

Transcript of Interview with Alan Geiger by Grant Gilmore

Interviewee: Alan Geiger

Interviewer: Grant Gilmore

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Location (Interviewee): Bradenton, Florida

Location (Interviewer): Cincinnati, Ohio

Transcriber: Grant Gilmore

Abstract: Alan Geiger lives in Bradenton, Florida. He and his wife, Patricia Geiger, have comorbidities that put them at risk for COVID-19. In this interview, Alan Geiger reflects on his efforts to protect them both from COVID-19 and how their community has changed as a result of this crisis.

GG: Um, what do you know about the coronavirus?

AG: What do we know about? Well, we know what we watch on TV. We were - right now because we're home. And your grandmother watches probably, well I would say from the time she gets up until the time she goes to bed, probably 80, 90 percent of that time is watching TV. So it's on, it's on most of the day. So every update, um, from the governor of Florida to the president of the United States, we watch all those updates and then there's a show that—matter of fact, we just got through watching it before—is an hour show on, you know, with all of the things that are going on with the coronavirus. So I think we're pretty much up to date on it. Um, and we know that things have changed because this is a virus that has never been on the face of this earth before. So when everybody started with it, there was one line of thought. And over the last two or three weeks, it's changed literally, almost, uh, weekly for sure, but almost sometimes daily.

GG: Yeah, definitely. Um, what's your impression of like the, the news and the news cycle? Do you think it's um, like over sensationalized or do you think that the virus has sort of given the respect it deserves?

AG: Uh, I honestly believe that when it started there was a lot of sensationalism and I think for the most part a lot of the media blew it out of proportion and in retrospect, maybe they were right, but in the beginning, I don't think we knew what the end result was going to be. So they were just sort of playing it up. I mean that's all we heard of is virus, virus, virus, virus. There was a lot of second guessing. And then I think a lot of the media used it as a political tool and now they're using a negative ads against the president for political favors and they're taking the words of the leaders who really didn't know what was going to happen. As you know, look, they did this wrong. They did that wrong. They did that wrong. It's a lot of finger pointing and I think any intelligent human being put in the same position as the leaders of this country would have done somewhat similar things. I mean there were a lot, a lot of mistakes, but there were a lot of good things that were done.

I think for the most part, what I feel is a lot of miscommunication came out of China because I think they kept it to themselves far too long. I think they thought they could put it under wraps and rest of the world really wasn't going to suffer from it. So they just let it, they were mute on the reporting of it. And I think that's really what screwed a lot of it up. So that's just my opinion.

GG: And um, uh, have you noticed like have you been following different networks to see like what different ones are saying or are you sort of focusing on what network in particular?

AG: For the most part, we watch Fox news and there's enough of it just on that channel. And we would have to go, well we haven't. To quickly answer your question, no, we have pretty much stayed on Fox, which is, which is a more conservative channel. But there are some programs even on Fox that are quite liberal like you know: TMZ and a few other ones. And there is a lot of negativity I think from quote unquote the other side.

GG: [inaudible] And as someone who lives in Florida still, 'cause obviously I'm here in Ohio and um, governor DeWine of Ohio like acted really quickly and shut things down really fast. And now as of today, Florida has just, I believe, received the order, this shelter-at-home order. Um, how do you feel about the response in Florida so far?

AG: The governor chose to do it on a county-by-county, um, directive. So whatever the county wanted to do. And I think for the most part that probably was a mistake because we have counties that still have the beach open. We have counties that still allow, you know, somewhat too much gathering of crowds. And I think it should have probably been more of a unilateral directive, although his view was, well, if you've got a county that only has three cases and a county that has 300, you really can't put the same rules on each and both counties. But in reality, you should have done that probably because that's how it basically is being spread by a group of people getting too close together, like either on the beach or in a concert or, you know, whatever. Again, a grocery store. And I think that may have been what spread it.

So, and in our case, Grant, I think our state is kind of unusual because it is a, it is a state that all the spring breakers come down to all the, all the northern snowbirds come down to, and a lot of flights go into it for amusement parks, like SeaWorld and Disney World and, and some of the other ones are in Orlando. So we get a tremendous amount of foreign traffic, spring breakers. Um, and also the, um, the uh, uh, uh, snowbirds. So yeah, I think we've got an unusual state.

And also see that's what happened in Miami. Uh, that's a lot of flights go into Miami and the big beaches down there that the spring breakers would come down and that's, that's what spring breakers want to do. They want to go to the beach and they want to party. And I think for the most part, that's really what set off because Florida is a state that, you know, the county has a lot, or they don't have many.

GG: Yeah. And it's interesting you point that out to you because the timing of the virus is really like inconvenient for Florida specifically because of the fact that as soon as it hit, it was pretty much spring break for most of America. And you had all those news stories about coronavirus parties and I think a couple of those were, were in Florida, right?

AG: Yeah, absolutely. And see when you're, when you're 18, 20, 22 years old—and I know 'cause I felt the same way—you feel you're almost invincible. You say, “Oh, this isn't going to affect me.” And you know, you have a different mindset and these—spring break is a very important break. I mean, good night. I did it when I was going to school 50 years ago. So people have come down to Florida. That's just the way it is. And I think all of the plans were made before the virus—or the, uh, the virus was even um, even really thought about. So I don't know. I, I just think that how are you going to stop the migration of the snowbirds or the spring breakers or people that come to Disney World all and, in a week it's never going to happen. There's too many plans and too many people just doing it. So.

GG: Um, so how, how are you preparing or, like, how have you prepared for this entire thing? Especially now that the shelter-in-place order finally came out?

AG: Well, for the most part, when, when we go to the store and we stock the pantry, we do it like big time. Once a week or once every two weeks. So we were probably more prepared because of that just way of living. We'd only go to the store two or three times a week just to get fresh vegetables and that. So we always had a big supply of soups and, and I can make my own bread if I have to. We've got the river to fish out of, but we had, we'd buy things that we could get two or three meals out of like half a ham or a, you know, whole chicken and then make soup out of it. So our pantry was well-stocked. We had plenty of pastas and plenty of sauces and we had a lot of paper goods, like paper towels and napkins and even toilet paper.

We probably had, I would say almost probably 25 or 30 rolls of toilet paper when this hit two weeks ago. So we weren't in a panic about anything. We had, we've all the staples and you know, we, we don't really, we buy some prepared meals. For most of them meals are we doing from scratch. So, and we're fairly creative with our meals. I mean it's not just, you know, a piece of chicken and a kind of baloney sandwich, you know, and a vegetable. So I think we were very well prepared—not because we prepared for this, just the way we were living so we weren't that short. Um, a lot of people I think go out to dinner, rely a lot on takeout or pizza places or fast foods and we're never in that position because we never did that. We'd only eat out maybe once or twice at the most a month. So I think we were well prepared. Don't you Pat?

And we still are and right now we've got, and because of the situation we're in, we've got somebody that comes to the house for once every two weeks to clean the house thoroughly. And then we have somebody that comes twice a week just to help us out with the laundry and ironing and just basic spot cleaning. And who also has gone out to the grocery store and bought a week's supply groceries because, because she's been here for two years. We can just show her—look, I want two cans of this and this is what it looks like, and I want this particular brand of flour, and I want some sugar and this is the brand that we like. So she could easily go to the store and do that for us.

The biggest problem I think we have is when we need a prescription. When you reach the age 50 you start using a lot of prescribed drugs by your doctor and the hardest thing to do is really get those drugs. So that, that's the biggest challenge. How do I go get my prescriptions without being infected by somebody else?

GG: Have you taken any precautions specifically for that? Like if you've got like masks or anything like some people are wearing,

AG: Um, being that the—being that the girl that comes here, once I reach, I mean twice every two every week. She's a nurse and also from her and the TV, we were told long time ago that wearing a mask does not prevent you from getting the virus. It prevents other people from getting it from you. So just to wear a mask is not really going to stop you from getting the virus because most of it is done from what I understand is like contact touching the surface or touching a piece of fruit that somebody has handled at the grocery store or the shopping cart handle or maybe a paper bag that was loaded up with groceries. So it was told to us I think and still is that a mask is not going to help somebody from getting it. It's going to prevent somebody from getting it from you.

GG: And I also wanted to ask about like your specific, um, like the dock and all the plants that you grow outside—has, has that like helped you yet? Like have you gone to get crab traps and see if there's, if you've gotten any crabs and do you plan or do you think that'll be like a, you know, a pretty useful thing to have on your side considering this whole quarantine?

AG: Yeah, the, the, the, the, the, the problem with growing vegetables and things in the garden: it's seasonal. So I grow all of my vegetables from seeds, so my tomatoes are probably two feet tall, but they're just starting to bloom and they have a few small tomatoes. So because it's seasonal that really isn't going to help us. But the river is actually a great source of food. We have got a lot of fish and crabs and stuff out there that we could easily live on. I mean, you can live on fish for the rest of your life if you have to. So we have a source of food out there that is available and um, we can use it if we need to. We haven't had to and we don't need them at the moment, but it's certainly there.

GG: Right. Um, how about your neighbors? Do you, have they, have you noticed or have you spoken to any of them? Like have they started like integrating more fish and crabs or anything into their diets that you know of?

AG: Not really in this neighborhood, Grant. So the neighbor across the street who we always keep his mail for him when they're gone, went to—of all places—India through, I think they flew into France and then went through Italy and then went to India. And they just came back, I think about 10 days ago. And we email each other even when they're overseas. And I told him, I said, we are not going to be tracking you when you return. We're going to sort of put you at, uh, yeah, out of, out of harm's way and, and we don't want to see you. And we did it nicely. I mean, you know, and I, you know, I said, because of the situation that we're in, I mean, if you look at all, check off all of the little things that you can have wrong with you that are negative as far as catching the virus. We've got every one of them. So we cannot take the chance of being face to face with our neighbors yet and we're not going to, and they understand, I mean, they'd have to be out of touch completely if they didn't understand. And they said, you're right. And we will do that. We'll self-quarantine until we know that we don't have the virus. So I don't know if I've strayed off of the question you asked, but

GG: No, not at all. Um...

AG: Uh, uh, we've talked to our neighbors, we talked to all of our neighbors. I mean, I think this is a fairly good neighborhood. We do things for each other. Um, well I've got one neighbor that has three kids and they're over there homeschooling and then they take them outside and they run around the house or do whatever they can to burn off some energy cause their kids are like one, five, and seven or eight. So they're young. So everybody seems to be doing well. They don't ask us, um, "is there anything we can do for you? Can we order food or whatever?" And we do also the ability to buy even dog food from, uh, from, uh, the mail orders and Amazon. And all the rest of us, I think we're pretty well set. I don't think we're gonna starve to death. I might say the only thing is really is medications that, um, if I hadn't known this was coming and you know, hindsight is 20/20, I would've changed all my prescriptions to a place that delivered. But in order to get, I bet you between Pat and myself, we probably have maybe 15 different prescriptions. Well, they all, uh, they all, um, uh, are refillable at different times. So you know, if I would, who would have known? I think from now on, once this is over, I'm going to change it so that all the prescriptions, um, um, uh, uh, are, uh, refillable at the same date and also go to one that will deliver to us.

'Cause I think that - I think this is not the last of this virus. Once this thing peaks out and it starts turning around where either] there's a, there's a bell curve and uh, it's about what, four to six weeks out and it's gonna get better. But when it does, they say it may come back in the fall. Not as strong, but make it back in the fall. So I think we're going to prepare for something like this happening again. I think most of the country is, it's going to change everybody's outlook.

GG: Yeah. So then how, how, how do you think it'll change society? Like what do you think is going to change, like in as broad as you want to go? Um, and what do you think is going to stay the same?

AG: Well, the biggest thing, and it's just what we're watching every day is the television on paper. The TV's, um, programs are now our, uh, main Fox 13 for out of Tampa is almost entirely broadcast from the people's home. Um, the schools are going viral. There isn't one school in the state of Florida and I don't know about the rest of the United States that is still going to a brick and mortar school. They're all virtual. Um, people are home schooling, uh, the restaurants, it's only self, uh, only a delivered or, um, or takeout. Um, I think the stores are going to their, their aisles and food and, and probably even the way meat is butchered. Who knows what, they're going to do a lot more strict, more serious, uh, cleaning. Um, I think we're going to prepare, like I said before, by going to more places that will deliver to you rather than you going to a brick and mortar store. I, I just think it's going to be a world of difference.

GG: Hmm. And so what do you think is like, cause you mentioned earlier how you talk to, umm, like everyone in your neighborhood. Um, has this pandemic like gotten in the way of that at all? Like any sort of sense of community?

AG: Yeah. You don't go and put your, your, your elbows on the fence between the houses and talk within two feet of each other. It's not, it's more of a talking by phone or uh, emailing or just shouting 20, 30 feet away. We've had a lot of contact. We used to, a long time ago we used to have a block parties and, and going over just a couple of years ago, we used to go over to the

neighbors across the street for supper and, and that was more socializing. Right now the socializing is, you know, at a distance will add change. Yeah. I think we'll go back to it. I don't think it's just gonna stop us from doing that. We're still going to go over and borrow a cup of sugar or give him, give him a bag of tomatoes that we've grown or, you know, smoke a fish and smoked fish or, yeah, I still go back. This isn't, this isn't life changing, but I think we're going to prepare better.

GG: Right. Um, how have your like church habits changed since, especially now? I don't know how it was before. I know that in Ohio where I am, all gatherings of a certain size were completely prohibited. Um, I'm not sure. Is that how it's been in Florida too?

AG: And we've got one pastor that is up in Tampa. Who had a two or 300 parishioner at his church last Sunday. He was arrested, taken to jail out on bond. Now he's saying that going to church is an essential business and he wants to fight this all away. But the local police, police, uh, uh, sheriff said, and if he does this again, he's going to jail for up to 90 days and he will be arrested for endangering the public. I think it was. So, um, there are some people that are trying to defy it and um, I honestly think that, um, anybody meeting over, I think it's five now. It used to be 50 and then it went down to 10. And I think it's five, um, is breaking the law. So the, our church is streamlining this on, um, the internet, which they've been doing ever since for, I don't know, four or five years already. So it's nothing new, but it'll be used more so.

GG: Right. So what's your take on, do you think that it's the right call to, um, keep small groups as contained as possible?

AG: Oh, absolutely. Right. I don't know. I mean, this is what's going to, this is what's going to either stop it or go or just continue to flare up because there should be people all over the United States and the little ones are going to be stupid. And you just can't care that. So I think the government's going to have to step in and do the best job they can and try to keep people sick, segregated and trying to, you know, um, all of the stores I've been through, now there's a little line on the floor with tape, you know, do not cross this line until the one before you move forward. The, um, the, uh, cashiers have got, um, plexiglass shields. Now I just want them to a hardware store four or five days ago and their shields there. I think that's all good. We all have to do just our part.

And if you're not stupid, you'll know that the thing to do is just to stay your six feet away from me. If you just do that if everybody did that, this thing may have been on its way out already, but there's that certain group of people have a mentality that I'm not going to get sick and, or I don't care if I get sick. They've had people, there was a, uh, driver for, I think it was Amazon, but I'm not sure. It could have been FedEx, but he spit on the package when he delivered it. I mean they're most, the mentality of some of these people is just incredible.

GG: Yeah. Especially in light of the fact that, um, a lot of people have been shown to be carriers without any symptoms whatsoever. Um, it is concerning. So, uh, when comparing like this, because I know in my life I've lived through a couple of, of, you know, like epidemic scares. Like, um, recently we had Ebola and right in SARS and H1N1. Um, and this one doesn't really

compare whatsoever to those in my view. Uh, what, what is, what do you think about the difference between this and like other epidemics that you've lived through?

AG: Well it seems like, and I'm not sure this, but I rather like the concept that they're started in a country who has a very, um, poor section of their society and because of their poor, they eat just about everything imaginable. And I think this was, somebody said, and it sounds probably true that they either ate an infected bat or an infected meat. Like, let's say a dog over there would eat somebody suddenly that was affected. Well that because they ate the dog and the dog ate something else, it started a virus that was so new in the world that it became almost impossible to stop because the book trying to look at what, who lost, who knows how long that was there. That could have been there a year. We don't know the communist government, it can squash a news article in a paper, in a heartbeat. It'll just never get out of the country. So I just think somebody, I think it was, uh, something that we've never seen before, Grant. I mean, there've been plagues in the, in the world, uh, long before this one. I mean, what the black plague wiped out millions of people. This one may to a million people do.

GG: Yeah. And so like, just with the scale of it, is this even remotely close to any of the others you've experienced?

AG: No, nothing. The other ones we knew were there, but we just, we didn't think much of it. I don't know. It's like malaria. You don't worry about malaria because you're not, where are they at work, you know, prevalent. Or, You know, HIV, HIV or whatever that is, wasn't HIV. I'm not worried about that.

GG: Right. Yeah. And, and especially because as we've seen like a ton of world leaders have gotten, they've contracted the coronavirus and it, at least from what I've seen, it really does feel like it's something that can affect everybody. Whereas in previous, uh, more recent, um, outbreaks like this, that hasn't necessarily been the case. And how about just other like major crises that you've lived through? Um, not, not just like pandemics necessarily, but anything like any major global event that causes this much of a reaction in the news and in society.

AG: Well, I—Grant, you got to remember that this country has been completely isolated. We've got, we've got water around to two coasts and two countries on each side that we're basically friends with. We are isolated. We're not—sure, we went to war in Vietnam and we went to the war in Iran, but there's too much area of water and land between all of those places. So we're isolated from it. We didn't know desert storm would, that didn't mean a thing to the normal human sitting here. The only thing that really crossed our, our, our defenses was 9/11 and 9/11 was so isolated. It was just, you know, a city in the Northeast corner of the United States. And that's as far as it went, it affected all of us, but not on a personal basis. We didn't have to protect ourselves and, and stash food away. And you know, like you do in a hurricane or a tornado or something like that. It's just the, it's just a small area. This is global. This is not something that happens very often at all. I think it's probably the first time maybe ever the entire United States, the entire world was involved with this even world, even world war one and world war II, the United States wasn't out. It didn't come to this or this country.

AG: It didn't even come to a lot of the countries in the world. It was just, you know, pretty much isolated.

GG: So is this current one, um, one of the only like major sort of things that that feels like it affects you personally? Like others really haven't gotten that far?

AG: I think so, yeah. We stay still not over. I mean it's far from over.

GG: Would you compare it to sort of the way Floridians experience hurricane season? You think they're like comparable?

AG: No, cause it would have to wipe, it would have to go across the whole state to affect you. If we know weeks and sometimes months in advance that something's coming and we can prepare - we could prepare for that if we're smart, but this was an invisible foe. Still is. You can't see it. You can't touch it. You don't know where it is. You don't know if the next person that you see has got it. You don't know how long it's going to last. You don't know what is that's going to cure it.

AG: There's a lot of, if when there's a hurricane, you pretty much know where it's gonna be and if it's in your path, you're going to get it right. You can get out of its path or have a house strong enough to withstand it or I - I don't know how you can - You can compare this to anything that we've been through. I don't know.

GG: Thank you for your time and thank you for participating.

AG: How long did that take?

GG: That was 36 minutes. Pretty good.

AG: Is that pretty good?

GG: Yeah, definitely.

AG: Well, we didn't plan on talking a whole lot, but yeah.

GG: No, I mean, no, that was more than enough. Thank you.

AG: You got enough? Pat, Is there anything you want to say? She says no, she's just sitting here.