

Interview with
SHEILA BERGER

April 22, 2021

**THE PANDEMIC YEARS: COVID-19
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SHEILA BERGER

Sheila Berger was interviewed on April 22, 2021 by Drex Finlinson. She related her experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic.

[First thirty seconds of audio were discussing technical difficulties and have been cut.]

DF: This is Drex Finlinson. Today is April 22nd; I am interviewing Sheila Berger for the [Utah Tech University] Pandemic Years Oral History project.

Would you please state your full name and spell it, and your location?

SB: Sheila Kay Berger, S-H-E-I-L-A K-A-Y B-E-R-G-E-R, and I am in Santa Clara, Utah.

DF: Alright, so just a few things before we get started. I know we're pressed for time right now, but they want me to let you know before we start this that if you sign a release document after the interview, you know, don't say anything that would, you know, get you in trouble in court, or anything, or you can say you don't want it released for a certain amount of time. Not that anything like that would come up, just that's what they want me to tell you.

SB: Okay.

DF: So this is just going to be a series of questions; let's try and get through them as much as we can. I'll let you go on for, you know, as long as it takes you to answer the question, but, you know, they want me to stop you if you start rambling a bit.

SB: [Laughter.] Okay.

DF: Okay. So, let's go with, first question: What did you think about— When did you first hear about the pandemic? And what were your first reactions about it?

SB: I first heard [about] it probably December or January, and it sounded like not that big of a deal to begin with. It was so new, no one really understood what it was going to do. So, I wasn't too interested in it to begin with.

DF: Okay. Has the pandemic really changed too much about how you go about your day-to-day?

SB: Because I am retired and no longer going to an office every day, and because I no longer have children in my home, it didn't affect me [in the same ways that I imagine it affected other people.] But definitely, [things were different.] I couldn't see my family, I couldn't go to a movie, I couldn't go to a restaurant, [or join my friends in my book club or attend

lunch with my group of friends that meet monthly for lunch.] So definitely, it interfered with my social life.

DF: Do you know anyone who the pandemic has affected more significantly?

SB: I know of people who lost their jobs, and have struggled [financially and] some marriages have not made it through the stress of a job loss and the pandemic. I know of them.

DF: When you say you know of them, do you mean that you know them personally, or that they're close to your social circles, or do you mean you've just heard about people—

SB: Close, close to my social circles. Like my friends' family, or my friends' neighbors.

DF: Okay. Those people live in Utah?

SB: Yes. Northern Utah.

DF: Okay, Northern Utah? Alright. When you're trying to stay connected with family, what has been the best thing for you? Just friends and family, how do you stay in touch with people?

SB: Texting, and Zoom is really a great help. You can have a Zoom meeting with family, and keep in touch, and so that's been a big help, I think.

DF: Do you have regular Zoom meetings with the rest of the family?

SB: Not regular. We also have a GroupMe account, with just the siblings. We communicate through GroupMe a lot. We've probably held only one Zoom meeting. But I've had Zoom meetings with my book club, with my church, and that has been very helpful in keeping me from being totally isolated.

DF: And just to clarify for people reading this in the future, when you say "siblings" you mean your, your—

SB: My children, yes.

DF: You got the vaccine, I remember you telling me, so— after you got that vaccine, how has it really changed, has it changed what you do at all?

SB: It has. What it has done is removed some of the concern. And, a difficulty for me personally, and it's probably somewhat because of my age, is that the people in government and in medical positions of authority, don't seem to have a handle on the effectiveness of the vaccine. So I hear a lot of medical people saying that the vaccine I had is good for six months. [They say] you will not get Covid as long as you have had this vaccine. Then I hear some of the national medical people in charge suggest that you still need to wear masks. That is a confusing message, that's a mixed message for me. So,

the way I have handled it pretty much is if I'm outside I don't worry about it. We're doing our first book club in person and we held our first lunch bunch in person. I wear masks wherever they are required.

DF: Okay. You mentioned that you've heard, you know, medical professionals say that [the COVID-19 vaccine] is good for six months, and I've heard similar things, but I'm just curious about where exactly you've been hearing that from, and what exactly you've been hearing.

SB: I have listened to news programs who have had Harvard medical professionals and other doctors, and I've also heard [people] when I've been in my car on the radio, that have said the testing is showing that the Pfizer vaccine and the Moderna vaccine are good for six months, that you won't be spreading it or receiving it. So, news sources on the radio and on TV.

DF: Okay. When they say that, do you remember if they're saying that they know it's good for at least six months, or are they saying it's only good for six months?

SB: They're saying they know it's good for six months. We haven't had the disease long enough, I don't think, for them to have more data.

DF: Okay. Since the beginning of 2020 in general, have you noticed significant changes in the local community? I'm not talking about things going on nationally, I just mean things for people you know, have you noticed any significant changes?

SB: Probably their changes are similar to mine. [Coughing.] People are not getting together, parties have been cancelled, you know, our Christmases, our Thanksgivings, our Easters, were very different, as a group of people. I have seen restaurants close, most restaurants here did some takeout to keep alive. So, I think we have been affected less in our community than communities with huge populations.

DF: Okay. Let's see, what else? So over the past few years, there's been a lot of social movements that have been going on, and I know we sometimes get into heated discussions about these but, I just want to get your thoughts on a few of them for the record, and I'm not going to argue about 'em because that's not what this is for. Just for example, what are your thoughts on the BLM [Black Lives Matter] protests that have been going on, both last year and this year?

SB: I think peaceful protests are part of our rights as American citizens and are supported by our Constitution. I think when you break down windows and take products from other businesses, their possessions, that you should be arrested and locked up. I don't think there is any place for violence or destruction of property in a protest. So, Black Lives Matter, they get a lot of media and I think sometimes the media does a lot of harm because we get a one-sided view. We almost never get a complete view of the situation. And so, I really don't know for sure. When I've heard the leadership of Black Lives Matter, they sound like they are intelligent, and unemotional in what they are doing and

opposed to violence. So I think when we see violence and destruction of property, people are using the name BLM as a permission to do as they please, but they're not really following the leadership's guidelines.

DF: Alright, what are your opinions on the sort of central grievance of a lot of the protests, which is police brutality and the like?

SB: I think that there certainly have been instances of police brutality. I can't speak as an expert on whether it's always directed to people of color. I know of people who are white who have had problems with police brutality, so, I don't think it's always just an instance of color and someone having a prejudice. But brutality from anyone is unacceptable. I don't like something politicized. I don't think our justice system should ever make its decisions [based on political opinion] or violence that they're afraid of. And that worries me, that we're being affected by violent threats, which is interfering with judicial decisions.

DF: When you're talking about judicial decisions, are you saying specifically, do you think the Derek Chauvin trial was affected by the threat of violence?

SB: Oh, I think it had to have been. And I also think the video, which was horrible, affected an emotional response [that may have interfered with a] logical way of looking at this that might indicate the charges toward the policeman would be less? I just don't think there was any, any question even allowed that maybe there was another way of looking at this, because of the threat of violence and because of that video. The video said it all.

DF: Did you watch the trial at all? I'm not talking about clips of the trial from other people, did you follow the trial at all yourself?

SB: I did not. I only heard the parts that the news media would occasionally share.

DF: Okay. So, after the election, as you know, there was an incident at the Capitol at Washington, D.C. on November 6th, and I wanted to get your thoughts on that particular incident.

SB: January 6th.

DF: January 6th, yes, sorry. I got the date confused.

SB: Well, I was watching [coverage of] the people on, what was it called, the lawn. Did they call it the Capitol Lawn?

DF: I believe so.

SB: Wherever it was that they were meeting with President Trump. I watched a lot of the people moving toward the Capitol. And when I heard later what had happened, I was really surprised because I felt that many of the people in that group were senior citizens,

they are not the type of people who would cause damage or cause harm to anyone. They are very big on the Constitution and freedoms, many of them fought in Vietnam and had parents and relatives [who] fought in other wars. So, again, I feel that the media does not give us a complete picture. When I was a child, I felt that the media reported news. They did not try to slant your opinion of the news. And so, there are some things that occurred in that; [for instance,] the death of the police officer that the media said [died because he] had been hit with a fire extinguisher, and then they found later that he died of strokes. He had two strokes. The woman that a Capitol police guard shot and killed, we don't really know what that was all about. So, anybody that was breaking property, destroying our government's [property], you know, the things that our taxes pay for, or caused violence, were totally out of line. And I do not agree with them rushing in and pushing their way into the Capitol Building, that was totally out of line. But I don't think it was any worse, maybe it was a lot less worse, than the riots last summer, in what was it, Minnesota, where they had those—

DF: Minneapolis.

SB: Minneapolis, yeah. So, I feel badly for anyone who is young and growing up and dealing with the media. It doesn't matter whether it's liberal or conservative, everything is slanted. It isn't just, news just isn't reported.

DF: You mentioned that you heard that the, Capitol police officer that died from a fire extinguisher actually had a stroke—

SB: Mm-hmm.

DF: I'm wondering, where did you hear that, because I haven't heard anything about that. So, do you remember where, and if possible, who told you that?

SB: It was on two different programs, saying that the medical examiner had released his findings, and there was no sign of damage from a fire extinguisher, his death was caused by strokes. And that was on two different radio programs, one of them was a Fox program at night, and one of 'em was, I'm not sure which one it was in the daytime. But they were on, they were on Fox News.

DF: So, you don't recall the hosts for those programs?

SB: [Hesitant] I do not. I don't.

DF: Why do you think there was so much social unrest last year specifically?

SB: When I think back, I was [alive] during the severe fighting and discontent of the [19]60s. I was a teenager growing up, I lived during the protests with Vietnam, and I lived with, what was it, the Watts Race Riots, and people not being allowed to, you know, Black people being treated terribly in the South and other areas, and not having freedom to be treated just as people. So, I think that there has been improvement in the attitude of races.

I think it's better now than it was in the 60s, but someone is encouraging [volatile and angry feelings, and encouraging] the rioting that I observed, particularly last summer. I don't know who they are, but I think that certainly people of my age and slightly younger have a much better attitude of not being racist, and so where all of this has come from with the outcry that everything is unfair and unequal, I don't know where it's coming from other than there is a group outside of just the average-day American, Black, White, or brown, pushing for discontent.

[William "Richard" Berger, husband of SB]: Power, honey.

SB: Somebody wants to get some power out of this.

DF: So I know you're pressed for time and you probably have to leave in just a minute. But do you have time for one more question?

SB: Uh-huh [affirmative].

DF: Okay. What do you think about how the different levels of government, both state, federal and local, have handled the pandemic?

SB: Of course, I can only speak for what I hear on the news about other states, but I feel quite good about how Utah has handled the pandemic. Our schools were only closed for about two weeks, and then they reopened, they had very few cases of children within the school community getting COVID. And we had businesses that were certainly affected, but they were not completely shut down. So I feel really good about how Utah has handled the pandemic with the limited amount of information that any of us have.

DF: Alright. Well, thank you Grandma. [Last twenty seconds was logistical and has been cut.]

[END OF RECORDING. END OF INTERVIEW.]