

*Pandemic Perspectives: Jeffersonville Residents Recount Their Lives During the 2020 Covid-19 Pandemic. Interview with Carrie Beth Collins*

Jen Weidner 0:03: Today is May the 25th 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 Carrie Beth Collins, local artist. Carrie, do you remember when you first heard about the Coronavirus COVID-19?

Carrie Beth Collins 0:31: Yes, it was in February of 2020. That's, that's pretty much when I first heard about it at work. And I think that's when most people started hearing a few little inklings about it. Did you—

Jen Weidner 0:45: Did you think it would come to the US, let alone Southern Indiana?

Carrie Beth Collins 0:51: I worked with somebody who was very paranoid about it. So yes, he, he felt like it was going to change the world and—

Jen Weidner 0:59: He was right.

Carrie Beth Collins 1:00: He was right.

Jen Weidner 1:01: What was your occupation at that time?

Carrie Beth Collins 1:03: I was a dental hygienist. And we were right there—

Jen Weidner 1:06: You were right up in people's business!

Carrie Beth Collins 1:08: Right up in there, getting sprayed on, spit on, and there was very, very little, almost zero guidance from the American Dental Association at the time, because we were all doing all this for the first time, everybody was just learning about it.

Jen Weidner 1:25: So, how long was it before you started taking more precautions than normal?

Carrie Beth Collins 1:33: Well, basically, I went to work on March 16, and on March 17 we shut down.

Jen Weidner 1:43: Was that because of the stay-at-home order issued by the governor?

Carrie Beth Collins 1:46: Yeah, so, St. Patrick's Day, it was, you know, I saw patients the day before and I was a little leery, because we already knew that there was some things coming around. But yeah, it was just like one day you're, you're doing your job normally, and the next

day you're told not to come in for two months. But, we were one of the first ones that they brought back, which, you know, at the time, you couldn't go out to eat, right, you could come to work and spit all over me. It was just, it was, it was a, it was a weird world.

Jen Weidner 2:20: So were you all completely closed for two months?

Carrie Beth Collins 2:23: Yeah, basically completely closed and, also, just like everybody else is trying to navigate this new way of isolating people, you know, whereas patients used to just walk in the door, they now have to sit in their car, and we had to figure out, like, how are they going to check in, and how are we going to keep people as far away as they need to be? And so, we were not in the office, we weren't seeing patients, but we were there, trying to figure out how to see patients and trying to do some, some training on how to fit our masks and how to— it was really difficult trying to get gowns that would cover you from your neck to your knees and face shields, and so—

Jen Weidner 3:12: Getting PPE's was an issue?

Carrie Beth Collins 3:14: That was difficult. You were only allowed so much. And then, you were asked to use so much more. And thankfully, places like Maker 13 here in Jeffersonville, thankfully, places like that stepped up and said, “Hey, we know you need faceshields, let's make some for you,” and so, they were some of the first places that we were getting.

Jen Weidner 3:35: Because you couldn't get that kind of stuff, even in the medical field, it was—

Carrie Beth Collins 3:39: You know, you had an order on Amazon and then you had to wonder if it was gonna fit, and then sometimes the order might say, “Oh, we'll get it to you in three weeks,” and then it's like, “Oh sorry, it's gonna be six weeks,” and you're expected to go to work and you have to learn all this new stuff and—

Jen Weidner 3:54: You got to change all that stuff after each patient?

Carrie Beth Collins 3:56: Yeah, yeah, you had to garb up, and you know I went from wearing, you know, my scrubs and regular tennis shoes and just, like, a lab jacket that buttoned up the front, and they call them a level three masks which is just, basically, what everybody's wearing, the disposables. So, you went from wearing that, to all the, you know, the same clothes, but over the top of that another gown came in and N-95 Mask, and then a level three mask over that, a face shield and a hairnet, and something to cover your shoes, so you looked like you were from outer space. And you're trying to breathe and talk and see and everything's foggy and, yeah.

Jen Weidner 4:44: So, during this time, you decided to leave that profession.

Carrie Beth Collins 4:44: Yes!

Jen Weidner 4:44: So, you've been a dental hygienist for how long?

Carrie Beth Collins 4:52: 22 years!

Jen Weidner 4:53: 22 years, and was it the pandemic that made you leave, or was it just, you, just, just time for a change?

Carrie Beth Collins 5:02: It was the pandemic is what was the tipping point for sure. It's a good thing that I was germaphobic, too, for all my patients, for that reason.

Jen Weidner 5:13: Yes, for sure!

Carrie Beth Collins 5:14: But aside from that being a scare and me having autoimmune issues that I just wasn't sure about returning to work.

Jen Weidner 5:25: Well, there were so many unknowns and things were changing almost daily about what we should do what we shouldn't do.

Carrie Beth Collins 5:32: Right, but, you know, a lot of those people I saw for 22 years. So, I saw some of them four times a year for that many years, and now you're saying I can't hug them and I can't really have unnecessary conversations with them, I can't ask them about their family. I can't. I guess I don't know if I'd hug them or not. I can't accept their gifts, you know, some of them would bring me tomatoes out of their garden and just different little sweet things like that. That, that was the highlight of my day and that's what kept me going all those years, and when all of that changed, it, it changed the profession for me, it lost, it lost its...

Jen Weidner 6:10: Personal touch?

Carrie Beth Collins 6:11: Yes, exactly. And one of the dentists that I worked for, he was overtop and wonderful, and he was really great about it all, and then the other dentists that worked for kind of had that mentality that he kind of made fun of me for wanting to have the extra PPE there, and which is what we were supposed to be doing and you know, but-

Jen Weidner 6:35: In the end, I mean, that's what saves so many people's lives that are in the medical profession.

Carrie Beth Collins 6:38: Exactly, so, you know, between the one office that was handled it really great. I knew that we were my group of people since I had been working at that same practice all those years. I knew that I wasn't going to be able to see some of them for so long, because they were in the age group that wasn't allowed to come in yet. So, 65 and older wasn't allowed. I think they all opened that up in August, maybe. So, from May to August, the patient pool would be lower and I just knew it was just like, "Okay, It's time." You know, it's just time to pivot, and if anything 2020 taught us, is the great time to change things if you need it.

Jen Weidner 7:22: So, what are you doing now for your job?

Carrie Beth Collins 7:26: Well, I decided to go full time with art. I'm a painter. I did that that year when all the art shows closed. But the good thing about having that extra time is, you know, I had always been a hobbyist. I started painting about 20 years ago and it was just a way to unwind after work. And I got to take it from that to actually legitimizing it to being a real business. So, right now there's still not a ton of art shows, there's some of them coming in, there's some of them still canceling for the fall, it's just, it's hit or miss, but I attended my first art show last weekend and people were just so happy to be out and so excited to see artists to get into, walk around and have that art show experience that, it's really, it was helpful for me, you know, to see that again, so that's what I'm doing now and I'm doing the not-so-fun stuff, like right now, where I'm learning how to do spreadsheets and bookkeeping, and—

Jen Weidner 8:38: The more business side.

Carrie Beth Collins 8:39: Of social media and the things that aren't so much fun, but I'm preparing that for whenever I'm doing bigger shows next year, so that I'm not scrambling to learn those basics, so it's been kind of like the world hit the pause button for a minute and I felt like, you know, it was a good year to pivot and learn, because that's a whole different career for sure. Like, I never even had to use email for 22 years of learning, you know, of doing dentistry, never even had to use that, and I go from that, to now I work for an artist nonprofit also and, you know, I was like, meaning to reply to the entire group and I would just reply to, like, one person, and then then, you know, I had to figure email out, I had to figure some really basic stuff out, how to build a website and just, that's what I'm doing. It's like, I feel like it's an education, except for I'm going to University of Google right now.

Jen Weidner 9:36: But there's so many things out there to help you right there and figure things out and—

Carrie Beth Collins 9:41: Yes, and as much of an introvert as I am, meeting people through the artists nonprofit that I work for has been really helpful, because I've learned more about social media and websites and all that, and they know about doing art shows and how to survive those, the outdoor ones especially, that I've always been hesitant to do, so, we give and take, you know, it's kind of cool. One of my friends, I call her my art wife, because we just, we just talk all the time, when we share information and that's, that's what I've been up to lately.

Jen Weidner 10:18: So, do you think that you, yourself and other artists have used COVID to help them cope and to become more creative and maybe try a different form of art?

Carrie Beth Collins 10:31: A various small percentage. So, a lot of artists, they're used to just doing the thing and selling the stuff and doing the thing and selling stuff. And when all the art shows closed down, a lot of them felt uninspired because they didn't have, you know, you can create all this stuff, but it felt like, what for?

Jen Weidner 10:53: Who's gonna see it?

Carrie Beth Collins 10:54: Right, or, you know, so that was, that was one thing is, a lot of artists felt really uninspired, they felt paralyzed by, just like everybody else did, by the fear of, you know, running out of toilet paper, yeah, running out of food, how do we get groceries, and so, a lot of artists really, really struggle with inspiration, and some of them still are, but, you know, now that they have a few shows on their calendars, some of them are starting to get back in their studios again and starting to create other ones, they were like, "You know what, since I'm not going to be art shows, I'm not so busy I can't stop for a minute. I'm going to experiment with this new medium, or I'm going to try something else." But a lot of them were at a loss. Artists are terrible at keeping books, a lot of them are. So, they didn't even have, really, a way to show their income.

Jen Weidner 11:54: Right!

Carrie Beth Collins 11:55: To apply for unemployment, a lot of them were struggling with that. So, that's a lesson to any future artists listening to this: learn how to keep your books, because, you know, if you have to prove your income to be able to get unemployment, you're self-employed, you've got to keep those necessary things, because they ask you for. So yeah, a lot of them were struggling with that, and, and just, just kind of paralyzed by fear, but then, of course, you saw in different social media how there was some artists who were just, like, playing concerts on their phone and streaming on.

Jen Weidner 12:31: Yes, there was a lot of that and just anything to keep going and show people that, you know, this isn't the end of the world just yet, you're still moving forward and—

Carrie Beth Collins 12:40: Yeah I remember the — I felt really, I was really sad when I first left hygiene, it was like, I didn't know what to do with myself. And I just, I was organizing the heck out of our house, like, I got to the point where I was going to take a label maker and, like, label our fuse box and our house with it I was like, "Whoa, I need a different hobby," you know, because you can only organize—

Jen Weidner 13:07: You need a different outlet!

Carrie Beth Collins 13:08: Yeah, so one night, I had a painting that I had started back in, I don't know, before the pandemic hit, and I just decided to keep working with it, and as I painted that, it was, it was almost healing for me, and it was, really ended up being about kind of how, even though there was so many bad things going on, there was still so much beauty. You get to see a lot of nature returning.

Jen Weidner 13:37: Our world got quiet for a while.

Carrie Beth Collins 13:39: We all took a break and a breath, and it was, it was kind of on pause for a minute. And so, like I said, a lot of nature started returning, animals that they hadn't seen in

different places where we're thriving, and, and we all slowed down a bit, you know, I quit coloring my hair, I mean, things that never would have thought I would do in a million years, just, we all started living a little bit more simply, and I think that we're all kind of tricked into thinking that we need more than we do. And we were just, we just don't, we don't need as much as we think we do, and that proved it. You know, living a little more simply is, isn't always a bad thing. So that was, that was my big takeaway from that.

Jen Weidner 14:29: What are some things that you would, hopefully, that you will continue to do after the pandemic, like, some things that you learned from the pandemic that you're like, "Oh yeah, this is what I want to keep doing,"?

Carrie Beth Collins 14:40: Well, I would like to really learn how to manage this art thing. You know, when I was a hygienist, I used to think, oh, like get off work at seven, we'll go home, eat I'm going to paint, you know, and that's what I always dreamed about doing, and I never really had a good reason to stop. I loved what I did, I loved my patients, I loved everything about it. And I hope that this continues for me. If I don't explore this, I think I'll regret it for the rest of my life. So, I gave myself a couple years to try it out, and if it's not for me, you know, if I get out there and I hate being in a tent sweating all day and getting rained on and freezing to death and, you know, all those unexpected things that, that I don't like, I could always go back and work for somebody else. But I, I feel like this is something I would really like to give a shot and I hope that it continues to be what I need. We all need purpose, and I feel like, I hope that I can find that purpose within myself, more so than than working for somebody else. But, I don't know. I'll figure that out.

Jen Weidner 15:51: Oh, the pandemic was, like, the perfect time to just change and see what's going to happen. I mean, we all had to stop for a while, and you were one of the brave ones that's like, "Let me just see what, what this all about and..."

Carrie Beth Collins 16:08: It came with some, it felt like everything kind of fell into place because, a long time ago, I actually got the book here at the library. It was Dave, Dave Ramsey, *Total Money Makeover*. And I started his system back in 2007, and followed it through, and if I hadn't made all those sacrifices that I made during that time, there's no way that I could try this because, you know, this, the starving artists myth is real for a while, any kind of job when you switch over, right, there's always a lean time.

Jen Weidner 16:48: Oh yeah, for sure, you're working for yourself.

Carrie Beth Collins 16:50: Yeah, and you have limited funds, you know, because I don't take money from our account. This is a self-sustaining thing, so I let my head to learn how to market myself and, and do it on a budget and, and continue with that so...

Jen Weidner 17:13: You made some wonderful masks.

Carrie Beth Collins 17:15: Yeah.

Jen Weidner 17:16: During a pandemic.

Carrie Beth Collins 17:17: Yeah.

Jen Weidner 17:18: What was your inspiration to do that?

Carrie Beth Collins 17:21: Well, okay, so a lot of the companies out there were selling masks, and I just got on one of them and they had the software, and I just uploaded some paintings and I'm like, "Hey, I kind of like my stuff on masks," and I just shared it on Facebook, like, hey this is just cool, something to do because, you know, we were all just, like, sitting around, kind of bored some days, and people were like, "Oh, are you selling those," and I was like, not planning on it, but sure. So, it turned out to be something really great for a minute, and now, you know, most people have plenty of masks at this point, but yeah, I broke out a sewing machine for the first time and, trying to find elastic on Amazon, and there was just, it was just a weird time, and I'm glad you're doing this because, you know, I meant to keep a journal during that time and never did, so, I can't wait to go back to listen to some of these things, because I'm sure one day I'll be digging through something and find that mask and be like, "Woohoo I remember those days."

Jen Weidner 18:25: Well, do you have anything else you'd like to add?

Carrie Beth Collins 18:29: Hmm. Well, we can get through this. I'm thankful for science. I'm thankful for the break. I'm thankful for seeing who people are for themselves, because a lot of people, their true selves really came out. And I'm saying—

Jen Weidner 18:54: For better and for worse!

Carrie Beth Collins 18:5: For better and for worse! And I think that sometimes we have so much noise in our lives. And I don't like the fact that I've lost family members to it. I don't like the fact that how much suffering it costs for so many people or businesses that, but I do think that we all needed that break for a minute to kind of see what was important. And to miss people. I don't know about you, but there's so many times I'll have plans with friends and they're like, who really don't feel like it, or how about next weekend, or they'll just kind of back out. And since we had that nice long break, it's, I have less of those friends canceling now, people are starting to make it a priority to see the people that matter.

Jen Weidner 19:53: Even us introverts are starting to be like, "Yeah I could, I could go out."

Carrie Beth Collins 19:56: I could use a little people in my life

Jen Weidner 20:00: I could use some people around me besides the people I've seen for the past twelve months.

Carrie Beth Collins 20:04: I am thankful for that, that we all got a little bit of a break to see what was important. And, like I said, we also got to see people for who they are, and I think anybody who could keep a positive attitude during that time. And I want to take a little dose of that every day. It makes you appreciate when things are really good. It really has.

Jen Weidner 20:28: Well, thank you for coming in today.

Carrie Beth Collins 20:30: Thank you for having me.