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Interviewee: Kurman, Kurt

Interviewer: Hellmich, Madeline

Secondary Interviewer: Lawson, Ellie

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Transcribed by: Otter AI, Hellmich, Madeline

Byline: This interview was recorded as part of The Covid 19 Oral History Project, a project of the IUPUI Arts and Humanities Institute associated with The Journal of a Plague Year: A Covid 19 Archive.

00:00:01

Hellmich, Madeline:

Okay. We are recording. So welcome, Kurt. Thank you for joining me tonight I'm excited to hear what you have to say about your experience in COVID-19. I'll start by just having you state your full name and spelling it for the record.

00:00:22

Kurman, Kurt:

Yeah. Um. My name is, do you want middle name too or does that matter?

00:00:28

Hellmich, Madeline:

No, that's not necessary unless you want to.

00:00:30

Kurman, Kurt:

Yeah, um. My name is Kurt Kurman. K-U-R-T K-U-R-M-A-N.

00:00:39

Okay. Sorry, I just have to allow Ellie to start recording, so just give me one second.

00:00:46

Kurman, Kurt:

Sure.

00:00:51

Hellmich, Madeline:

Okay. Ellie let me know if you're good.

00:00:58

Lawson, Ellie:

I'm good.

00:00:59

Hellmich, Madeline:

Okay. Sorry, I forgot to do that. So we'll start by just reviewing the informed consent document that you have signed prior to the interview. My name is Madeline Hellmich and I'm going to be the interviewer today. I'm here with Kurt. The date is April 15, 2021. The time is 6:04 pm. I am in Cincinnati, Ohio. Where are you at tonight Kurt?

00:01:33

Kurman, Kurt:

I'm in Indianapolis, Indiana.

00:01:36

Hellmich, Madeline:

Okay, So like I said, I want to briefly review the informed consent and deed of gift document that you signed. This interview is for the COVID-19 Oral History Project, which is associated with the Journal of the Plague Year: A COVID-19 Archive. The COVID-19 Oral History Project is a rapid response oral history, focused on archiving the lived experience of the COVID-19 epidemic. We have designed this project so that professional researchers and the broader public can create and upload their oral histories to our open access and open-source database. This study will help us collect narratives and understandings about COVID-19, as well as help us better understand the impacts of the pandemic over time. The recordings, demographic information, and the verbatim transcript will be deposited into the Journal of the Plague year: A COVID-19 Archive and the Indiana University Library System for the use of researchers and the general public. Do you have any questions about the project that I can answer?

00:02:45

Kurman, Kurt:

No questions.

00:02:47

Hellmich, Madeline:

Okay. Taking part in the study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part or you may leave the study at any time. Leaving the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your current or future relations with Indiana University, IUPUI, or the IUPUI Arts and Humanities Institute. Participating in this project means that your interview will be recorded in digital video and audio format and may be transcribed. The recordings and possible transcriptions of the interview, copies of any supplementary documents, or additional photos that you wish to share, and the informed consent and deed of gift may be deposited in the Journal of the Plague Year: A COVID-19 Archive and the Indiana University Library System and will be available to both researchers and the general public. Your name and other means of identification will not be confidential. Do you have any questions?

00:03:55

Kurman, Kurt:

No.

00:03:56

Hellmich, Madeline:

Okay. In addition to your signed document, would you please offer a verbal confirmation that you understand and agree to these terms?

00:04:07

Kurman, Kurt:

Yeah, I understand and agree to the terms.

00:04:11

Hellmich, Madeline:

Okay. I am also asking that you verbally confirm that you have agreed that your interview will be made available under the second option. The COVID-19 Oral History Project license.

00:04:28

Kurman, Kurt:

Yes. I agree that it'll be under that option.

00:04:33

Hellmich, Madeline:

Okay. Finally I want to ask for a verbal confirmation that you have agreed that your interview will be made available to the public immediately.

00:04:44

Kurman, Kurt:

Yes.

00:04:45

Hellmich, Madeline:

Perfect. That is done and out of the way so we can go ahead and get into the questions. We'll start by just you telling us what your what your life looks like on a day to day basis.

00:05:03

Kurman, Kurt:

Yeah. So, day to day, I've been working from home full time since last March of 2020. So I log in at 8am, Monday to Friday, and I'm done at 5pm every day. And it's just Zoom calls pretty much all day, with the lunch break in between. So yeah that's, that's pretty much it. And then after work is, you know, sometimes the gym or like going outside for my daily stroll or whatever, but yeah.

00:05:39

Hellmich, Madeline:

And what do you do for work?

00:05:41

Kurman, Kurt:

Yeah. So I'm a financial analyst for Chase Bank, here in Indianapolis, about to be in Chicago next month. So.

00:05:51

Hellmich, Madeline:

So you're moving to Chicago?

00:05:54

Kurman, Kurt:

Mhm.

00:05:55

Hellmich, Madeline:

That's exciting. Um. Well, this question is about to change but, where do you live now and what is it like to live there?

00:06:06

Kurman, Kurt:

Yeah. So currently I'm in Indianapolis, in the Broad Ripple area. Sorry, what was the second part of the question?

00:06:16

Hellmich, Madeline:

Just what it's like to live there.

00:06:18

Kurman, Kurt:

Yeah, it's a really nice neighborhood. There's, like, I mean, pre-COVID there's a lot more to do up in Broad Ripple, but things are kind of opening back up. But yeah, I definitely have enjoyed, even though we've been in a pandemic, it has been an enjoyable, like place to be.

00:06:44

Hellmich, Madeline:

So, if you can think back all the way to last March. When you first learned about COVID-19 what were your initial thoughts about it?

00:06:56

Kurman, Kurt:

Yeah, so when I first heard about COVID, was probably like early March. And I didn't think too much about it, I mean, I was hearing about people getting sick in I think China. And I didn't think too much about it because I was like okay, well it'll probably just like fizzle out or get contained over there. Um, and so yeah, nothing really like urgent or hesitant, like on my radar at the time.

00:07:31

Hellmich, Madeline:

How have your thoughts changed about it since then?

00:07:35

Well. Definitely the seriousness of it. It really came into, it came around really quickly. So, mid-March, I think it was like March 18 maybe was when we were told, we'd be going home. Well at that time it was for two weeks. But the day before, I was actually with family, and one of my family members contacted me that Sunday and was like, hey, I think I may have been exposed to COVID. So I actually didn't go into the office that next day. And then that's when we were told that we would just stay home. So, it all

happened so fast. And then like, once the news started spreading and everything started like shutting down, that's when I really, I was like oh boy like, like this is crazy. So.

00:08:41

Hellmich, Madeline:

Okay. I'll try to provide transitions to let you know when we're moving on to a new topic. The next questions are about employment and COVID-19. So, has COVID-19 affected your job in any ways?

00:08:56

Kurman, Kurt:

Yeah. So prior to COVID I was in the office for like three or four months, because I was still pretty new at the time. And it was just a lot. It was easier to collaborate with coworkers, like when we were in office. It was easy, kind of easier to like, you know, get help with from coworkers too because you could just like go to their desk. It was a hard adjustment doing work from home every day, because prior to that, the policy was I think, like once a month, you could work from home. And they were actually about to phase that out, and then COVID happened. And so, like, everyone kind of had to adjust to that. And it definitely had its challenges, like work life balance was a big one. Still like, it still kind of continues to be a challenge, like a year later, but it's definitely more manageable than it was like last summer, for example.

00:10:15

Hellmich, Madeline:

Um. What concerns do you have about the effects of COVID on your employment and then just on the economy more broadly?

00:10:29

Um, in terms of the effects on my employment. I would say, honestly, like, the main difference has been the work from home and not being in office. And in terms of affecting it like in the future. I feel like it actually has kind of modernized the normal work week in a way because, like once we return to office, it's gonna be like, limited capacity. And they've already talked about doing like hybrid scheduling where they would be like okay so like three days a week, like please be in office, maybe, or be at home, something like that. So I think in a lot of ways it has actually has kind of made things a little better, which is ironic.

But, yeah, in terms of the economy at large, I think, you know, we still are gonna, I'm not sure what the long-term impacts will be. But I know in terms of like small businesses, especially here in like Broad Ripple, or in Indianapolis, like we've seen a lot of closures, a lot of businesses like not coming back. Which, you know it's terrible, but, you know, we're seeing it kind of all over the country just, you know. It's been hard for people to kind of, you know, stay afloat. So, you know, maybe, hopefully long term like businesses will bounce back, but.

00:12:08

Hellmich, Madeline:

You talked about businesses closing, and I know a lot of businesses even if they didn't close they had layoffs and things like that. Has COVID affected the employment of people that you know?

00:12:25

Kurman, Kurt:

Yeah. I have several friends that lost jobs, or just heavily reduced hours. I knew friends that ended up on unemployment, you know getting unemployment benefits. You know. It, it affected everyone differently obviously. But, you know, for, for me like I had friends in the grade below me, that were just graduating in 2020. And so, they were like, just kind of blindsided once they were kind of unceremoniously dumped into the workforce. And I know many of them like still haven't found like that typical like salary, like, nine to five job. So yeah it's, it's affected everyone pretty, pretty negatively in terms of that stuff.

00:13:33

Hellmich, Madeline:

How do you feel about returning to work in person?

00:13:37

Kurman, Kurt:

I can't wait, personally, because you know I do miss like that face to face interaction. I'm a very social person. I like to you know be with people. And like I have found, like I've gotten more acclimated to Zoom over the course of the past year. But it's still for me not as like, it's still not as fulfilling and not as I feel productive as like a face to face, like meeting. I just feel like I get more done when I'm actually with people physically.

And so, I mean, when they have, when they ask for volunteers for like who wants to go back, I'm gonna be like, me like, me first. So I can't wait. And also, so like, I'm going to Chicago next month for my new role and chase. And like I've never met my new team in person yet. So like, that'll be really good. And it was actually crazy because in my last role with Chase, here in Indy. There are people that joined, who I never met. And like. And so, like, I've moved on and they're gonna move on, and it's like we've never met each other, like, actually. So, yeah, definitely looking forward to going back.

00:15:04

Hellmich, Madeline:

Okay, the next series of questions are going to be about, like your household and community. And, you can define community, however you want and you can also talk about different communities that you're a part of, not just one. Um, has, I guess this

depends, I'm not sure what your living situation is. Um, but, has COVID affected the day to day living situation of like your household?

00:15:51

Kurman, Kurt:

Yeah so, I currently, like, I currently have a roommate here in Broad Ripple, just like a great friend from college. And so for the first at least few months of lockdown, we were both working from home daily together. And so there were long stretches where we both would be working from the dining room table. And, like that was just like such a crazy feeling. And it, it made things difficult, in a way because, you know, after we both were done, I couldn't be like, how was your day? Because like I was there. I was two feet away the whole time, like we were talking the whole day.

But you know it posed a lot of challenges for sure. Like, you know, I feel like a lot of people in similar situations with roommates had like similar stories of just like, eventually, you know, you're just getting, like, wore out of the same thing every day.

And, you know, thinking about, sorry, the question was just about like living arrangement? Okay. Yeah, so it definitely had its challenges for sure. But once things started to open back up a little bit more, it got much more manageable. Because we didn't have to be like constrained to the 850 square foot apartment all day so.

00:17:28

Hellmich, Madeline:

Has COVID affected how you communicate with your friends and family?

00:17:35

Kurman, Kurt:

Yeah. Yeah, I'm actually, like, I was never really big into phone calls with people, and I found myself especially during the lockdown, like calling, FaceTiming a lot. Like, because you kind of, I kind of crave like that social interaction. Especially like when all of a sudden you're told, you know, you can just stay home. And so, I used a lot more social media, probably too much. And, you know, just try to find new ways to you know, link up with friends virtually, and family.

Family was was rough, especially, because like, you don't want to expose your parents to like COVID potentially. So you know I would try to call my parents when I could. And that was a big challenge actually because like, yeah, you were locked down. But that didn't mean you had to isolate yourself from people like in terms of social interaction. And that was a hard kind of realization, because at one point I was like, am I just not talking to people, because I'm like forced to be inside? And you know that's a hard thing you have to maneuver around and yeah for sure.

00:19:04

Hellmich, Madeline:

Have you seen those ways that you've communicated during the pandemic that you didn't before, um, have you seen yourself kind of phasing those out as things open up, or any of those going to be lasting you think?

00:19:20

Kurman, Kurt:

Um, probably more post pandemic I won't rely on Zoom as much. That was a good tool for like getting groups of friends together to like just talk over Zoom. So, I'll probably be phasing that out, but I actually do like FaceTiming people. I think it's fun. So I'm probably gonna keep on doing that, because that definitely shot way up during lockdown. And I kind of prefer that over texting. So, yeah, I definitely see that sticking.

00:20:01

Hellmich, Madeline:

You mentioned getting together with friends on Zoom. Um. What are other ways that you had fun during the pandemic that you wouldn't typically do?

00:20:14

Kurman, Kurt:

Yeah. Gosh, it was so weird. So like we did the Zoom thing. So basically, last April is when we started meeting up weekly over like Zoom or FaceTime or something. And we would literally just like either talk or like, watch a movie together, like time it, which was like a lot of fun. We actually still do it, which is crazy.

But I also found myself picking up new hobbies. And a lot of like impulse buying things online. Oh my god, so much. So just like, in terms of things I would buy. Like I bought, like, I bought a record player on Amazon. I bought a ton of vinyls, I don't even like listen to half of them. But, like I just have them. I bought a keyboard that I have since sold because I was like, I used to play piano. I'm gonna pick it back up, and I played for like two weeks, and then I was like, okay, never mind.

I started going on. Like at the gym and stuff, I would go on the treadmill or elliptical or whatever. But, like especially last spring/summer, weather was nice, I would go on like runs like around the neighborhood, like around Broad Ripple. And like I never used to do stuff like that. And like I would do that daily because it was like something different than being at home. So, I picked that up. I'm actually probably gonna keep doing that because it's fun. Like it's better than being on a treadmill kind of because, you know, it's not as boring. Yeah, just like random stuff. Too much Netflix, too much, you know that, that was just a lot.

00:22:20

Hellmich, Madeline:

So, these are the questions more about community. Um, how has the COVID outbreak affected your community?

00:22:32

Kurman, Kurt:

Mmm. Um. When I think of community, like since I'm out of school, I think I tend to focus more on like, like my family, and like my hometown. Because I'm from Franklin, Indiana. And so when I think about like how COVID has affected you know, people I know really well, like that community. You know, it's just, it was less so COVID itself more than the things surrounding COVID. So like the mask wearing, the social distancing, you know, the politio-- I can't even say it, but like how everything was politicized basically. That had such a negative almost toxic effect on a lot of people I knew. And a lot of like, like pretty rational people, even you know, things like vaccines. That's been politicized, to an extent. And like, I've definitely seen like different shades of people in my community back home that I never thought I'd see. And uh, but it's also shown me a lot of, you know, compassion from people that either I didn't expect or, you know, that was always good to see. Just people looking out for each other. So there was a lot of bad, but there's also a lot of good in the community.

00:24:22

Hellmich, Madeline:

Um. You mentioned different people's different responses to the outbreak. Have you seen the people around you change their opinions or their day-to-day activities in response to the pandemic?

00:24:41

Kurman, Kurt:

Yeah. Um. I feel like a lot of the day to day changed you know due to like state mandates, with regards to like masks, things like that. Like my parents for example, like my dad changed his day to day, like quite strongly where they are, because he has like a lot of health issues. So he would just stay home, like he, like, we'd have people drop off groceries, like it was, it was, it was that bad.

But, you know, my mom she works two jobs. And, you know, she would take the precautions. But like, you know, she was always, not even like skeptical but it was just like, it was just another obstacle. Like the mask wearing because you know, it's like she just, I don't think she was a fan of it honestly. But uh, you know, you do what you have to do with regards to like state mandated things. So you know, it's hard because like when we were on lockdown, I wouldn't really see much of people. But when I would, we were all basically doing the same thing, which was just like, nothing, at home. So.

00:26:18

Hellmich, Madeline:

Has COVID changed your relationship with family, friends and or community in any way?

00:26:28

Kurman, Kurt:

Not really changed just kind of like reinforced some like preconceived ideas of how the community operated of certain individuals. You know people that I knew weren't for things like vaccines or masks or whatever like. It wasn't too surprising, you know, I'm trying to think. So, the question was, sorry. What was the question?

00:27:04

Hellmich, Madeline:

Yeah. Um, if COVID has changed your relationships with family, friends and or community.

00:27:10

Kurman, Kurt:

Yeah, family, kind of. Yeah, I would say yeah. Yes because, like I have a pretty big family, very like traditionally raised when it comes to like a lot of different topics. And, you know, when it comes to vaccinations for me, that's kind of where I drew the line. Like masks, like, sure that's one thing. But like refusing to get a vaccine for me, that was kind of like, that was my line in the sand. I'm like okay that's just kind of, like you're not thinking about the health of other people at that point. And that like really bothered me. And seeing that happen within my own family, that really bothered me. You know coworkers is one thing but when it's, when it's your actual family it's like, wow, like. It kind of blows my mind. It still does, because it's ongoing, so.

00:28:14

Hellmich, Madeline:

Yeah. The next questions are about health. So have you or anybody you know gotten sick during the pandemic?

00:28:27

Kurman, Kurt:

Not me, but many of my friends. Yeah.

00:28:34

Hellmich, Madeline:

If you want to, um, could you expand on their experiences, or how they responded to the sickness?

00:28:45

Kurman, Kurt:

Yeah. I had multiple friends test positive for COVID over the past year. They had varying degrees of sickness, some had like a minor kind of flu. But I had some friends

that just got like horribly sick. And they're telling me like, Kurt, it's the worst I've ever felt. You know, it's like the worst flu I've ever had, things like that.

And I think what was interesting to kind of see was, you know, even, like, I had friends that were pretty like, not even like COVID skeptical just like not taking it as seriously as, you know, the government, the world was, whatever. But, like once they got sick, like once they actually like experienced it, they're like, no, now I'm wearing a mask, like all the time. Like, you know, and sometimes like that's kind of what it takes to kind of grasp how bad it is, which is terrible. But, you know, it's like, I feel like, because I took it, I take it seriously when it comes to COVID. Because like, I hate being sick, because I'm terrible when I am sick. So. I feel like if I got COVID and it was bad, I would just take it, like even more seriously, which like I don't even know how I could do that but.

00:30:22

Hellmich, Madeline:

In what ways do you think that COVID is affecting peoples' mental and or physical health?

00:30:31

Kurman, Kurt:

I was just talking about physical health with my boss today because we both admitted that like last year, like we've both gained weight. Like, I think I gained like 15 pounds last year or so, 15-20 pounds. Because I wasn't eating healthy. I was DoorDashing all the time, still working on that. But like, you know, it just, it, it basically forced us into like sedentary lifestyles, where like we weren't doing anything. We weren't getting enough exercise, enough movement.

And, you know that, that also affects like mental health. Like I saw in my mental health slide at a few points. A lot of my friends too. And it's like we're still recovering from that, in a way, because like, you know things. So it's over a year later and things like aren't the same, still. We're just trying to get people vaccinated so we can like hope to return to that point in like a year or two.

And I also feel like people in our age group like in our twenties, like this is like our prime time to like do whatever, like, see the world, explore, be with our friends. And it's like, this is such a big obstacle that's like stopping that. And that, that was a depressing realization last year for me. And, like, like luckily, like, have good support systems like good friends, good family. And but not everyone has that so it's like, you know. It's hard when you're in that rut to, when you're also like isolated because of this. You know I had a lot of friends I like tried to reach out to pretty regularly because it's like, you know, you got to still let people know that you're thinking about them, and that you care. You know.

00:32:50

Hellmich, Madeline:

Okay. I'm going to transition to the next topic. So, how do you tend to get your news and information about what's going on, not just about COVID but just in general, how do you get your news?

00:33:03

Kurman, Kurt:

Yeah, I've leaned on a lot of like, not, not. I try to lean towards like, how do I say this? Like objectively, like not, kind of nonpartisan-ish news. I don't necessarily watch, like, cable news or like even really local news. I get everything from my phone. But when I do like read news outlets, it's like BBC, NPR, like AlJazeera. And if I see like news articles from like Twitter or something, I try to like verify that, if I'm not familiar with the source. But yeah, I mean I'll get news from like AP and things like that.

Um, and that's one thing that's been kind of illuminating and kind of dangerous about news in this era right now, because like I feel like a lot of people get their news from social media. I mean, me too. But you have to verify it. You have to make sure it's like actual news. You know, it's like my worst nightmare to get fed news that's just like an anecdote from some guy. It's just like that and it's like, I've seen that happen with, you know, people I know too where it's like, oh, I heard this and this about, you know COVID or whatever. And I'm like, where did you hear that? And they're like, I read it on Facebook somewhere. And I'm like, alright. Like, whatever. But um, yeah.

00:34:56

Hellmich, Madeline:

Have your news sources changed at all during the pandemic?

00:35:00

Kurman, Kurt:

Yeah, actually, um. I was. I was actually bigger into CNN before COVID. And then, during COVID I was like, I was like, oh. Like, I just wasn't interested anymore in, like, kind of partisan news sources. You know, left, right, you know, however, people swing. I just don't think it's healthy to be kind of in an echo chamber. Which is why I kind of started leaning more towards, more I guess like central, nonpartisan news sources. Things that at face value don't seem like they have a slant. Which is why I rely on like BBC because it's not American, you know. Like it's, it'd be weird if they were partisan for American politics, but.

00:36:11

Hellmich, Madeline:

What do you think are important issues that the media is or is not covering?

00:36:21

Kurman, Kurt:

That's a good question. Um. I think they need to be covering what's going on, well they need to be covering more so what's going on with policing in America. Obviously, you know, last year, with George Floyd with Breonna Taylor, just, you know, that kind of, you know. This has been happening for years. But I feel like that, during COVID, really just kind of, it was like lighting a match on, you know, at a gas station or something. It was just like, that illuminated, I think for everybody just how bad you know the system is. And we're still seeing things happening coming out recently, like in Minnesota again. Like they just released a bodycam from Chicago PD today. And it's just so frustrating. And like, it's just like that stuff is. It just boggles my mind.

Also, I feel like American media has really become very, I guess stagnant when it comes to shootings that happen all the time. It's almost like they don't even care to cover it for longer than a day. I mean, it's just sad because like that shouldn't be normal. Like mass shootings shouldn't be normal. They should be addressed and solved or tried to be solved. You know, have a remedy as opposed to rhetoric, nothing.

You know I feel like it sucked the last four years because, who we had in office really sucked the news into that vortex, where everything he said was just covered for like three days, until he said something else. And then, no actual news was getting covered. So, yeah, that's kind of my two cents on that.

00:38:44

Hellmich, Madeline:

This seems like a good point to segue to the topic of protests. If you are comfortable talking about it?

00:38:53

Kurman, Kurt:

Mhm.

00:38:54

Hellmich, Madeline:

Cool. So, when and where did you attend protests during the pandemic?

00:39:02

Kurman, Kurt:

I attended a protest here in Indianapolis, and also down in Johnson County. Um, in Greenwood. I went to one or two there. But yeah, mainly here in Indiana.

00:39:22

Hellmich, Madeline:

Can you tell me what the protests that you attended looked like?

00:39:30

Kurman, Kurt:

Yeah. Um, very peaceful affairs. I know here in Indianapolis, that first weekend. Things were pretty, like crazy. And I heard the story, saw the pictures, saw the aftermath. And it is, it was scary. But the ones that I went to, were very nonviolent, very peaceful.

You know, the organizers had a clear message. They want to, you know, like shine a light to the injustice. And you know we were there to, you know, kind of take a stand to like what we were seeing, what we have been seeing, and you know just how, just how messed up it is.

The environment, you know, very like, it was very sad to just. I don't know, like, to empathize with what's been happening to the Black community for decades. It, it's just so painful too, that like an entire, like group of people in this country has just been completely you know, just. It's almost just like, it's not fair. It's racist. It's, it's just like, it's just like uncomfortable to even think about that, you know. People just like us. We're all people, but because of the color of their skin, they are immediately just like targeted, and it just makes me, makes me angry.

What, I also thought was really interesting. The big protest I went to in Indianapolis. Like, I remember in the crowds as we were marching, it was like down Mass Ave. or something. But um, there were like a couple people that started chanting, like explicit things, like F the police, things like that. But then you saw people around them being like, no, not that. Like, we're, we're here to protest what happen to you know, Breonna, George Floyd, countless other people.

And, you know, it was interesting to see people defusing potentially harmful situations that would take away from the message of what we were there for. And I really respected that.

00:42:39

Hellmich, Madeline:

So were you able, the protests that you attended. Were you able to identify the group that organized it, or leaders at the protests?

00:42:53

Kurman, Kurt:

Yeah. There was a clear organization of people that were. It was like the Indy Black Lives Matter, kind of, they organized the event. I think I saw the event, either on Facebook or Twitter or somewhere. I mean we all used social media during that time to kind of organize and find out where these things were happening. And yeah, I think, I think it was like the Indy Black Lives Matter group that was. They all have, they're all very easily identifiable and like they did a really excellent job of organizing those.

00:43:44

Hellmich, Madeline:

I know you mentioned your feelings about racist policing practices and things like that. But was there any, the protest that you attended, was there anything specifically that motivated you to attend?

00:44:03

Kurman, Kurt:

I think. I think what motivated me to become more active in it was. I think it, part of it had to do with just. I think seeing the video of George Floyd. I don't know but it was like a switch flipped. And I was like, I feel, I feel like I'm not doing anything if I just sit here at home and, and say, you know that's bad. But it's like, but I feel like at that point, I still feel this way, it's like, if you really care about something. If you really want to help drive change. You need to make your voice heard in some way. You need to be active. Like you need to, you know, be in that public forum. You need to have your voice heard. And when people do that in mass, it sends a clear message.

And, you know, it's just, I also feel that. You know, because George Floyd, that whole thing began. I think he was, I think that video came out, was it like June, end of May? Something like that. But I feel like also at that point and I thought about this a little bit too where, I feel like, given everything that was already happening, with lockdown, with COVID. I feel like with George Floyd's death. I feel like, you know the response to that, it was so huge. And I also feel like the frustrations that people were already feeling because of COVID. They were probably emptying it out to an extent. And it just kind of unleashed itself. And you know George Floyd's death was kind of like a catalyst to that. And so people are already pissed about COVID but they're also pissed about racial injustice, policing, how that is. It all just kind of spilled out.

And, you know, that's something I've kind of thought about, and I'm sure people might agree. But it was just like, we felt so powerless at the time. And that gave us an opportunity to have some control over, you know, what was happening.

00:47:20

Hellmich, Madeline:

Can you tell me how the protesters and IMPD were interacting with one another at the protests that you attended?

00:47:30

Kurman, Kurt:

Yeah. It was, it was not, not very confrontational, I would say. You know, there is nothing necessarily bad happening. And that's because it was a nonviolent demonstration too. So, I mean.

[phone ringing] Oh, sorry. Got a Facetime.

Anyway, so, sorry, IMPD. Yeah, like I saw them there. But, you know, it was just kind of, they were there to kind of standby, facilitate. I didn't think too much of it. I wasn't,

like personally, like I wasn't looking to talk to them. But, you know, I, but I wasn't like hostile, and no one really was actively hostile towards IMPD.

You know, because again, that's like what I really appreciated because there were like thousands of people downtown. But, you know, as far as I could see, like no one was concerned about destroying or vandalizing anything. It was, we were there, clearly, you know, to get our point across. And, so.

00:49:17

Hellmich, Madeline:

Have you noticed changes in your relationships or even just in like public consciousness, since the protests, not only in Indianapolis, but across the country and around the world?

00:49:34

Kurman, Kurt:

Yeah, for sure. Personally, like, I got a lot of heat from people I knew, because I was very vocal about my opinions of what was happening on social media. And maybe that, maybe it was in hindsight, maybe it was too much. I don't know. But like, that's just how I feel. And like my opinions were strong, definitely turned some people off. Lost a few followers on like Twitter or whatever. But like, I don't really care about that. You know, I had a couple people like confront me. And they're like, I saw your post and I don't agree with it. And I'm like, that's fine. Like, you don't have to. But, but I didn't like, shut them down. I wanted to hear their perspective too, because like, I don't know, I was kind of raised to hear people out. Even if I thought, what they were saying was like not right or something.

But I also saw, you know, pulling it back. You know, just society's response to, you know, implicit bias, racism. I saw a lot of people that were like saying, saying things that were like, I don't know. I don't know how to really describe it just, just hearing people say things like, you know, bad apples. You know, arguing. Like just, a lot of arguing over, you know who is racist? What makes a racist? Things like that. Heard it from family, heard it from, you know, people I knew.

And just the discord on social media, was just like, ridiculous. People literally just like propagating conspiracy. I mean, you see that with COVID too. But with, with the police and with George Floyd, the conspiracies just really got way out of hand, about a lot of things.

But yeah, it was definitely interesting to like talk to coworkers during that time. And, you know, some of them were like, hmm, I don't know. Like I don't know what happened, so I can't make a judgment call. Then some people are like, no. That's messed up. And, you know, talking to friends that are Black, that are African American, and it's like, they're like yeah, we've been experiencing this forever.

And I feel like we all knew that in the back of our minds. But I feel like, you know, in the face of everything that was already happening, just seeing that video. We were just like, how is this happening?

And, you know I still, you know, with, with just the shootings. The police shootings that have continued on into 2021. I'm just like, it's like, did we. It's not that we didn't learn anything, it's just that the people in charge didn't act accordingly. And we're seeing the repercussions of that. It's just like, not enough changed. And, you know, I wouldn't be surprised if there's more protests coming, so.

00:53:32

Hellmich, Madeline:

I need to switch from my AirPods to my speaker because they're about to die. So just give me a second.

00:53:39

Kurman, Kurt:

Yeah.

00:53:53

Hellmich, Madeline:

Can you hear me okay?

00:53:54

Kurman, Kurt:

Mhm.

00:54:13

Hellmich, Madeline:

So. [pause] A loud car on the street. Sorry. Since the protests in Indianapolis. How have you seen, or have you seen, um you know, government officials responding to police brutality in any way?

00:54:40

Kurman, Kurt:

Just here in Indiana? Or just like? Um, no. Like, Indiana, politically, you know. I mean you know, it's very conservative. And like, I wasn't expecting them to pass legislation, kind of looking to fix policing here. Because I know there was even a shooting here in Indianapolis last year. And.

I mean yeah there was a lot of demonstrations, but I feel like once the initial momentum died down, the lawmakers just took it as a win. Meaning they didn't have to act. That's been pretty commonplace here for the past, I mean since I've been alive. But, yeah, it's so unfortunate. But, yeah.

00:55:53

Hellmich, Madeline:

Just before we move on. One other thing I wanted to ask about your experience at the protests was, if people seemed concerned about being exposed to COVID? Or, what steps, people were taking to protect themselves from COVID at the protests?

00:56:12

Kurman, Kurt:

Yeah, that was also something that was really surprising. I mean it was like a good surprise. Like everyone was still very conscious of COVID. Masks. I wore a mask. There were masks everywhere. Yeah, like we were assembling in a large group. So like social distancing, not too great. But, you know, I feel like with the precautions that we had in place, hand sanitizer everywhere, masks everywhere, I feel like we did a pretty good job.

You know, it's not like we were partying. We weren't. It's just like, and, like, for me it was more justified because we were there for a good cause. I mean, it was just kind of an added bonus that everyone was very like COVID cautious about it.

00:57:16

Hellmich, Madelin:

Was there anything else you wanted to add about your experience protesting during COVID before I move on?

00:57:22

Kurman, Kurt:

Yeah, um. Just that, I have no regrets. I would have done it. I would do it again. And, you know, I'll keep speaking my mind and protesting about policing until it changes, foundationally. So.

00:57:50

Hellmich, Madeline:

Um. How have municipal leaders and government officials in your community been responding to the outbreak?

00:58:01

Kurman, Kurt:

Well here in Marion County, I feel like the mayor has done a pretty good job in terms of mandating masks, and in terms of like capacity for reopen. So yeah, on a local level, here in county, I feel like it's been pretty good.

Back in Johnson County, I know that once the mask mandate became advisory. I know in Johnson County, they're like okay. Masks are no longer mandatory, which I mean, I don't even think I've been back into Johnson County since that happened. I probably won't. But, I mean, that that's just like a politics thing too.

You know. I just, in terms of vaccine distribution too. It's been pretty good. You know, I don't know of anyone that's like, trying to get one but can't. So I feel like anyone that wants one is able to get one, which is definitely ideal.

00:59:19

Hellmich, Madeline:

Do you have any thoughts on how local, state, or federal leaders have responded to the crisis differently?

00:59:30

Kurman, Kurt:

Yeah, I feel like, in terms of like local and state, definitely could have done a better job with mask messaging and vaccine messaging. In terms of the safety of vaccines, why you should still wear a mask after you're vaccinated. I feel like federally and state wise, everyone could do a better job with that.

Federally. I know that things, I mean, to put it bluntly, they weren't great last year. Because of just the federal response was so, it was so reactionary and not proactive, which is not what you want in a pandemic. And I feel like now it's been a lot of playing catch up.

And I feel like we've done a good job so far with vaccines. I feel like there's still a lot of work left to do, in regards to that distribution. And, you know, convincing people that it is safe to get a vaccine. I know the recent J&J advisory, really threw me for a loop honestly. Because like, you know, I've heard, because it was a blood clot issue, I think? Where a handful of people are getting blood clots out of like 7 million doses almost. Even though like the odds of you getting a blood clot off of like birth control are like, much like, you're much more likely. So, that's what some friends told me.

But, you know. That aside, I feel like the U.S. is federally doing better obviously than it was. I just hope that they continue to support the states, the municipalities, with regards to the schools, making sure that, you know, essential workers are getting vaccinated, things like that.

01:01:45

Hellmich, Madeline:

Um. Knowing what you know now, what do you think that individuals, communities or governments need to keep in mind for the future?

00:01:59

Kurman, Kurt:

Mm. Just about like COVID in general? I think people should keep in mind that. I think just broadly speaking, you know, be mindful of others. Meaning, just like, when it comes to health. When it comes to public health, it's, you know, we are seeing it firsthand, the

importance of public health and how that equates to our, our freedoms. And, you know, if we have bad public health. We're obviously constricted in what we can do.

And that's out of like an abundance of you know, caution and necessity, because, in March, when we went into full lockdown, like, we kind of had to because of how fast things were deteriorating. And so I feel like people shouldn't take for granted, moving forward, you know, the freedoms that we have as a nation.

And I also feel like people shouldn't demonize the government when it comes to, like, addressing a national issue, such as a pandemic. Meaning that, I mean, obviously the circumstances were kind of messed up last year because basically, the people in charge said we didn't have a problem when we did have a problem. So that was like slightly different. But like, you know, we should trust the federal government to address these issues, and if they aren't addressing the issues, correctly or timely, we need to hold them responsible collectively. Whether that's reaching out to your legislators, whether that's protesting. Because, you know, responsible government is also an accountability thing. We can't just elect these people and then watch them do whatever. Like we, we ultimately have a say if they get to keep their job.

So I feel like the power of the individual to, you know, have their voice heard. Their opinion matters. You know, I absolutely cannot stand when someone says, my vote doesn't matter, because it does. You know, your vote, determines, you know, who sits on the Supreme Court, whose, you know whose individual rights matter.

You know, like so, I feel like this past year. You know we have just seen so much happen. After the dust settles, I feel like, you know, I need to give back to the community in some way, because, you know, it's like a miracle that all these businesses have even survived COVID even when so many haven't.

You know, so it's just like, we gotta build each other up. You know, I'm just so, I'm just so tired of all the division. And I feel like once COVID's passed us, we need to focus on just, you know, fostering our old relationships, building new ones. Stop tearing each other down over nonsense you read on Facebook.

So, you know that's kind of my soapbox about it. Just, you know, moving forward, we just need to treat people better, but be mindful that we have the power to change things if we want to.

01:06:30

Hellmich, Madeline:

I just have a couple more questions. So this is in regards to thinking of the future. If there is, I don't know what, if there will even be a post-pandemic, quote on quote. What can you, or, what do you hope your life is like a year from now?

01:06:52

Kurman, Kurt:

Oh god. A year from now. Well, hopefully I'm all settled in up in Chicago. Hopefully I'm in a committed relationship. Dating during COVID. Ugh, that's been just the worst. Like either nonexistent, or ever done a date over FaceTime? It's just not fun, like.

But yeah, you know I hope, a year from now. You know. I, part of the move has been kind of like, I needed a fresh break, a fresh start. So hopefully I'm acclimated, in my new city. And I'm always looking to the future anyway. So I hope that in a year I'm comfortable in my new role with Chase.

And I hope that, you know, I hope that my friends and family are all healthy and that they're all, like, doing well. I just want everyone to thrive, honestly. You know, and, but yeah just hoping everything's, everything's good. I'm hoping to travel next year too. So.

01:08:17

Hellmich, Madeline:

Looking back, if there's been one positive experience or positive outcome of COVID that may not have happened if the pandemic didn't happen, what would that be?

01:08:35

Kurman, Kurt:

That's another good question. Um. Honestly, in terms of, in terms of work and in terms of my friendships, I feel like both of those things actually kind of got better in a way during COVID.

With work. So I was still pretty new in my old role. But then when work from home started, it was a new adjustment for everybody to do work from home consistently. But for me, it gave me an opportunity to not be, like, because the office environment was intimidating too. So it was good to hone my skills at work while also being in a place I'm comfortable, completely. And I feel like that ultimately helped my job performance.

And in terms of friendships, it became easier in a way to keep tabs on my friends. And, you know, because it's not like, you know, if I was gonna FaceTime you, it's not like they were out doing something. Like we're all at home. So it was easier to keep tabs on people, and to just, I don't know. I feel like I had some of my deepest conversations, in recent memory, during the past year, because, you know, there's so much on my mind and at the same time, like nothing at all. It was so bizarre.

I was just like FaceTiming a friend one night, and we talked for maybe two hours or something, just about random stuff. And you know it, it kind of came to me halfway through the call where I was just thinking like, you know, I don't know if I would have done this pre COVID. You know, because everyone's always very fast paced, busy. [snaps fingers] I'm out doing something. I'm out, you know, meeting someone for dinner, getting drinks somewhere, gotta go do this. But when you're stripped down so much to like, you know, that's the only communication you can do. It definitely was important to take advantage of that. And I definitely feel like I got closer with a lot of friends because of that.

01:11:30

Hellmich, Madeline:

Um. This is the, the last question. So, is there anything I didn't ask you, or any last comment you'd like to make that came up through our conversation?

01:11:48

Kurman, Kurt:

Um, any last comment? Well, I did learn a lot during COVID, but I hope to not repeat another pandemic in my lifetime because it just, it was so like mentally draining. We went over that earlier, but um, yeah, that's just not something I want to relive anytime soon.

But yeah, I hope, I just hope from here on out, everyone just really cherishes, just, what they have around them and, you know. Honestly, yeah, definitely keep your friends and family close, and value their time, value, you know, your relationships, so.

01:12:43

Hellmich, Madeline:

Thank you. I will go ahead and stop the recording.

01:12:49

Kurman, Kurt:

Thank you.