

Transcript of Interview with Paul Jason Baker-Nicholas by Robert Baker-Nicholas

Interviewee: Paul Jason Baker-Nicholas

Interviewer: Robert Baker-Nicholas

Date: 03/13/2021

Location (Interviewee): Wake Forest, North Carolina

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Transcriber: Robert Baker-Nicholas

Abstract:

Paul Jason Baker-Nicholas grew up in Leonardtown Maryland. He studied Theater, Film, and Media Studies at Saint Mary's College of Maryland, where he received his Bachelor of Arts. He then spent several years living in New York City and then moved to Houston Texas where he started a Masters in Ethnomusicology. After spending a semester, he decided not to continue his program and then he decided after a time period he decided to move to Jacksonville, Florida. While living in Jacksonville, Florida that is where he met his future husband, Brad. After dating and living together Brad and Paul Jason decided to move to Raleigh, North Carolina where they bought a house in Wake Forest, North Carolina and got married to one another. Paul Jason speaks about his life as a gay man, how COVID-19 has directly affected him, his community, his family, and his personal life.

Robert Baker-Nicholas 0:01

My name is Robert Baker Nicholas. I'm here with Paul Jason Baker Nicholas, interviewing him on March 13, 2021. We are completing this interview as part of a project for Arizona State University history department. We're contributing to an archive about the Coronavirus pandemic and its effects on the LGBTQ plus community. I have a few questions to ask you, Mr. Baker-Nicholas. First off, I wanted to say thank you for agreeing to this interview. So the first area that we're going to talk about is your background. So where do you live? And what is your occupation?

Paul Jason Baker-Nicholas 0:54

I currently live in Wake Forest, North Carolina. My occupation is, I am a interior designer, field technician installer.

Robert Baker-Nicholas 1:12

Okay, thank you. Tell me about how you consider yourself as part of the LGBTQ plus community or an ally of said community?

Paul Jason Baker-Nicholas 1:24

Well, I would say I am a part of the community because I am married to my husband of the same sex. So, I guess I would consider myself to be a part of the, part of community. Yeah.

Robert Baker-Nicholas 1:41

Okay, explain to me how you remember life within the LGBTQ plus community, and your own personal world prior to the pandemic.

Paul Jason Baker-Nicholas 1:55

Let's see, I would say that the gay community before the pandemic, there'd be a lot more socialization, there'd be a lot more ability to interact and connect with people, going to the bars, going to the clubs, things of that kind of nature. Personally, I didn't do too much the clubbing or the bars. But for me personally, because my background is in theater, theater and film, I interacted more with the community through volunteering at the local theater, and whatnot. So, for me, I was a lot more hands on involved in the arts prior to the pandemic.

Robert Baker-Nicholas 2:44

Okay. What are some of the things you did in your day-to-day life prior to the pandemic?

Paul Jason Baker-Nicholas 2:54

Let's see, things that I did day to day well, other than working my usual full-time job, nine to five. From time to time, I would volunteer at the local theatre where I would probably be backstage helping out, being a stagehand for some of the shows and whatnot. And, yeah, that was pretty much before the pandemic.

Robert Baker-Nicholas 3:25

Okay, can you describe a normal day at work prior to the pandemic?

Paul Jason Baker-Nicholas 3:34

Yeah! Basically, I would wake up at my usual time, which consists anywhere from like 5:30 to probably about six in the morning, get myself thrown together, grab breakfast, grab my coffee, run to work, get in there and get my day started probably around the 8:30 mark. And usually, my job prior to the pandemic was I was a warehouse coordinator. So, I mainly worked in the warehouse. I was not in the field at that time. So, it was a lot, not too much different than social distancing, because I pretty much was by myself in the warehouse. But that pretty much was it, and then I got off usually around 4:30 or five came home and kind of just putted around the house, and you know, cook dinner and get odd ends and run errands and stuff like that, and from time to time would go out and audition for shows or I would help out with a local theater show. Yeah so.

Robert Baker-Nicholas 4:53

Very nice. When you first learned about COVID-19, what were your initial thoughts?

Paul Jason Baker-Nicholas 5:03

When I first learned about it, or did I hear about it?

Robert Baker-Nicholas 5:07

When we first learned about it.

Paul Jason Baker-Nicholas 5:10

When I first learned about it, I was kind of, I guess I was kind of in shock or surprised that something like that would exist, I guess. For me, I compared it to the Ebola, and because it was like on the other side of the world that really didn't affect me at that time. But just hearing about a virus that could do something like that, that could be so contagious. Yeah, I was a little, it was a little jarring. I wouldn't say I was scared or anything, but I was just kind of taken back.

Robert Baker-Nicholas 5:56

So how is this pandemic affected your personal life slash home life?

Paul Jason Baker-Nicholas 6:04

This pandemic really has affected the way that I would say my husband and I really interact and socialize with our friends and family. Within the Wake Forest area, usually prior to we would, we would go out or we would have people come over, hang out in the front porch, we would go out, grab a drink or two, nothing like super crazy or anything like that. Since the pandemic, the last year has literally been at a point where we rarely go out. One of our favorite activities is, we would love to, we would usually go to the movie theater and catch a show. And since the pandemic, we have not stepped foot in a movie theater in almost a year. Actually, it's been a year, and a few months, so it's, it's kind of really hindered a lot of social activities that my husband and I would do together and has really changed how we do go out and socialize, being careful on that, on that matter. So.

Robert Baker-Nicholas 7:25

So, on that note, I'm actually going to talk or ask questions about social life during this pandemic. So how would you describe your social life prior to the pandemic?

Paul Jason Baker-Nicholas 7:43

My social life prior to pandemic was a lot more interacting with people, meeting people for coffee or hanging out at dinner, grabbing a drink, working with people behind the scenes and getting, you know, getting, getting to know them and doing a lot of church activities too. So doing all of that involvement. Yeah, so it was really hands on social interaction, getting to know people, and that was my life prior to the pandemic.

Robert Baker-Nicholas 8:20

Okay, so what were your feelings about the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, concerning your social life?

Paul Jason Baker-Nicholas 8:32

My concern was, I guess what, what it would, what it would look like and what it would do. For example, going to church and being involved in the church and doing outreach programs within our church was, was rather very important to me. Right around the same time the pandemic kicked into full gear, the leadership of our church basically made a command decision that in order to protect the people at the church, that they would stop holding services in the physical building. And that really kind of put everything on hold as far as being involved in meeting people at church because now, everything was done online. And it really changed the way that I, my husband, I interacted with people at church because everything was now done online. Like we couldn't just, you know, run down the street and meet up with such and such at the coffee

shop now, we had to go meet up a certain such and such online or give them a call or text them or Zoom with them or whatever other social app program that we are using, and still do.

Robert Baker-Nicholas 9:58

Okay, so has there been any notable changes to socialize during the Covid- 19? pandemic?

Paul Jason Baker-Nicholas 10:07

Oh, yeah. As I just described in the last question, yes, the way we interact with people now, via online, through Zoom, text messaging, Facebook apps, Facebook Messenger, basically, that's all we really do. Even if we do go out, it's wearing the masks and staying distanced and sanitizing your hands like there's no tomorrow. And really just trying to keep our distance from people as best as we can, if we do go out and eat, for example, prior to the pandemic, we really didn't care. But now when we do go out to eat, my husband, and I really look at where we are sitting in position to other people in the restaurant, if there is outdoor seating, that's kind of our first priority is we would like to sit outside away from people. So it's really, it's been challenging in that remark. Yeah.

Robert Baker-Nicholas 11:10

I completely understand. Have you went out and socialized and attended any LGBTQ plus events that you normally what have?

Paul Jason Baker-Nicholas 11:20

Are you asking have I done any during the pandemic?

Robert Baker-Nicholas 11:24

Yes.

Paul Jason Baker-Nicholas 11:25

No. Simply because due to restrictions, social distance restrictions, a lot of the events that the LGBT community would have in the Raleigh area have been either postponed or moved online. And it's quite difficult to interact with, with the gay community online, especially if you are not a solid friend of someone who is in the community, if you're just acquaintances, it becomes even more awkward, because you don't really know the person well enough to actually carry on a dialogue of any kind. The conversation is, I would say, kind of superficial in that regard versus if you were in you know, in person meeting the person you can actually carry on and normalize conversation, and build repour getting to know the person, and you can still do that on Zoom or whatever other app you're using. But it's, it's somehow just different being doing, doing online versus actually being, being there. It's a whole different set of protocols when you're interacting with someone. So yeah, it does, has, doesn't, and it has really affected the way that I interact with the gay community, because I kind of stopped interacting all together with the gay community because it's really hard to, to socialize.

Robert Baker-Nicholas 13:09

Okay. How do you think your personal world has been affected by the pandemic overall?

Paul Jason Baker-Nicholas 13:18

How y personal world has been affected?

Robert Baker-Nicholas 13:20

Yes.

Paul Jason Baker-Nicholas 13:22

Oh, gosh. Well, I, I, for me, doing theater, doing theater related activities, or going to go see a film, or things of that nature was just part of life. To honestly say I have not done theater in over a year has been extremely difficult on that end, because I'm used to being involved in some kind of theatrical production or some kind of theater activities, whether I'm on stage, backstage or doing something in that regard. So not having that ability to do that for a full year plus, has been really, really challenging because I've developed a lot of anxiety just sitting here watching Netflix and Hulu, and there's only so much TV you can watch or binge watch before you start pulling your hair out and wishing you could go out in the world and go do stuff. So yeah.

Robert Baker-Nicholas 14:25

I can completely understand with that. How well do you think we are prepared for the next pandemic?

Paul Jason Baker-Nicholas 14:39

I would like to say that we are better off, but honestly I don't think we are. With the given, with the given circumstances, the way that things have been progressing, especially with the whole vaccination efforts. I just feel like we are trying to catch up with being prepared, and that's quite difficult to do, because even, even our as administration is trying to push it, it's just overall as a society, we aren't just ready to be mature enough to handle the responsibilities what we need to do to protect ourselves, our families. So, yeah, we're not ready.

Robert Baker-Nicholas 15:30

Yes. How has the pandemic affected the LGBTQ plus community?

Paul Jason Baker-Nicholas 15:36

Well, as I said, it's really hindered the way that people interact. Most, most people in the LGBT community do sport activities or go to the bars or go clubbing, or they do extracurricular activities. For example, my friend Terry started his own kickball team for a, for, for a fundraiser that they were doing, and I had the ability to be involved in that. And that was really, really fun. But with the whole given pandemic, and all that, that's been kind of shut down. So the, so the desire ability to actually connect with other, other people in the gay community, through extracurricular activities in the theatre arts and whatnot, has really stopped like, just stopped. Which, again, really sucks because for a lot of people, that was their way of getting their anxiety out or getting their stress out. Um, so I can imagine it's quite difficult for a lot of people in the gay community.

Robert Baker-Nicholas 16:53

Yes. Speaking of stress and anxiety, I have a couple questions about health during the pandemic. How would you describe your general health prior to the pandemic?

Paul Jason Baker-Nicholas 17:07

Well, I was a lot more active, I'll be honest with you on that. I would say it wasn't the best, but it wasn't felt worse. So it was okay.

Robert Baker-Nicholas 17:23

Okay, so explain to me, your health now that it's been almost for about a year since the pandemic has started.

Paul Jason Baker-Nicholas 17:34

The first word that comes to mind is fat, fat, fat, mcfatty, I have gained a lot of weight. I show no, because I haven't done as much activities properly so but ever since pandemic has kind of rolled out, I have gained a substantial amount of weight. And I got a little bit, pudgy belly going on. So yeah, I could use, I could use the opportunity to burn off some, some weight.

Robert Baker-Nicholas 18:12

Yes, I know quite a few people feel the same way. COVID-15, I think is real. So family life. How many people live in your household?

Paul Jason Baker-Nicholas 18:25

Well, human beings that live in our household are two. We have three four legged children, our dogs who live with us.

Robert Baker-Nicholas 18:38

Okay.

Paul Jason Baker-Nicholas 18:39

We have two humans.

Robert Baker-Nicholas 18:40

How has work in the COVID-19 pandemic affected your family life?

Paul Jason Baker-Nicholas 18:52

As I said earlier in the interview, the way that my husband and I would interact or not necessarily interact, but socialize with our friends. Prior to we would go out and you know, meet up with who have drinks or whatever that has all kind of hindered, been put to a stop. It hasn't been until recently, probably I would say maybe within the last two or three months, that he and I have started going out and eating. But when we do go out in public, it's trying to stay away from people as best as we can as far as table wise. making the choices sitting outside versus inside the restaurant. It's been a lot of phone conversations, a lot of text messaging, a lot of Facebook messaging, versus actually meeting people face to face.

Robert Baker-Nicholas 19:52

Yes. What, if any, post work routines have you developed at home to keep everyone in the household safe?

Paul Jason Baker-Nicholas 20:05

Well, I know from time to time I do, I do spray the doorknobs and the handles of the doors with Lysol spray. I've gotten to the ability now, where, prior to the pandemic, I wasn't really focused on cleanliness. But now I'm more adamant about wiping down the counters with the Clorox wipes. I know the beginning, we had a hell of a time trying to find it. Because everyone was everyone was taking all that cleaning supplies. But once we actually had a small supply enough, we started using it. I think just monitoring what it's been like for us here in the household is my husband and I, we monitor where we go as far as letting us, letting each other know, hey, this is where we're going. We really do go out except for if we need to run errands and things of that kind of nature. So we don't really go out just, just to go out. We only go out and drive around if we have somewhere to be with we have something to do that's important. Otherwise, we just kind of stay at home.

Robert Baker-Nicholas 21:38

And what concerns did you have about working during the pandemic?

Paul Jason Baker-Nicholas 21:45

My big concern was what, I guess, I would say during the height of the pandemic, again, I was still working in the warehouse as a warehouse coordinator. So I would, it would mostly be myself and the mostly be my, my colleague who would be working in the warehouse. We didn't do too much social interaction. So as far as working goes, there wasn't too much concern on that front, I guess, with work my one concern is what is that? What, what would it look like for our installers and our teams who go out into the field. Now that I'm on the other side of the fence, and I am an installer, it hasn't changed drastically as much as just a lot more safety precautions. For example, when we do go out into the field, there's two installers per vehicle. We have to wear face masks at all times when we're in the building, on the job site, which is quite difficult to do. So a lot of just kind of safety measures just, sanitizing your hands like crap, and just trying to try to wear, try to wear that stupid mask.

Robert Baker-Nicholas 23:12

Okay, well, I've two last questions for you. So the first question is, what advice would you give your pre-pandemic self about the COVID-19 pandemic?

Paul Jason Baker-Nicholas 23:27

Develop an exercise routine that you can do and stick to it. Do not eat as many sweets and junk food as you have. Find more time to enjoy your husband's company. I get, yeah, so that's, that's pretty much it. Try, really try not to stress about what you cannot, what you cannot control. And for the love of God, don't turn on the news at all.

Robert Baker-Nicholas 24:14

And finally, is there any other points or topics that you would like to discuss before we end this interview?

Paul Jason Baker-Nicholas 24:24

Nope, none I can really think of, I'll just say this in closing. As, as far as personally go-, as far as personal goes, we put the whole COVID, the only thing that has, the only real thing that has been

impacted is the way that we do socialize with our friends and family, which has been a huge hindrance. But overall, it's, hasn't, I mean, it's changed a little bit, but it hasn't changed as dramatic as, as I, as I thought or other people have, have felt the pandemic. So that's, I guess that's about it.

Robert Baker-Nicholas 25:14

Well, I appreciate you taking the time this evening to speak with me and to do this interview. And I wish you the best of luck with the rest of the pandemic. Thank you.

Paul Jason Baker-Nicholas 25:26

All right, you too. Thank you.