

Pandemic Perspectives: Jeffersonville Residents Recount Their Lives During the 2020 Covid-19 Pandemic. Interview with Erin Harper

Jen Weidner 0:04 Today is May the 15th 2021. I'm Jen Weidner with the Jeffersonville Township Public Library, conducting interviews for *Pandemic Perspectives: Jeffersonville Residents Recount Their Lives During the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic*. This project was made possible with a grant from the Indiana Genealogical Society. I'm here today with Erin Harper. Erin, what is your profession?

Erin Harper 0:27: That is a good question that I don't really know the answer to. I kind of do a little bit of this, a little bit of that. I'm a videographer, I have a natural skincare company, I work for my parents' embroidery company, and I work for Amazon and Whole Foods delivering stuff for them. So, little bit of this, little bit of that.

Jen Weidner 0:50: Do you remember what your first reaction was when you heard about COVID?

Erin Harper 0:55: Well, we were in Panama, no I guess, when we first heard about COVID we were in Costa Rica. I don't know, when we did COVID, like, what were the dates?

Jen Weidner 1:07: I can say like, for the United States, I remember hearing about it, December, January, early – early 2020. And then, like, things started happening really fast like mid-March.

Erin Harper 1:21: Okay, so that sounds, that makes sense, because we started traveling towards the middle, early January of 2020, so we weren't concerned about it at all, obviously, because we decided to go travel anyways. It wasn't until early March that it became a concern. We were in Panama, and we were actually on a tour with a group. And these people were from Wisconsin, and we were with a lady, a family friend of ours, Marie, and she did tours in Panama. So we, it was then, with that group that we got concerned because the Americans came, and we're really concerned about it. So, didn't get really concerned until mid March.

Jen Weidner 2:06: So, did you think that it was gonna hit the United States or Indiana as hard as it did?

Erin Harper 2:12: I actually did, being outside of the United States gave us a little bit different of a perspective, and I, we didn't want to come home, because it was worse in the United States than it was in Panama. So, we really thought about staying, but it wasn't until we saw Justin Trudeau, the Canadian Prime Minister, he looked into the camera, I felt like he spoke into my soul, and was like, "if you're Canadian abroad, get home now." I looked at my husband, I showed him. I was like, "he's talking to Canadians, but we're going home, like, we got to go home now."

Jen Weidner 2:44: Right, so what was that like, trying to get home?

Erin Harper 2:49: It was interesting, we got very lucky in the time frame that we did get home, we, when we saw that video of Justin Trudeau. Jordan said, "okay book the flight." I got online, I booked a flight, 12 hours later, we were at the airport in Panama, and 12 hours after that we were home, so within 24 hours after deciding to come home, we were home, but the drive to the airport in Panama was crazy. They had enforced a curfew, 11am, or 11pm, you couldn't be out. So, we're in Panama City, Panama – huge city – and we're on the interstates going through the city and there's no one. We saw, like, eight cars total on the way to the airport, at about 11 o'clock

Jen Weidner 3:34: How surreal!

Erin Harper 3:35: It was the creepiest thing in the world. We saw a few cops, and then like a couple other cars; so scary. So, we were nervous going to the airport and then we show up in Fort Lauderdale, no mask, no social distancing, no one who was cooking food had a mask on; it was, it was, it was crazy.

Jen Weidner 3:54: That's horrifying, knowing what we know now.

Erin Harper 3:56: I was very upset, and we have a video on our YouTube channel, then you can tell I was upset.

Jen Weidner 4:04: So, once you guys did get home, what was that like?

Erin Harper 4:09: So, when we got home, we thought, okay, we're going to go home, we have to quarantine because we traveled, we were in four international airports within 12 hours so we quarantined, self quarantined at the time for 14 days, and we thought, okay, we have 14 days. Hopefully, the country will go into a lockdown to have the entire 14 days for the whole country. That's going to slow the curve and then everything's gonna go back to normalish.

Jen Weidner 4:37: So, you didn't think it was gonna last like past the summer?

Erin Harper 4:39: No, no, we thought we would go home and then we'd start working on our van and then travel in our Dodge Promaster, which is what we're converting into a camper van. Yeah, we thought we'd get back out to travel pretty quickly, which is comical looking back on now.

Jen Weidner 4:55: Here we are a year and a half almost later.

Erin Harper 4:58: Yeah, yeah.

Jen Weidner 4:59: So, what has changed in your life since coming back and being in the midst of all this craziness?

Erin Harper 5:06: Um, I would say it's been a lot emotionally, psychologically, that's been a huge change, the unknown has been very difficult to handle. And we came, when we came home, we came back to live with my parents, um, short term which turned into a whole year, pretty much. And so that was difficult to handle just, you know, being a 30 year-old living at home.

Jen Weidner 5:32: Especially when you have to plan this around-the-world trip and probably sold your house or whatever and—

Erin Harper 5:38: Yeah, yeah, so we had this great vision of what our lives were going to be. 2020 was going to be one of the best years of our lives, which is hilarious to look back on now, but that and then, but something good that came out of it, I did start a small videography company, which is really cool, which brought me here today.

Jen Weidner 5:56: Yep, that's how we met.

Erin Harper 5:57: So, you know, you got to be able to go with the flow and deal with, you know, the bad with the good, and we're all going through it together, so that's what I have, it's brought me comfort, oddly enough.

Jen Weidner 6:11: Yeah, that we were all, we may be going through it differently, but we're all going through it.

Erin Harper 6:16: Exactly right.

Jen Weidner 6:17: So, you've been doing videography during the pandemic; what kind of videos have you been doing?

Erin Harper 6:22: So, anything from a wedding video last year which has gotten a six wedding videos this year, and we've been doing stuff for the Jeffersonville Township Public Library, and for the Jeffersonville Fire Department, we're hoping to do a music video for a bluegrass band, band, they've tried – they're trying to figure out logistics.

Jen Weidner 6:43: That would be fun!

Erin Harper 6:44: Yeah, so we'll see if that happens or not but, um, you know, just a little thing. Things just happen, word of mouth, Facebook, you know, social media is a great tool for us. People just tag my name, and I'll get in contact with people about different services.

Jen Weidner 6:59: So if the pandemic hadn't happened, you wouldn't have been doing all this really cool stuff, right, I would have been but not locally.

Erin Harper 7:05: Exactly, It'd have been different cool stuff. The reason we had all this equipment is because we were video videoing our travels and putting it on YouTube, we – shameless plug – in which who knows where you're going to be when this is, but E and J Go Away, was the name of, is the name of our YouTube channel, so we just planned on making cool travel videos. And then that turned into being able to do cool things in our community with really cool people, so it's worked out.

Jen Weidner 7:36: So, you had COVID Back in February of 2021; what was that like?

Erin Harper 7:43: Again, that was difficult because we were at my parents and we were trying not to get them infected, so it was quite depressing because we just, like, stayed, we tried to stay locked up in our room the whole time. So, two weeks and a little square box just, it was difficult, and I think it made us feel worse than we would have because we weren't, like, up and about.

Jen Weidner 8:04: Yeah, you can really move around and go out.

Erin Harper 8:06: And so we're just laying for, I mean for real, laying for like one whole week straight, but as far as symptoms, it wasn't terrible for us, we definitely had all these symptoms. To this day, we're almost three months later, I still can't smell properly at all, and my taste isn't back 100% either, because I think I can't smell, which is just really odd. I think it's gone through ebbs and flows, I thought it got better. And just recently, with my skincare products I use a ton of essential oils to scent everything, and I can't smell them properly. I'm asking my partner, I was like "does this smell bad," like it is, it often she's like "no, it's fine."

Jen Weidner 8:45: So, that affects your business, your skincare business. How long did it take you, besides the your smell, to feel somewhat normal again?

Erin Harper 8:55: I would say from, like, day one when we thought we had it to the end, maybe like three weeks, but still, like, tired. If we went, like, on a walk or a hike or for food downstairs or something I definitely felt it, but we didn't have – we got lucky, you know, just being young, but luck, I think, has a lot to do with it as well. It wasn't too bad.

Jen Weidner 9:18: What are you looking forward to most once everything is back to whatever our new normal is?

Erin Harper 9:22: Travel, travel, travel!

Jen Weidner 9:24: That's what I figured you would say.

Erin Harper 9:27: On the way here, we had the windows down and the wind's blowing in my hair, beautiful day outside, and I just looked at my husband and I thought "I can't wait until this, we're in this exact same position but we're in the van going somewhere cool." Travel is easily the biggest one. We're hoping that we're going to use the entire year of 2022 for travel, but last time we planned that and didn't happen so.

Jen Weidner 9:52: Where's the first place you want to go?

Erin Harper 9:54: That is a very good question. We had kind of thought about doing travel across the United States in our van, but right now we found there's an opportunity in Italy – because they've been hit so hard by the pandemic – that they are doing an incentive for young families abroad to bring them in. So they're paying part of people's rent to come live in their towns in hopes that they will love it and want to stay there, because these villages are just dropping off, all the kids are leaving to go to Rome to get high paying jobs. So you can live in, in Italy in Tuscany, gorgeous views for, like, around \$300 USD. If you get you know like a small enough little cute apartment. And so we're thinking about doing that. So I don't know exactly what we want to do. I need to get to Croatia ASAP, so if we lived in Italy, right, because from Croatia. So Croatia is the answer to that question, but it may not be the immediate right, yeah.

Jen Weidner 11:02: Okay, what did you learn about the pandemic that you continue to do or hope that you continue to do?

Erin Harper 11:07: You know, just basic hygiene I think is a huge thing. I think a lot of people haven't been as sick as normal because we are washing our hands better.

Jen Weidner 11:16: We're wearing masks.

Erin Harper 11:17: Wearing masks and I sanitize all the time, especially with us doing our deliveries. I sanitize in between every delivery that and then yeah I think it is just like basic hygiene that we knew, but we didn't really practice it.

Jen Weidner 11:32: Because I had Dr. Yazel here from the health department, he said he had no cases of the flu this year.

Erin Harper 11:38: That's insane.

Jen Weidner 11:39: Uh-huh. He's like, "so that's proof that obviously masking does something for us."

Erin Harper 11:45: Yeah, so I've kind of enjoyed the masks. For the most part.

Jen Weidner 11:49: Right.

Erin Harper 11:51: Yeah, I think it is just basic hygiene that, and maybe just to be appreciative of what you have when you have it. My uncle was taken from us because of COVID. So, just to be thankful for who you have, what you have every single day, because you, seriously, I know it's a cliché, but it is for a reason, you don't know what you have until it's gone.

Jen Weidner 12:15: I think this has shown us that more than anything, yeah.

Erin Harper 12:19: Time is sensitive and just to wake up every day and say what you're thankful for, and I started my day that way today, and that's how I want to start my day every day, just being grateful. We don't know. You know, we obviously have no control over anything, this has proven that. And so, just be grateful and try to, you know, have a positive outlook, because we don't, we're not in control, we don't know what's going to happen.

Jen Weidner 12:44: Is there anything else you'd like to tell us?

Erin Harper 12:46: Well, it's, yeah, it's just, it's been a very difficult year. I think everybody's dealt with mental illness in one way shape or form, to varying degrees. And I think the biggest thing would probably be I hope that people get help when they need it. It's like the hardest time to get help when you need it to reach out and to act to literally just to book the appointment to make the call. So I do hope that people have seen that I do feel like mental health has been a big topic throughout all of this, which has been great, and it's made people probably less scared to reach out for help and I hope that continues. Yeah, I think COVID definitely brought on a big mental health wave of people taking care of themselves, I hope. But yeah, I'm grateful that we got home, I don't, I haven't said this yet, when we were in Panama, and we got home in those 24 hours. It was three days before they closed the borders down indefinitely.

Jen Weidner 13:56: So, you barely made it.

Erin Harper 13:58: We barely made it, so that if we hadn't seen Justin Trudeau, we might have been stuck there for months. The – our friend that I was talking about, Maria the tour guide. She lived there, she has dual citizenship, and she was stuck for months and then ended up having to pay like a \$1,000 one-way ticket to Florida from Panama, that's like a two-and-a-half, three hour ride.

Jen Weidner 14:21: Not that far.

Erin Harper 14:21: Not far at all. So, I think we got home for like \$300 total, I think it is about \$150, and that was two different flights. Well, three total but two different, you know, reservations. So yeah, that I'm very grateful we made it home, because who knows what would have happened money wise I think all of our savings would have been gone, we'd have to live, but there'd been no way to make money.

Jen Weidner 14:45: Right!

Erin Harper 14:46: Because everything was closed. Exactly. So, I think, yeah, grateful has been the way I've been trying to get through all of this, and just trying to take time whenever I know I'm getting close to like a breaking point, going on a hike, taking care of myself, and not putting too much pressure on the future, because who the heck knows?

Jen Weidner 14:57: We don't know what's going to happen, I mean, things look good now, but—

Erin Harper 15:15: Exactly. So, I think just being grateful for what we have and going with the flow has been a huge thing that COVID has taught me, and I think everyone, throughout this. So I'm grateful to be here and so happy to be alive, honestly.

Jen Weidner 15:33: I'm very grateful that you got to come in and share your story with us. Thank you.

Erin Harper 15:36: Thank you, Jen.