work --

LB: Right.

RM: -- you know. Within my immediate circle -- in terms of my family here in Allentown -- none of us are, you know. But, again, my daughter-in-law -- some of her family has to continue to go into work. So, you know, and some of them have some health issues that worry me with that. And I just pray that, you know, that doesn't happen. But no. I've been very, very fortunate --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- that it has not impacted me, personally, at this point.

LB: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And so the last thing -- and [01:11:00] I think we've talked about this a little bit, but I want you to have an opportunity to talk about this a little bit more if you want -- because you can't divorce the circumstances of COVID from the circumstances of Black Lives Matter right now -- and even our local issues with that, which are very significant at the moment. So do you want to talk about that anymore? You have said some things. But go ahead and say whatever you want to about that.

RM: As I said, I think it's a double-edged sword with COVID. Because it's both -- as I mentioned already -- really opened up the possibility for a movement. But I can remember thinking -- like right after George Floyd, you know -- the video surfaced -- which I haven't watched that or most others. I can no longer traumatize myself in that way. I realized that many Americans --

particularly white Americans -- need to see it to believe it.

[01:12:00] I don't. So just the image -- just the photo on my Facebook feed meant that I went off of Facebook for --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- weeks. Because I could not continue to see just even the still image.

LB: Yeah.

RM: But one of the things that I think was really troubling to me is I was so thrilled to see that, in spite of everything, immediately people took to the streets.

LB: Right.

RM: But it also made me, you know -- I wept about it, because it was like folks who are the most vulnerable --

LB: Yes.

RM: -- are forced to put their lives on the line in multiple ways --

LB: Right.

RM: -- by going out into the streets -- because literally people have been run down by cars, or, you know, maimed by police with rubber bullets, or whatever it is -- but that they are willing to do that, in spite of the fact that we have a pandemic --

LB: Yeah. [01:13:00]

RM: -- is amazing. And really, as I said, that's what gives me the hope. But it also makes me worry, because, you know, right now, there isn't like a lot of evidence that that has been a major contributor to any surges anywhere -- primarily because the stuff is all outside, and people are moving, and air flow, and, you know, probably at least 50 percent are wearing masks. But there's a lot of people -- when you look at those protests -- who are not wearing masks, or who pull them down when they are speaking, or singing, et cetera. But, fortunately, the dynamics of how the virus seems to spread -- they're still pretty much protected, because they are outside -- and they're able to be outside, you know, at this moment, because the weather is good or whatever. But I had real mixed feelings about it in the beginning. And, [01:14:00] to be honest with you, I've had a lot of guilt that I haven't been able to be out there with them.

LB: Me too. Me too.

RM: And my sister has tried to calm that guilt, and said, you know -- I mean obviously I continue to donate to things, you know, I was just on a program on PBS -- I think it was yesterday -- I didn't see it, because I don't have cable, so I have to look at a streaming thing on it --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- on systemic --

LB: Yeah, yeah.

RM: -- racism.

LB: Yeah.

RM: I've been on a town hall with Ce-Ce Gerlach. So I'm still doing things -- and my teaching I really do consider to be an extension of my activism -- but it is a weird moment in my life where, you know, it's the first moment I can think of -- with any kind of protest that's been important to me -- where I can't take that risk. And I feel really guilty about being privileged enough to say, "I can't take that risk to be out and about." But I can't take that risk. So [01:15:00] it's brought up a lot of weird emotions for me.

LB: I feel the same way. You know, our two local protests that we just had in the last week -- I looked at the videos of the first one -- and Adrian actually called me, and said, "Do you know what's happening?" And I looked at the videos, and I could see people shouting, and they weren't wearing masks. And I thought, "I can't do it. I can't do it."

RM: Right. Right.

LB: So this is exactly -- it's like the, you know, the choir singing. And I hate that. I mean I really wanted to be there, and I have also written -- I tried to do some lobbying for Ce-Ce. She asked me to do some lobbying, and I tried to do that for specific people. And I also wrote some talking points for

her and stuff. But because this most recent [01:16:00] video that came out -- [and I don't know what he did with that?] -- but I watched that second by second, and I wrote down -- this happens at this point, and this is exactly contrary to what the police said in their statement -- because I want people to talk about what happened, as opposed --

RM: Yeah.

LB: -- to saying these sort of abstract things. I haven't posted that yet, because -- and now, of course, there's some stupid -- I have a very visceral response to police in Allentown because of my interaction with the police in Allentown. And I was talking to a young person of color in one of these interviews who was saying, you know, "These things have happened, and they've never happened before." And she said, "They're happening because of COVID." And I said, "No they're not. You're seeing them because of COVID, and you're also seeing them because every single person in the United States has a video camera [01:17:00] that they're carrying with them" --

RM: That's right.

LB: -- "thank God."

RM: That's right.

LB: So, you know, that's the thing.

RM: Yeah.

LB: And it's not just one person. So they can't say, "Oh, well that" -- it's fifteen people making a video of that -- you can see them holding their phones up. Well it's a great thing --

RM: Yeah.

LB: -- because you can't argue with it --

RM: Right.

LB: -- and people who used to --

RM: Well, but they can -- did you see the article about the expert?

LB: Oh, yeah. That was ridiculous.

RM: And I'm like, "Are you kidding me?"

LB: Yeah.

RM: "Are you kidding me?" Because he didn't keep his knee on there long enough to actually kill the man, that means that there's no problem?

LB: Yeah.

RM: And it doesn't matter what happened before. If it's not supposed to happen because of your --

LB: Right.

RM: -- policies --

LB: Right.

RM: -- how can you say that's not -- I mean on every level -- plus, I mean, the man got down in a supplicant motion.

LB: So if you watch that nine minute video --

RM: Yeah, I did.

LB: -- at [01:18:00] 5:59 in that video, the police officer does it again -- he knees the guys head -- after he's been handcuffed -- you know, and that's just the use of force.

RM: And why are you handcuffing somebody who does need to be in the emergency room?

LB: Right. Right.

RM: I mean why was there an arrest? Why was any of that -- I mean when you watch all --

LB: They didn't need to arrest him.

RM: -- the video, it makes no sense.

LB: Right.

RM: I mean, that's why -- it makes no sense other than the fact of police acting like --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- police.

LB: And --

RM: Because --

LB: Yeah. And no question about it -- it's racism. No question about it, it's bullying. There's even that part where every time the police officer goes to do something, he rolls up his sleeve, and he goes like this with his muscles -- he's a very muscular guy. And I think, you know, "Oh, for heaven's sake." (laughs)

RM: Yeah.

LB: It's just --

RM: I mean it's really a sad thing when Allentown made -- I mean, *Democracy Now!* covered it --

LB: I know.

RM: *Buzzfeed*, you know. (laughs) [01:19:00] It's everywhere. And --

LB: And the first thing they do is they release a statement saying that he fell to the ground, and the other people fell down with him. And then you see the video where they (laughter) sweep his feet out from under him. (laughter)

RM: Exactly. Exactly.

LB: So, you know, my response to that is, "So they lied?"

RM: Right.

LB: They lied, and they got caught because of the video. And that's what I was trying to say to this young woman -- the fact that there's video all over the place is -- and I was just like -- this was a person in their 20s -- and I said, "Do you really think this hasn't been happening forever?" (laughs) I mean it's just that nobody was driving by with their phone (laughs), you know. And obviously the person who made the first video was very motivated to make the video too -- they were very, very concerned.

RM: Yeah.

LB: So they were more tuned in to doing it too, but --

RM: Yeah.

LB: -- you know.

RM: Yeah. [01:20:00] It's so not new.

LB: But I do think that the resolution that Ce-Ce made and Josh Siegel made is a very good set of things. I had said to her over and over again, "Don't make a resolution unless you talk about body cams" -- because that's something that is a real practical thing. And apparently they're (laughs) supposed to be wearing them anyway, since 2017.

RM: Yeah.

LB: And I don't know. That stuff is -- And I hate not going to march for that.

RM: Yeah. It's been really tough from that standpoint.

LB: And I know that people -- because if you look at the demographic, for the most part, most people are younger. And that's not always true in old-time --

RM: Right.

LB: -- (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

RM: And which also, again, is why I feel so -- like this is a moment of optimism.

LB: It is. It is.

RM: Because there's a lot [01:21:00] of young people -- and, you know, I mean places like Bangor --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- have protests. I mean I used to do consulting work up there, and used to be afraid -- like I was always grateful I was light skinned (laughs) when I went up there that they could mistake me and not know who I was, because that was not -- I mean that and Pen Argyl -- those places were scary to me.

LB: I know.

RM: Or -- what's that place called in Texas? The one that was a sundown town. I mean that's what's like been amazing --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- or when you see like one lone person -- one lone white person --

LB: Yeah.

RM: -- you know, on a corner with Black Lives Matter. And then things like TikTok, which --

LB: Yes.

RM: -- first of all, I'm completely addicted to TikTok. So if they --

LB: Oh, that is --

RM: -- take that away I'm really in trouble --

LB: -- [my favorite?] No kidding.

RM: -- but it's been really interesting to watch [01:22:00] the movement evolve on a platform like that. And then it's clear that TikTok is doing some things -- and they have a term for it -- you know, the young people have some term for what's

happening to them -- but where you're not seeing that in your feed. Because the stuff is still happening, and people are still protesting, and yet, you know, for a while, I was seeing only that. And now I'm really not. But, again, the kinds of things that are available for folks when protesting -- like social media -- and social media's one of the main ways in which people in Allentown were out and about, you know --

LB: Right, right. Absolutely.

RM: -- almost immediately after seeing the video -- because, again, in the past, that would have been very difficult to accomplish.

LB: No kidding. We know that to be true.

RM: Yeah. (coughs)

LB: So I think [01:23:00] we're about done here.

RM: Okay.

LB: And do you have any other things that you're thinking, "Oh I really should" -- like here's something I ask people -- if you're thinking that somebody thirty, forty, fifty years from now, when we're not around any-- well, I was actually talking to somebody that said, "Oh, you could be around twenty, thirty, forty years" -- but we probably won't be (laughter) (coughs) -- at least fifty years from now -- what do you want to tell somebody who is maybe looking at this and saying, "This is something you need to know about this time from me?" I mean

you've said a lot of things that I think are very important, but is there anything that, you know, you just want to throw in? Or do you think you've covered everything?

RM: I think I've pretty much covered everything, other than -- yeah, I can't think of anything that --

LB: Well thank you so much for doing this. This was just -- first of all, it's --

RM: You're welcome.

LB: -- really fun to be able to see you nonstop [01:24:00] for an hour and --

RM: I know. (laughter)

LB: So I'm going to stop recording. Thank you very much, Roberta Meek. I'm going to stop this n--

END OF AUDIO FILE