

*Pandemic Perspectives: Jeffersonville Residents Recount Their Lives During the 2020 Covid-19 Pandemic. Interview with Judge Bradley Jacobs*

Jen Weidner 0:02: Today is September 13, 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 Judge Bradley Jacobs Circuit Court Two. Judge Jacobs, how long have you been a judge in Clark County?

Judge Bradley Jacobs 0:27: I was elected in 2014, so I'm finishing up my seventh year.

Jen Weidner 0:33: Do you remember what your first reaction was when you heard about the COVID-19 Pandemic?

Judge Bradley Jacobs 0:38: Yeah, absolute panic, we all did. Chief Maples in the jail first brought it up, and we were all kind of confused what even it was, and we had a map as the progression was supposed to take place over the next six months. And I remember, at the time we thought, in June and July, that wasn't going to be very heat tolerable so we thought, everybody thought the virus would die out in July and August and we'd be fine. But then, we found out that wasn't true. And I remember, right about St. Patrick's Day of 2020, we had a meeting and shut everything down and everybody went home confused.

Jen Weidner 1:13: So, when you knew for sure that it was coming to the United States, like you already had it, you all saw the progression and saw it coming from the west coast?

Judge Bradley Jacobs 1:21: Yeah, I don't even know where Scotty found it and it wasn't even the West Coast, it was still in Europe or Asia, but it wasn't in the United States at all, but there was a map that he had that pretty much showed how it would get here and when, and how bad it was supposed to be, really interesting, and we didn't, that we'd never heard of it, we hadn't followed it. So, we thought it was like kind of novel and interesting, but not panic-worthy, but then when we started getting the reports, and you remember how everybody in 2020 panicked.

Jen Weidner 1:51: Oh, yeah!

Judge Bradley Jacobs 1:51: We were on absolute lockdown, didn't do anything. We did the same thing, we all went home, and then for probably two months we rotated. We only have one and sometimes two judges on site at a time, so we only worked one day a week.

Jen Weidner 2:04: So, were the courts completely closed, or did you guys still did, like, important cases?

Unknown Speaker 2:10: Then we only did the necessities, which are initial hearings, because everything else is put on hold, because that our had their day in court, but if you just got arrested you had to have a judge set a bond for you and begin your case, and set on the path at least, so we were only doing, pretty much, initial hearings and bond cases.

Jen Weidner 2:29: And those were in-person?

Judge Bradley Jacobs 2:32: Yeah, they had to because we'd have Zoom. Yep So yeah, those would have been in-person.

Jen Weidner 2:35: So what were some of the things that were done to keep things moving quickly through the courts?

Judge Bradley Jacobs 2:40: Well, the Zoom was the best, and that came from, assuming that came from Indianapolis. Judge Carmichael is the presiding judge of the Board of Judges, so she was in constant contact with the leadership in Indianapolis, but they got to set up with Zoom licenses quickly, and we all got trained on that. And that's been phenomenal because, honestly, once we got up and running with the Zoom, and it took us several months, but once we got up and running, it was before Thanksgiving last year, that we really didn't slow down much after that, it's, it's full-speed ahead right now, we're pretty much going strong. It's just, it's so odd that it's not in-person.

Jen Weidner 3:19: So, do you think that the virtual courts will continue after whenever the pandemic is over?

Judge Bradley Jacobs 3:24: Absolutely, in some form. There's no reason to bring people up from the jail for some of these incidental hearings, there are certain hearings that absolutely have to be in-person, there are some that it almost makes no sense to be in-person. So we will have to figure out, you know, where we lie on that, but there will be a lot of things we do virtually from now on.

Jen Weidner 3:45: Let's back up. What cases do you hear?

Judge Bradley Jacobs 3:48: I have all the felony drug cases in Clark County. So, that's all I do. And if, unless you're charged with some more serious offense like robbery or murder or something like that, and possession of methamphetamine drug case, it comes to me.

Jen Weidner 4:02: Okay, so you needed to get those people through initial hearing as quickly as possible?

Judge Bradley Jacobs 4:07: You have to be, you can't be held in custody for too long without having your day in front of the judge, so the judge can set a bond and move forward and everything,

Jen Weidner 4:17: So, I assume that the jail is on board with the virtual hearings as well?

Judge Bradley Jacobs 4:21: They love it also. In my court, bringing inmates from the jail to the courts is always a security risk, because you may have one officer, they had protocols on what the numbers are, but maybe it's one officer for every ten inmates. Well, you can't keep an eagle eye on ten inmates with just one person, and it's three, four times a year they catch somebody trying to pass drugs from somebody on the outside to one of the inmates to take back to the jail.

Jen Weidner 4:48: Of course!

Judge Bradley Jacobs 4:49: So, it happened way too often, so the jail was excited to get Zoom implemented because it reduces the interaction with the public, pretty much forever. And one of the things that I do, if you're driving on spring break from Chicago, you're gonna pass through Clark County on 65. If you get stopped and you happen to be in possession of meth, there's no reason to have you come back to Clark County ten more times in the next year. So, if we can zoom all that, if it results in probation and somebody doesn't lose their job, everything's gonna be working out better.

Jen Weidner 5:21: So now, if those people were sentenced to jail time, they would have to come back down here?

Judge Bradley Jacobs 5:25: Right.

Jen Weidner 5:25: They do their time down here.

Judge Bradley Jacobs 5:26: And we do that today as a condition, so, today I revoked a lady's previous release because it was her third pending case. So, I ordered her report to the jail on Wednesday morning, we'll see how that plays out. It's about 50/50 whether they go to jail or not.

Jen Weidner 5:42: So, what have you learned from the pandemic, personally, career-wise?

Judge Bradley Jacobs 5:48: Professionally, I've learned technology, a lot of different technology.

Jen Weidner 5:52: We've all had to, real fast!

Judge Bradley Jacobs 5:54: The Zoom has been phenomenal. I love the Zoom, and I got a new Yeti mic, so that I can, you know, sound even better, and we're working on how we can do remote hearings. Regardless of the pandemic, it's gonna be so convenient and so productive to do certain hearings remotely, at least hybrid.

Jen Weidner 6:13: You get more people coming to court if they don't have to leave work.

Judge Bradley Jacobs 6:16: Drastically reduced failures to appear, because somebody who doesn't have a license doesn't worry about walking to court, they can open their living room, which is easy. Personally, I've learned spend more time with my family we're forced to spend more time with.

Jen Weidner 6:29: You didn't have a choice!

Judge Bradley Jacobs 6:33: Just learn to appreciate what you have when you have it, because we may never go back to life as it was, probably never go back to life, it was. And then, ten more years, we'll have a different change, so.

Jen Weidner 6:45: So, you were home with your three children and your wife?

Judge Bradley Jacobs 6:48: I always, when I went in, once we got past the part where we were rotating in once a week or once every other week, probably by June of last year, I was back at the office every day. My staff rotated, still just one person came in. That was over for a couple months, and we went back into the orange a couple weeks ago, so we went back to the remote workspace, but I've always been in the office because it's just easier, technology is there instead of trying to set one up at home in the office. But my wife was home last year, she was teacher of the year last year, with, I think most of the parents in Clark County, with an eight year old, seven year old, last year, but teaching, she was teaching seventh grade all last year, second grade, I'm sorry.

Jen Weidner 7:33: What are some things you hope continues after the pandemic, besides Zoom? We all hope that Zoom, Zoom is an option for everything.

Judge Bradley Jacobs 7:44 Zoom and handwashing, because there's too much stuff going on. I've washed my hands 20 times a day before the pandemic, because I work in the courthouse and that place is kind of gross. Yeah. So, and honestly I don't mind the mask. The mask will keep, cut the flu down so much.

Jen Weidner 8:01: There were no cases of the flu in Clark County this past year, no cases that sent anyone to the hospital, according to Dr. Yazel.

Judge Bradley Jacobs 8:07: That's insane. That's unheard of.

Jen Weidner 8:08: It's almost like masks work!

Judge Bradley Jacobs 8:10: Yeah, hmm! But I like to be in the store, and if I'm wearing my mask and a song comes on over the intercom—

Jen Weidner 8:17: No one can see you singing.

Judge Bradley Jacobs 8:16: I can mouth all the words.

Jen Weidner 8:18: And people don't notice you as much.

Judge Bradley Jacobs 8:21: That's true, too. Oh yeah, and I do like that a little more anonymous. Yeah, so I don't mind the mask at all. The technology is fantastic, the hygiene is going to be great. We wash our hands, we don't...

Jen Weidner 8:34: We carry hand sanitizer with us.

Judge Bradley Jacobs 8:38: That's insane how much everybody in the world has hand sanitizer everywhere now. It's convenient to have everything delivered or curbside pickup, that's crazy. But there's some good that's gonna come out of this, it's a lot of bad, I was in McDonald's drive thru the other day for every bit of 20 minutes, because you can't get time to work anywhere. But hopefully that'll change at some point.

Jen Weidner 9:01: I think about that too. People are just scared still, because our numbers are up and, you know, if people would wear masks...

Judge Bradley Jacobs 9:08: And I worry about the people who are in the service industry, because there's no one to serve, then you're gonna be out of work. So, hopefully we'll get back to some of that, but I hope a lot of the changes stick with us for a while.

Jen Weidner 9:21: Is there anything else you'd like to add? Thanks for being here.

Judge Bradley Jacobs 9:25 My pleasure, Thank you.