

Sarah Trimmer

2020-07-27

LIZ BRADBURY: -- and because actually it's not even six thirty but let's go for it. I also have an audio recorder because I'm paranoid and anyway with this. So all right, actually with good reason because I did a whole interview and there were some problems with the person's camera and stuff, and it turned out that it didn't work at all. I mean the whole ninety minutes, but luckily, I did the audio tape of it and since their camera wasn't working well anyway, their projector. So I still had because I couldn't imagine asking this person to do the whole thing again. Okay, so I'm going to read you this information, I want to turn my phone off first I'm going to do that.

SARAH TRIMMER: I think I already did.

LB: Yes, [00:01:00] I did all that stuff so we're recording. Okay, so with this project Bradbury Sullivan LGBT community center of Trexler Library at Muhlenberg College will collaborate on forty years of public health experiences in the Lehigh Valley LGBT community, collecting and curating local LGBT health experiences from HIV/AIDS to COVID-19. My name is Liz Bradbury and I am here with Sarah Trimmer 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. So we're meeting on Zoom on Monday July 27th and thank you so much for your willingness to speak with us today, so can you please first of all state your full name and spell it?

ST: Sarah Trimmer, S-A-R-A-H T-R-I-M-M-E-R

LB: Great. [00:02:00] Can you please share your birth date?

ST: May 22nd, 1981.

LB: Are you in Bethlehem, is that what town you're in?

ST: Palmer Township.

LB: Oh you're in Palmer Township okay, now is the consent portion. So the first part says do you consent to this interview today?

ST: Yes.

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

ST: Yes.

LB: Do you consent to the LGBT archive using your interview for educational purposes in other formats including films, articles, websites, presentations, and even other formats we may not even imagine?

ST: Yes.

LB: And that could be, 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 [00:03:00]
like to delete and/or withdraw, or withdraw or withdraw the
entire interview from the project?

ST: Yes.

LB: Okey-doke, so this is the identity part of it. So what is
your zip code for where you are?

ST: 18045.

LB: What is your age?

ST: Thirty-nine.

LB: How do you identify within the LGBT community trans, gay,
lesbian, bi, pan, queer, QTPAC, nonbinary, etc?

ST: Do I have to pick one? (Laughs) I would say bisexual.

LB: Okay. Here are some things and cisgender would we say?

ST: Yes.

LB: Here are some things to think about, oh I already told you
that. Okay so these are general things, and you can answer
anything you want with regard to how this goes. But we're just
going to hit this right [00:04:00] up front. So where you have
been in your house, and I know that you've been working, but who
is in the home with you?

ST: My wife, who is also named Sarah, we've been married for
six years, together for about eight. And my cousin is also here

with us, he's about the same age as us. Then we've got three dogs and a cat.

LB: So you've got a whole family there that's great, I've talked to a few people who have been totally by themselves and it's been very hard for them, I think. So you've been working, so tell us a little bit about what you do and what your employer is and stuff like that.

ST: So I manage a bed and breakfast and I just landed this job at the end of last year with big huge plans to take it to the next level and then boom global pandemic. So when we were told that we had to shut down, we were considered an essential business for lodging, but you know the [00:05:00] majority of B&B guests are recreational, so they don't -- a lot of cancellations came through. I had to lay off my entire staff and on the off chance that we did get one or two reservations I would, most of the time I just had the phone at home and I was taking all the calls at home, but if we had one or two reservations I was going in, getting the property ready for the arrival, cooking the breakfast in the morning, cleaning the rooms, doing the laundry, all of that. So I was like a one person show for many weeks and even when I was home the phones were just off the hook so many cancellations came through and inquiries of well are you open and what's going on. So it was a

rough couple of weeks for sure, then my company was able to secure one of the loans, I called some staff back but then the loan money ran out and I did another round of layoffs because we still aren't seeing the business to support my entire staff.

It's a little better, it's starting [00:06:00] to pick up and we're obviously very very careful, so yeah definitely not what I was expecting for my first time managing a B&B.

LB: What a surprise. I've been talking to a lot of people, this is actually my twenty-third interview and I have to do twenty COVID-19s and I have already done -- so this will be the thirteenth of those or the fourteenth one of those and then I also did ten HIV/AIDS ones for people who had lived through the AIDS epidemic in the 1990s which was very interesting, and very different from the Covid, although people talked about Covid because they were talking now about how it related to the actual epidemic. But a lot of people I've spoken to are involved with the colleges because we have a lot of colleges in Lehigh Valley so are you seeing this as -- you're [00:07:00] pretty close to Lehigh University and they're talking about opening, but do you think that's influencing your reservations and stuff?

ST: Yes, so we have a very close relationship with Lehigh all the alumni come to us, all the parents, the kids when they're visiting the college before they're enrolling. So they had

tasked us with sourcing some rooms because they thought, you know, they were building new dorms and they had to stop construction. So they thought they weren't going to have enough housing for these incoming students so I had worked the area hotels trying to scramble to find housing for these students and it turns out they didn't need them, but should they need to quarantine international students they've approached us to ask if we would. Because if it's a student that's from like Chicago that is exposed or tests positive than [00:08:00] can, you know, hopefully travel home, or stay, but an international student doesn't have that luxury of just going home to quarantine. So they've approached us if we would accept some students that had to be quarantined. And other area hotels are already doing that, it seems really really scary, we even at one point were talking to area hospitals that if the medical professionals didn't want to go home and expose their families would we house them. And that was a hard pill to swallow. I'm like well then, I'm kind of being exposed or my staff is being exposed to those front lines. But I, you know, we really looked at it through a lot of different lenses and talked to a lot of different agencies and we were ready to take that on if we had to. Ultimately, we didn't have to, we didn't have that -- we were preparing for that peak in the Lehigh Valley, but we didn't quite see where

the hospitals were overrun, and the medical people didn't want to go home to their families. [00:09:00] Yeah, I'm waiting for Lehigh to make the announcement that they would, like Lafayette did, if they're going to go virtual, but I don't know I think Lehigh's going to trudge ahead and see what they can do, hopefully safely. I know they've been meeting about it a lot; I know they will be safe.

LB: Just saying because even colleges that are not planning on opening are taking in groups of students that can't go home and I was just speaking with somebody who cannot go home and this is a Goffstown student so they've arranged for housing and they have international students too, so there is definitely -- and it's not even that the folks are needing to be quarantined they just can't go home, they don't have any place to go. So even if the colleges close like Kutztown apparently will be running all of its classes [00:10:00] -- we have a family friend who goes to Colgate and they also -- it's totally -- they're going to be in their rooms but they're going to be there but they're going to be doing online classes. So it's an interesting thing and apparently the students really want to do that because they want to at least feel like they're on campus. I don't know about that, I don't know, I don't because I guess they would have to pay then, so I think there must be some kind of privilege

involved in that to be able to afford to do that at a lot of the schools. So it sounds like you've been communicating a lot with phones and people that way, have you done video chats with people or have you been doing that with your family or what do you think about that?

ST: My friends, we -- [00:11:00] I saw other people were getting together with their friends on Zoom calls and I was like I don't know if I'm going to like that, it's weird, like I'm so used to being around my friends face to face, so we tried it one night and we had a freaking blast. And so it's opened up this whole new way to communicate with each other which was cool and I did not expect it to give me that sense of like oh I got to see my friends today, I got to hang out with my friends today, but it left me with that and I was really surprised by that. On the contrary you know it's like work gets ahold of like, "We can Zoom call now!" And it was like that could have been an email so like I was so excited to have that extra way to communicate with my friends but on the flip side like you know the very first Zoom call for work it's like you know full hair and makeup, make sure you've got pants. And then by like the middle I was like oh whatever, hair is in a bun I just rolled out of bed. And then like now I don't even put [00:12:00] my video on for Zoom calls I'm like come on just like -- what I love about it is how many

companies are going to continue to do this and not make people drive into the office. And we're seeing the pollution go down in so many areas and if there's any sort of bright spot or positives to all of this hell we're going through I really found some happiness in that. Like maybe people will scale back how much they're traveling into the offices or whatever. And it's another way to communicate so they've been just for it. I think about the you know a hundred year ago flu they didn't have all this, what did they do?

LB: No, I'm glad you've got that out because I love to talk about the flu epidemic of 1918, because I think it's really an interesting comparison. It was far more terribly dangerous. Young people died, fifty million people died, my grandmother died in that flu epidemic and she was thirty-two years old, my father was [00:13:00] four and his sister was seven. And after she died, his father left these two kids with his wife's parents and he just went to South America and never came back; he was an engineer and he was building roads and stuff. So the effect that that had a hundred years ago on me is a residual effect because my father grew up without a mother, I didn't have a second grandfather because of that, and it's surely absolutely influenced his life very significantly. So when you have a circumstance like that and people say "Well you know it was a

long time ago," really you know who knows even that was incredibly significant. And a lot of people had to deal with the government because it was during World War I they told people they couldn't talk about it, it was sedition to talk about it, because they didn't want America to [00:14:00] seem like it was weak. So all of these because it was, we were at war. And so all these people were just, I mean Easton, for example, five hundred people died in Easton, thousands of people died in Allentown, Bethlehem was pretty good at quarantining and they had about a hundred deaths. If you compare that to even Easton which was a tiny city in comparison, Easton was really small then, it was terribly serious -- one out of every three people in the whole world had that flu. And yeah, they couldn't talk to each other, they barely had phones, and most people didn't have phones, and they certainly didn't have the ability to see each other. And people would be desperate to see each other, and they would wear masks and they would like go -- and there's a story about these four women that wanted to play Mahjong and they gasped [00:15:00] but they wore all these masks and everything, and they played Mahjong and by the end of the day three of them were dead. It was that kind of flu; people would die in one day from that flu. It was amazingly terrible and it was involved with the war too, it really -- so it's a lot of people, but it had to do

with young people, it influenced young people. And some people that it came from a flu that had affected little children twenty years before and so that's why those -- like if they had had it twenty years before then they would die quickly from it if they had it when they were twenty to forty years old.

ST: I never read that, that's really interesting.

LB: There is a theory and since we don't know anything about flus, who knows, you know, if it stays there for twenty years. Yeah, I'm actually fascinated by that flu because it affected my family but also affected every single thing that happened [00:16:00] in the United States for the entire century and people forgot about it pretty quickly but it was true. So we're lucky in our LGBT community because we get to watch Dr. Rachel Levine who is part of our community. What do you think about seeing Dr. Levine on -- have you seen her talking about the--?

ST: Yes a lot of times when I was, when I had to be at work a lot of down time when there's only one or two guests so I watched the briefing, I watched Cuomo's and I would watch Wolf's almost every day, I was really hot and heavy on it in the beginning. And I guess I never paid attention to who our secretary of health was, I didn't know, I'm just watching this amazing -- and I really like her. I thought she was so direct in her delivery. What was interesting to me is like Cuomo ran his

conferences but really when you look at Pennsylvania's conferences it wasn't Wolf running them it was her, and I was just like man [00:17:00] she's awesome. And then all the ugliness came out and I was like "Oh, I honestly didn't even realize," so it's so -- then I was extra proud you know I'm like man like it was so great that she's running these conferences and she's brilliant and she's always like you could see how frustrated she'd get when day after day people would ask the same damn questions. And I always loved at the end when she'd flip and she's like, "Now for our daily reminders." And I swear by the end I could almost like recite them with her: "Wash your hands for twenty seconds in soap and water." And it's like she had to, she had to pound it into these people heads because they just weren't getting it. And it was just so obviously representation is important so to see that is great and it's just so absolutely disheartening that she's being attacked still today, today in what was it Morris County there was a menu did you see that story? Come on it's [00:18:00] just disgusting that this woman's there, she's trying to navigate us through a serious health crisis and people choose to focus on something like I don't know, well we're all faced with that all the time. But I was so proud of her and then it was just like, "Oh my gosh. Even better."

LB: And you know I've had a number of people say that young transgender people have expressed so much shock that somebody would be attacked this way that they have said to some of the leaders and some of the people that work in our program at our center, you know, "Is this going to happen to me?" And I was talking to her in place and one of the things the messages that we have to say is, "Look, heroes are attacked, if it was easy to do this, you wouldn't be a hero." People we admire, we admire them for standing up to adversity and that's what she does with the incredible [00:19:00] grace and science and every kind of calmness that makes people listen to her and it's very positive. We're lucky that we get to have her.

ST: Absolutely.

LB: What's your biggest concern during the pandemic and what's your biggest concern, for that matter, for the LGBT community?

ST: Personally, I am very concerned about getting it. I have survived breast cancer twice and as a result of the radiation treatment I endured the second time I've developed a bunch of nodules around my lungs, they've sort of diagnosed it as sarcoidosis, but they don't really know. So I've tried to research as much as I can about how would Covid interacts with sarcoidosis, or how would Covid interact with someone who has got lung nodules. Like it's very concerning for me, there's no

information out there of course because we don't know enough about either affliction. [00:20:00] So I don't know that I would survive it, I don't want to get a cold, let alone get this, you know, virus that we don't know very much about. So that's been my personal biggest concern, and I will say having gone through two bouts of breast cancer in the Lehigh Valley with our hospital network we're very very lucky here. I remember at the beginning worrying that they wouldn't let my wife in appointments with me or something, we never encountered that, everyone was incredible that I had to deal with with my care team. So, I think for the community I would be concerned about we already have a lack of healthcare, we already have you know we're statistically not as equipped as other communities, so it is concerning. But I will say that in the Lehigh Valley it's not as [00:21:00] concerning for me, and I'm incredibly grateful for that, I feel incredibly privileged that I can say that, that I don't have a concern about what kind of healthcare would I receive.

LB: I was reading about people talking about moving to other countries and then somebody started saying, "Oh you know you could move to Bolivia or Belize" and they said, "Of course, they don't have any hospitals there." So like well okay if that's

what you want to do. Do you know anybody that's had it or that's been affected by it?

ST: Relatives of friends, so no-one that I've actually known personally, thank goodness. And someone that I know lost his mom to it so that was pretty devastating, but I've also known some younger [00:22:00] people that bounce back and they have full recoveries, but no-one really close to my inner circle.

LB: So -- so (laughs) I'm not gonna -- there's a question here that says, "Are you spending any time on queer dating hookup sites?" I don't know if that really applies. But how about extended -- you know, being able to talk to LGBT friends who might have similar kind of sensitivities that you do with that gives you an opportunity to talk to people like that, do you have friends that fit that bill?

ST: Yes, I think, you know, both my gay and straight friends we -- Sarah and I, my wife and I really focus on reaching out to our friends that already struggled with isolation. Those were probably those people we most concerned about. You know even my father in [00:23:00] law he's super high risk, he had a double lung transplant about six years ago which was crazy, but he lives alone and every Sunday we'd go to breakfast with him and hang out with him and we can't, he's high risk, you know, we were arranging his groceries to be delivered and the one time

that we did have to go over there it was like dropping stuff off at the door and running away. I hate not seeing my grandmother who is 82, and we've since, you know, very safely have visited with those high-risk people but I guess we were at our peak really like the first part of April. I remember doing a lot more like -- it was almost like on my to do list every day, like make sure you reach out to these people, because I am very fortunate that I'm in a house surrounded by family and animals, [00:24:00] but for my friends that weren't and have to further isolate I can't imagine, it had to be really hard.

LB: For you yourself I know you have to work, and you have to be around people, and you have to tell people that they have to be careful. Have you had any problems with people that have stayed there that didn't want to wear a mask?

ST: No, the guests have been great. I did have an issue with a staff member, so we just went separate ways, it is what it is. I have people in my family that are definitely in support of the current administration and think that masks are not useful, so that's [00:25:00] hard to move past. That's really hard to forgive, like I don't want to sit at a dinner table with them anymore, so I'll maintain social distance from them forever, it's very difficult. We talked through it, actually, as a staff before we kind of brought everyone back to work, we had meetings

and we talked through, all right what's it going to look like if we have someone here that shows up at the door, because we have the big signs on the front door, "Guests must wear masks inside," shows up not wearing one or refuses to wear one, what's that going to look like. So we talked through procedure for that and we're ready for that. I mean we're not happy about it, but you never know, I think it's quite possible that we'll encounter something like that.

LB: For you, I mean besides [00:26:00] going to work and having to deal with folks that are potentially like that, when you have downtime -- and I don't know if you have any free time, but if you have free time -- are you going out? We know a lot of people who are going out and we think for me I'm thinking, "What the heck are you doing?"

ST: Yeah, so Sarah and I we love our community, downtown Easton, we were there a lot, she worked as a bartender and a server for many years down there, now she sells cars but so many of our friends are down there, that was like what we did, we really enjoyed being social. And we said the other night, we like we think this whole thing has finally broke our habit, because you would think that two people that love it so much as soon as it reopened like we'd be down there, we went once, and we were like this is not for us, I don't want to be around

people just aren't taking the masking seriously enough for me. And like I [00:27:00] said I'm very concerned about getting it, I'm very concerned about even social distance visit with my father-in-law like giving him something, so it's just not worth it. We built a bar in our garage, we're calling it the gay-raj, and we've been hanging out in there like it's just as great as going downtown. Because now we don't have to Uber home, we're saving a lot of money, we're not eating out, like why didn't do this years ago. And the other thing that we did to pass the time --

LB: Do you have people over for that?

ST: Sometimes, but again it's like we don't want a ton of people over, so our friends will come by and they sit at the other end of the bar and we're all consuming alcohol, so that kills germs right? The other thing that we did to pass the time so Sarah found this list online I want to say maybe it was on like Autostraddle or something and it was a list [00:28:00] of one hundred and twenty lesbian movies and so she's like we're going to power through this, we have all this downtown. So she prints this list out and she cuts them into strips, folds them up puts them in this like gift bag and every day she'd like shake it and I'd pull one out and all that would be on the strip was they ranked number 1-120, so it would be the ranking, the

title and then like year that it came out. So -- what a bunch of terrible movies, let me tell you. Oh my god I think we made it through twenty-three of them and we just, I mean--

LB: Any good ones?

ST: A couple, there were a couple of good ones, one of our favorites is *Carol* so that was in there. I mean what was great it was from all, from like the sixties up and from all over the world, there were French movies in there, so we still have the bag. I'm sure that we'll watch it from time to time, but [00:29:00] she just, it was great to see so much representation, we don't always get that in every movie we watch, but man some of them were a struggle to get through. And there were some days where she'd like walk over shaking the bag and I'm like, "Not today. I just can't. Not today, like unless you pick one in the top ten, I'm not doing it."

LB: Did you see anything in the top ten that you thought -- like one of my favorites is *Desert Hearts*, I thought *Desert Hearts* was a great movie even though it was a long time ago, it was in the eighties.

ST: Who was in that one? I think we did watch that one, that sounds very familiar.

LB: It's about an older woman and it's about these two women, one of them is getting a divorce in Reno, it's the 1950s and Kay is this young woman who lives, and she makes ceramics and they--

ST: That sounds familiar, see they're all just starting to run together at this point because we've watched so many. Sarah had a rating [00:30:00] system and everything so she was into it.

LB: It is true that some of them like they're so bad and people will say, "Oh you know 'entre nous' you know" and I remember one time somebody said all these people were sitting in the audience one of them just shouted out, "This is like a bad date."

ST: That's great, but you can absolutely identify that someone who was never like in a same sex relationship wrote these movies, someone who was never even, they have no idea about like lesbian sex, nothing, and you're watching this on the screen like, "What in the hell is this?" So we also realized that we could probably write a better someday and we should, a screenplay, I don't know.

LB: When you get to a time where you want to watch something don't forget that you can watch some of my art history videos on our website. [00:31:00] I think I have three on our website and one on the Parkland Community Library website and they're funny too. So it's worthwhile to see it and if you go to our Facebook page Bradbury-Sullivan Facebook page and look at all the

different videos that are there they're longer one's forty-six minutes, one's twenty-two, you know that kind of stuff, it's good dinner fare and kind of interesting. And you go huh that's, you know, and it's interesting one of them was about Greek myths and what the LGBT Greek myths, and I just did that one for Parkland. So those are fun to watch, I want to encourage you to do that because I went to a lot of -- people like them who saw them, more than a thousand people saw them so it was pretty great to do it that way. So I was going to ask you what sort of queer activities have you been doing and you just describe it this perfect thing, it's actually a perfect thing, I think it's wonderful. How about *Liana*, did you see the movie *Liana*, it's black [00:32:00] and white, John Sales did it, he also did other famous movies including that baseball movie about--

ST: I'm writing it down because--

LB: *Liana*, it's L-I-A-N-A and even though it was made by a man, John Sales is the guy who made *Field of Dreams* and sort of an independent movie maker, but I saw that movie a long time ago and I mean I was in college or maybe I was in graduate school and I thought, "This is pretty good, this person does seem to get the whole thing about the deal." *Desert Hearts* was made by a woman though and it's right, you look at that and you go, "Yeah that would really happen."

ST: Well speaking of *Field of Dreams* what was the movie that was just made about the two women that were on the team, a documentary about their lives that was a--

LB: It's called [00:33:00] *Secret Love*. I actually hated that, I hated it.

ST: You hated it?

LB: Because the person that made that was actually Terry's nephew or great nephew and it's really not about them it's about the family being able to deal with them. This whole thing it's so fucking depressing, I mean for heaven's sakes, and they don't know anything about these women's lives, they've been together for a million years, obviously they were very uncomfortable to come out to the family and you could see why, for heaven's sake.

ST: Sarah didn't like it either. Sarah didn't like it, I think I was comfortable watching something very depressing at that current time, I was like, "This is just what I needed." She felt the same way she's like, "Yeah, they did a shitty job."

LB: They did a shitty job because nobody said for example, they made it seem like when they were getting married that it was such a cute thing, they [00:34:00] didn't point out that when they get married that the other woman whose name I can't remember, Terry and Pat, that Pat was protecting herself,

because had Terry died before they were married the family could have come in and just made off with half of everything.

ST: Just like the book club -- the *Under This Beautiful Dome*.

LB: Yes, exactly.

ST: That always stuck with me just how, ugh--

LB: Yeah and so they didn't say, you know, how important -- and even when they were having dinner with those older guys who were their gay male friends and they don't say, "You know if we don't do this we're going to end up having to pay 15% tax on everything the person who is" -- you know, they didn't talk about the practical stuff of it because the people who made the movie didn't understand what this really meant. And then they're looking at "Oh look they had a whole life with all these other gay friends," of course they did why do you think they lived in Chicago, not near you? I actually incorporated that into a [00:35:00] training that I did and I use it in my training for older adults where I say in the nursing home where the person says like are they going to be accepted, the niece says that and the nursing home administrator says, "Well didn't they say hi to you when you came in?" As thought that would be it, that's the response instead of, "Yes we have a non-discrimination policy which includes sexual orientation and gender identity, we'll show you the different kinds of resources we have." They don't

say that they said, "Didn't they say hi to you when you came in?" Like that would be enough, you should be--

ST: Oh yeah, you're right, yeah.

LB: Well tell Sarah that she's absolutely right. You can watch that it's got some wonderful stuff about their baseball teams and stuff and their incredible relationship that they had which was driven. That's not what the movie's about, you know, if the movie was about that we would all be cheering for them for heaven's [00:36:00] sake.

ST: What was the other one, was it *Freeheld* where the police chief got cancer, obviously that really resonated with us, we were solving that, I thought that was pretty well done. And then of course as soon as you're watching you go and you're on Google looking up the true story and you want to see the real people behind the characters on the movie and what a story.

LB: Steven Goldstein was the main guy, he's the Jewish lawyer, he's one of our Facebook friends. I mean you probably are Facebook friends with him, because he's just local. He's in the southern part of New Jersey and he actually worked with what's the name of that movie star, the guy who played that who was in *The Office*, I can't remember his name. But Steven Goldstein actually met with him and said, "You're doing the gay part -- you're doing the Jewish part okay, but you're not doing the gay

part okay. Let me explain how you do this." And it was --[00:37:00] you know, so they really, when they made that movie, they really paid attention to what it needed to be. So that was pretty good, plus the actors were so good, you know. So good for you for doing that, I love that aspect, so you haven't had any problems being out to your family because you're with your family and they're cool. So what's the biggest frustration you're having right now?

ST: I think the lack of consistent messaging from the government. Seeing I don't even like saying who is up there behind a podium touching the microphone and not wearing a mask and the next person, like you lead best by example. I mean that's like leadership 101, that's what you [00:38:00] learn like if you're even on a team as a child you learn, like you lead by example and "do as I --" you know, anyway. I mean I find sometimes when I'm scrolling through Facebook like if my sound is on and someone shares a clip of him speaking that just his voice strikes a tinge, like this response in me and that's so not healthy. I'm 50% hopeful--

LB: I just want to stop and say that you know if people are watching this thirty years from now, that we're talking about Trump.

ST: Yes, I just don't like saying his name, it also strikes that tinge in me. I'm fifty percent hopeful and I'm fifty percent riddled with anxiety about this election which is in 99 days but who's counting because we never thought he was going to win the first time, and [00:39:00] that night watching the polls we were crying and I don't care if that makes people call us snowflakes or whatever, I've been called worse. We knew, we knew this was not -- we have, we know people who have family that like golf with that man and it was literally like a dare, it was a joke, he wouldn't be the president, so you have this person who doesn't even care about this country. He doesn't, and we knew it, we knew it was bad news for the LGBT community, we knew it was bad news for just us as a country and it's sad to see especially coming off the heels of Obama's administration. So I'm frustrated beyond belief with what I see at the top there. I try really hard just to focus on our own bubbles, you know the Lehigh Valley has a lot [00:40:00] of great things, Bradbury Sullivan Center being one of them, we're progressive, I feel safe walking on the street holding hands with my wife in our community and the other areas of the Lehigh Valley, I'm very grateful for that. But, I'm incredibly heartbroken and frustrated for things that I see happening in the rest of the country and nothing like a pandemic to just amp it up even

worse, I mean the civil unrest that we have happening right now, the Black Lives Matter movement, it's hard to just--

LB: I've asked everybody to talk about Black Lives Matter if they want to, so do you want to talk about that for a little while, go ahead and say some stuff.

ST: Yeah, so I grew up in Warren County, New Jersey, which is just over the border from the Valley. I moved to the Valley about fourteen years ago, but that county houses an incredibly racist [00:41:00] town that was just a couple of minutes north of where I grew up. So I was in high school with those kids. And I graduated in '99, I was 1998 or 1999 there was an incident of a man being hung behind a pickup truck with a noose in Texas. And there was a group of kids in my class who called themselves proudly, "The Rednecks," and then walking through the hall one day I spotted a noose hanging out of the one kid's locker and I questioned them about it, I said, "What is this about?" And inside of his locker he had the article of that lynching in Texas and said that the man that did was his hero. And I don't consider myself a violent person now, but when I was seventeen, I was a little crazy, and I kicked his locker shut on his hand and hurt his [00:42:00] hand really bad. But when we went to go to the office to talk about what had happened I didn't get suspended or anything, I maybe got like a day of in school

suspension but I've always been anti-racist, I don't want to say that I'm not racist, I am anti-racist and you know I've always had my eye on the police and what they're doing. I attended a free [Malia?] march when I was seventeen years old, it's just something that's very important to me, I am disgusted by people that think any less of someone who has a different skin color. So in terms of what's going on right now I'm here for it, I love seeing young people on the street and fighting for this and I hope to see significant change in my lifetime. I hope to see radical overhauls of our police [00:43:00] department so that we have more thoughtful response to things and we're allocating sources to better respond to -- you know, we should be taking some of the burden on, I would never sign up to be a police officer. I have great respect for the people that do, but they are overwhelmed, and they need more training. So I think that we're in for the long haul here, it didn't change overnight in the 60s when everyone was protesting it's not going to change overnight this time. Enough is enough, it's again incredibly frustrating to see how Trump handles it and what the things that come out of his mouth are just unbelievable. But hopefully that will change in 99 days and some real positive and progressive changes will come [00:44:00] about. I'm maintaining hope for that, I really am. And someone asked me the other day well what

if he gets elected again and I don't even know, I can't even stomach a response to that yet, I just don't know.

LB: Well I'm certain of that and I said you know we just have to go on that's the thing, we can't just give up and you know -- but we have to work, we have to make sure that that doesn't happen.

ST: Agreed.

LB: So you've already talked about being worried about getting the virus and taking a lot of precautions to avoid that. What's the best thing that you've really experienced so far, what's giving you hope now, and I think you were talking a little bit about young people marching, that's one of the things that gives me hope.

ST: Yes, [00:45:00] I think I'm realizing that there's more channels to communicate with each other. Seeing the global pollution go down has been something I've been -- you know a positive aspect I've been trying to focus on. I do try to kind of be the glass half full, it's hard for me. I think inherently I'm a pessimist and skeptic and maybe even a little negative, so I try to reprogram myself every day and really focus on the positive aspects of everything that's happening. So one of the best things that happened was in the beginning when I was home more, I've worked every day since I was like fourteen, so even

through cancer treatment I was working, I didn't take any time off for that, looking back like what the hell, I had the opportunity. But I just have always worked really hard and at the beginning [00:46:00] of the lockdown when I was mostly just answering the phones at home I got to stay home more, and I wish I could say that like, "Oh I drafted a book or I wrote a business plan and I got in shape," but I've gained so much weight. We made, I lost count of how many like trays of rice crispy treats we made and just like we were doing so well like in February we bought an elliptical and we were on it every day and we were doing the app where you count your calories and all that and we were like losing weight and just like boom, like ripped out from under us. And it was just like I wish I could say I was that person that took this opportunity to like, I don't know, do something great, but it's hard, there's so much uncertainty and it's so scary and I'm just glad that I'm alive, I don't care if I weigh a little bit more than I did, whatever, I'm alive [00:47:00] and I think, uh, it was great at first to spend some more time at home. I got like some cleaning and organizing, and craft projects done that I never had the time for, but I certainly didn't like probably utilize it all to my best ability. But whatever.

LB: [Linda Khan?], who is the head of PFLAG for many years and she's a good friend of ours and she said, "You know, I just wanted to have, I was always hoping that sometime I would just have time at home so I could give this series of projects done and I found out that if I had time at home I wouldn't do the projects anyway. I didn't do them, so I'm not that into it," she said. It was not true, you know, so yeah, I don't know we've been doing a lot of gardening. I think that's been a positive thing. But you've been working the whole time, almost the whole time.

ST: Yeah, [00:48:00] I was, so I should be a little easy on myself. I did have like this massive checklist and I'm a checklist person I have checklists every day. There was one in the kitchen that was like "Quarantine projects." You know so that it can loom over me every time I go get more rice crispy treats and put added pressure to me that I don't freaking need. But it was there we got some things done and the other things you know, whatever, they'll get done sometime.

LB: Well I think that's a really good and refreshing attitude to have, I think that it's brilliant so good for you for doing that. Have you had an opportunity to sort of like work into a regime of some kind of exercise, I just talked to somebody who said, "I don't go out of the house at all," and it was a young

person and they said there's a -- they ended up being stuck in a place where they couldn't go home so they had to stay at somebody's family's house from college and then the family left so they're by themselves and I said if you've [00:49:00] been like -- and they're in the woods and I said, "Have you been going outside?" and he said, "No there's a bear, I'm not going out, what, are you crazy, I'm not going out." So I thought that was really funny.

ST: I am not built for this hot hot weather we've been having lately. I'm not a hot weather person, so I don't, I try not to go outside either. We bought this house last year and there's an above ground pool, so we hang out in there a lot, that's about the extent of the exercise I'm getting. But I'm not swimming, I'm floating.

LB: Water just, it absorbs stuff so that would work. Well it's tricky. I have a bicycle desk and I've been using my bicycle particularly when I'm on Zoom meetings that are boring. But if I have to be, I'm not on it now because all the interviews have been fascinating for me. I've [00:50:00] got to tell you they've been fascinating, but sometimes there will be a Zoom meeting, a lot of the work meetings that we had to do and I'd be like on my desk, talking to somebody who is on one of those big bouncy ball things.

ST: Yeah, you can see them kind of bobbing the whole time.

LB: I thought that was great actually, I thought like you know what the heck, so they were getting out of it and I thought that was a terrific thing. So it sounds like you're doing pretty well with your mental health, this actually says, "How would you describe your mental health right now?" What do you think about that?

ST: I think I was way more sporadic than normal, I feel like I'm pretty even keel most of the time, like middle of the road, I don't let bad things like really ruin my day unless it's like a catastrophe. But I would find like I never knew how I was going to wake up. There were days I [00:51:00] would jump out of bed and you know knock out four of those quarantine projects on the checklist before 9 a.m. and it was great and then like the very next day I'd be like today we'll just stay in bed and watch these damn lesbian movies all day because I don't want to get out of bed and that was weird for me, I was aware of it though, which I think is important. I was very aware of like okay I don't feel like conquering the world today and that's okay, I'm going to let myself have this day of rest. Because I'll usually beat myself up if I'm not like gung ho. But it was just -- god, you couldn't escape it either, I mean I guess you could, but it was like Facebook and there's so much that they didn't know. I

was actually -- I had a big box of masks that I still had from when I was going through chemo because when your cell counts are low you know you have to mask up [00:52:00] to go in public. So I wore masks before it was cool, no but I was probably one of the first people going to the grocery store with a mask on and got a lot of weird looks from people and it was funny like as the weeks ticked by then it was like you'd see more and more people and I'd shoot them like a -- no, I didn't -- it was interesting to see the progression because of course at first they said well we think people should have them, but it's because they learned more about the virus so they learned that yes this is a good thing so that was interesting. I was a little high strung at first, I was doing the whole sanitizing all of the groceries because they said it was like living on surface,s we didn't know.

LB: So we're pretty much not doing that as much anymore is that true? Because I think we're still doing a little bit.

ST: I definitely [00:53:00] do a little bit, we -- my wife used to absolutely love food shopping, and I never really liked it and now we just we've used Instacart a lot, we're lucky to be able to do that, but it's just I don't it's going there gives us so much anxiety. At the peak in April I took like half of my paycheck, we planned out meals for 14 days and we're like we're

going to make a big batch of like -- we're vegetarian, we're going to make a big batch of veggie lasagna then we'll use it and we figured out like all right we're going to spend this much money and we're going to do two weeks of food shopping. So I went and my cart was overflowing, like I looked like that crazy person in the grocery store. But it wasn't overflowing with like toilet paper I wasn't like hoarding stuff, and the cashier gave me the dirtiest look she was like *scoffs* and I'm like this is what people should be doing so that you only have to check us out one time in two weeks and I'm saving [00:54:00] you like, but anyway, got home with all that stuff and had to wipe it all down and it was like a three-and-a-half-hour ordeal I was exhausted. I was like "I hate this" and of course you know you say like I want things to go back to normal and this is unfair but it's okay to have temper tantrums some days, I certainly have.

LB: Trish is a wonderful cook and one of her -- you know we are so lucky anybody that has a job, anybody that has a house, anybody that doesn't have to work in a place where they're constantly being really really at risk for nothing like waitresses that I know people that are servers that have to be at risk to the point where they're -- and they're not paid enough to make this worthwhile. And then threatened you know,

"Well yeah, we're not wearing these masks but if you have a problem with it you can just resign and then you won't get unemployment." [00:55:00] But Trish, a frustration that she has realized and she always kind of knew this but she's very very frugal, we live very frugally, and yet she makes wonderful food, and that was all predicated on her ability to buy bargains and go to the places where -- she just said, "If I could go to the farmer's market now I would be getting those big flats of strawberries and then I could can the strawberry jelly and I can't believe I can't do that, I could get a whole flat for ten dollars. I would be putting the blueberries away so we'd have blueberry crumble in the winter, and I can't get out." She's realizing that that is actually our biggest expense is that she cannot buy food that is economical, we can't go to the farmer's market when the sales are on because they're just not careful there at all and she's a very high risk too, she has lupus, actually. So -- has had it all the time that we've been together all the 30 years that we've [00:56:00] been together and she has to be very very careful. We have not been out, we haven't taken any -- well we were driving back from an appointment, we were at the doctor's appointment and we were driving back and we went by Produce Mart and I said go in there because we have our masks and we could go in there. And she said, "I can't go in there; I

can't count on it to be the way we need it to be and it will just be frustrating." And we have a young person who has actually had the virus and then was tested by Lehigh Valley Health network and has very high antibodies. So she shops for us. We don't even have to feel negative about it, but she still can't do the bargains, can't look at the stuff and go, "Well this would be good and then if I buy this and this, I can make this for dinner." It is killing Trish that this is happening.

ST: I think that's with Sarah like too she would go and maybe be inspired [00:57:00] by something that she would see and make this whole meal around it and now it's like and you know they never get the bananas right, it's like no matter what it's -- one time we had a mishap last week she ordered like five bananas but they registered it as five bunches and she's trying to like, you can message the person while they're shopping she's like, "No, no, no please don't bring us 11 pounds of bananas" and she was able to get it corrected. But I said to her yesterday or the day before we Instacarted again I said, "When are we going to go back to the grocery store?" Like we'll run in for quick things, you know, one or two items, but partially it's kind of being spoiled now, you know, I like having them deliver to the front door if I could just get them to come in and put them away that'd be awesome. But it's just also it's I realized even

driving [00:58:00] to the grocery store you start to realize like your shoulders are up around your ears and you're like, "Wow this is really causing me a lot of distress, why -- you know, I'll pay the delivery fee to have this luxury."

LB: We just went out; we haven't been out in probably two weeks and we've really only been out together to go to doctor's appointments. So we went to a doctor's appointment today, we're coming back and every single person that we saw we made a comment on whether or not they were wearing a mask, and it drives you nuts. You know you're like, "Oh those people are wearing a mask, that guys wearing a mask," the whole way, and you know one of the things we did see was rush hour and it was -- when we were coming back and we were coming back from Whitehall so it was right on 145 and that's a major route and I said, "Boy this is half the traffic you would normally see."

[00:59:00] People are at home, they are really, we were looking at shopping, all those shopping places there and grocery stores and they just didn't have the one car in the gas station, there was just clearly nothing happening, really this is affecting the economy and yes it's not going to stop. I mean I just asked somebody earlier today about what was giving that person, giving him hope, and he said that he is watching every single science-based thing about the vaccines. And he said, "That's

what's giving me the hope because they're on the third trial of a vaccine now that they still think is very promising." So because the way Americans are, we're really a bunch of assholes and so we can't be like England where they just, everybody [01:00:00] locked down, nobody left the house for 90 days and it went away and now they have life.

ST: I remember first hearing about China and seeing videos where the government or health officials were posting these giant speakers on street corners and it was saying like do not come out of your house and they were only letting people like on Thursdays go grocery shopping and I thought, "Oh my god this is, they're insane over there." And now I'm like, "Oh my god I wish our fucking government was as insane as well." I just didn't realize the magnitude of it at that point, we got no direction though we were like, "Wear a mask if you want, whatever."

LB: We've seen reports from scientists that have said bone fide reports that if every person in the United States wore a mask for three months it would be over.

ST: Yeah [01:01:00] wear it properly.

LB: Right, actually, not just -- and if that happened it would be a done deal and yeah if we'd had the leadership to do that and said, "Look I'm sorry I know this is tough for you but if we

don't do this we'll hurt the economy, kids won't be able to go back to school." Well, we really didn't have that leadership.

ST: Are you -- in your Covid interviews, do you have any educators or teachers that you're interviewing?

LB: No, I talked to somebody who was a retired teacher who has a lot of teacher friends and he was very strong about saying it's just ridiculous and he gave me so many interesting little insights into it. One of the things he said was -- in the Allentown School District, he was a music teacher so he worked in every single school, and he said in the Allentown School District in September it is so hot many of the schools are not air [01:02:00] conditioned, what they do is they take -- so he said they're talking about having smaller classes, what they do when it's hot like that is they take all the kids and they put them in a big air-conditioned auditorium. He said, "What are they going to do, we're going to leave the kids in the 99 degree temperature and who are they--"

ST: No way.

LB: "You kids have to be in there, but these kids can be in the cool area." He said there's just no way they're going to do that and then he named three or four other things where he said it is just not going to work, you cannot keep these kids from getting kids, sick from everything else. I talked to a number of college

educators and one of the people that I know very well who works at Muhlenberg was saying we cannot, you know, kids who are young people who are students on college campuses get sick, it happens all the time. You know you can have mono, where everybody gets mono, everybody gets the flu, it happens all the time. And [01:03:00] people get colds and part of the whole experience of going to college is that communal interaction, you're with people all the time, in fact I was just talking to somebody who just graduated today and he was saying you know I haven't seen my friends as much I can only see them on Zoom. And I said you know on the day I graduated from college I had a really good friend that I had seen every single day of college who was still one of my best friends, I just talked to her and stuff, but I didn't see her face to face for ten years after that day. And I said the fact that you have Zoom and you can see -- because she lived in -- she moved to New Orleans and I was living in New York State and it's just like I didn't see her. I talked to her but I didn't see her. And I said the fact that you can see your friends when you leave college, that's what happens, you're not in that communal situation. If you're [01:04:00] missing out on that communal situation of all that sharing and being around people that are different that you've never been around a person that was like that before, you begin to have new attitudes and

ideas, your family is conservative and you change, your family has only spoken one language and then you see oh there's people that speak all the different -- if you lose that in a college situation, it is devastating, and yet, you cannot stop kids from getting sick in college if they're all in dorms. It's just not going to work, it's like a nursing home, it's not going to work, and everybody has said that. And one professor was saying to me, she was an administrator actually and she said they think they're going to open this college but the staff and the faculty are not going to allow it to open, because it's too dangerous for the faculty and what [01:05:00] they've said is it's unethical to do.

ST: It really is, you're already asking so much of teachers, now this, and what is your plan? And again it's like every district is left to their own devices, "Well you guys write the policy and you figure out what the plan when a teacher gets sick or a student gets sick, but there's also HIPAA laws" and what? There's no direction from the top down and I just feel for them, I feel for every parent, you know, we don't have children, but definitely our friends do and talking to them through this it's like they're so torn it's like, "Oh my gosh my kid needs to go to school, I need to get back to my job, they need the

socialization, but germs." So what the hell do you do? It's awful.

LB: And there's even that other level of the idea that we're seeing that poor school [01:06:00] districts like the school districts in the city of Allentown where people don't even really have access to the internet, much less having a computer. They don't even have the internet in their home, we don't have a grid here, and what they're talking about is like in cities like this, or cities like Easton and Bethlehem, they need to make the entire city be a grid and then the payment to be able to get into -- and just have like you give every kid a password who is in school so that they can be on the internet and then you can get them inexpensive computers and you can do that. But right now kids who are in the Parkland School District are having no problem being able to do lessons and classes and Zoom classes and stuff. But kids who are in Allentown who in some ways need this education more -- they don't all speak English, they're American citizens, they don't all speak English, they need this, they don't have their family. Their [01:07:00] families are essential workers so they're home alone. You know, that has to really be--

ST: But the unexpected ripple effects of this, you know, the more people that you talk to and it sounds like you -- you know

you get to talk to all these people with these interviews and things are sprouting up that you wouldn't even think. One of my friends works in the parks system so when this first happened the shutdown everybody's like, "Let's get back to nature" and it was March, April, it was great weather so like the first or second weekend there were like seven forest fires, not like raging forest fires, but there were seven fires in our parks system that had to go be extinguished because it's like people that never go out into nature are suddenly out there, you know, tossing their cigarette butts or whatever and I was like, "Wow what an unintended ripple coming out of this," and there's so many of them out there, and there's so many that will continue to happen, there's so many we haven't [01:08:00] even identified yet. It's just -- it's a really interesting part of history, I'd rather not have lived for it, but you know let it happen in another hundred years but here we are getting through it.

LB: It will be a thing to see if indeed people -- like for example, "Well we can't afford to pay kids," you know, "We can't afford to pay for kids to have education" and suddenly we have a trillion dollars to line everybody's pockets, a trillion dollars is so much money that that would mean every single person in the entire Lehigh Valley could have two million dollars for children, you know.

ST: For us to get like a half hour bump on the stock market, that was fun right. Couldn't have spent that money better.

LB: And yet, you know they'll say like, "Well there's not enough money to have universal health care," because if we'd had universal health care that would have been another thing that [01:09:00] would have kept people from getting sick, because people went to work because they couldn't go to the doctor, they didn't have health care and stuff, they were afraid to lose--

ST: And they infected other people, yes.

LB: So, yeah, well this has been a wonderful conversation, I'm so glad to get to talk to you, what a good time. We'd love to stop by on Zoom at your bar.

ST: Alright, deal. We've got to hash out the happy hour specials, I'll let you know.

LB: Tell people what happy hour special it is so that they could bring it to their Zoom.

ST: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

LB: Their own concoction as a mocktail or something. But it would be really interesting to hear what it ends up to be what is your perfect lesbian movie.

ST: Yes, well we haven't found it yet. So far, you know, we do like *Carol*, we got really [01:10:00] into the *Gentleman Jack* series on HBO that wasn't a movie but we dressed up like Anne

and Ann and we're Sarah and Sarah so we dressed up as them for Halloween and I contacted Shibden Hall and had them put little signs around that was like, "Sarah's love for you is so strong it can be felt at Shibden Hall," so I did that for my wife. But we are absolutely obsessed with that series so if they could like -- and that's another thing they can't film the next season because of Covid. Of all the things that are going on that's the most devastating.

LB: Are we privileged or what? But boy, I feel that way too ,and I actually studied all about Anne Lister I was going to do a whole art history program about her for lesbian visibility day and how brilliant she was and all the problematic things about her and it's such a fascinating thing. That, you know, they actually had --[01:11:00] well I'm sure you would know this --but they had intimacy coaches to be able to tell them how to make out with each other and how to touch each other and stuff so that it would make more sense and it wouldn't look fake.

ST: For the series?

LB: Yeah.

ST: Oh my gosh, no I didn't know that.

LB: --This is what you should you know because these women are not lesbians, they were saying like you know you have all sorts of coaches for different kinds of movements in movies and stuff.

ST: That is so funny.

LB: Fighting coaches and stuff like that so they actually said you know this is what you should do, and this is how you should move, and this is the look you have. It is a brilliant series, it's the second, we don't have Hulu, so we sort of latched onto our friend's but it's the second series now, is it the second season?

ST: Yes, there were two seasons and now the third one is postponed. So, I think, or was it one season?

LB: --I thought it was kind of [01:12:00] sad actually so you know.

ST: Well we read her, Sarah read her actual diary too and then like, you know, I never have time, so she gave me the Cliff Notes, but her medical treatment from her diaries was horrible. So I don't know if they'll touch on any of that, I doubt it.

LB: Fascinating thing, but you'll never have time to do, but Shibden Hall has a thing that's called "Lister Sisters" and Michelle Meecham I don't know she lives in our community I don't know if you know her, she also has a whole outfit, a whole Anne Lister, she was at the pride festival dressed as Anne Lister. She wears that ring and everything and she looks -- she became a "Lister Sister" where -- because you know, there's five thousand -- or no it's five million words, she wrote five million words,

well they haven't all been decoded. [01:13:00] They get people who are known as "Lister Sisters" and they teach them how to decode it and then they give them pages and they write, they decode it.

ST: I have the legend of like her handwriting I think it's saved on my phone, so I was going to like write -- I'll start writing to Sarah in that code, she'll be like, "What the hell is this?" Grocery list, surprise.

LB: But you have to know all those math symbols and everything, and actually the actors in that are just, they're so incredibly great the women are so great. I love that you're into that especially since Harry Potter is dead to us, so you know.

ST: Yeah. I was never a fan anyway, so.

LB: I liked it but I'm past it now, I knew a lot of trans people who loved it and it's over such a shame. So good for Anne Lister for keeping [01:14:00] us amused. Thank you again so much for talking to me.

ST: Absolutely, it was fun.

LB: When the transcript is all done, they'll send you the thing and you can look it over and see if there's anything that you say, "Oh, I didn't mean to say that." But I don't think you'll find that, I thought this was wonderful and it was very different than a lot of other people I've been talking about.

Each person has such a different insight into that, and this is significantly different because of your working in the hospitality industry so to speak and it's very helpful. So thank you very much for doing that.

ST: Absolutely, thank you for thinking of me for the project I'm excited.

LB: We're very lucky that we have this archive because Trish and I saved tons and tons and tons of papers over the last twenty-five years that we've been doing this and we're like, "What are we going to do with this stuff?" And now it's digitized, it's all--

ST: Yes, incredible.

LB: We're very [01:15:00] lucky and we own it, the center owns it, but Muhlenberg is maintaining it so we've very lucky. Anyway thank you very much, keep up the good work, stay safe.

ST: I will, you too.

LB: And all that kind of stuff and we'll keep our fingers crossed for November, well ninety-nine days, ninety-nine days on the wall.

ST: All right thank you, bye.

END OF VIDEO FILE

