**Chris Dickerson**

**Interviewed March 2021**

Matt

Okay. All right, Chris. So, I have some questions related to the COVID-19 pandemic. So I wanted to ask you first off, what was your daily routine prior to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Chris

Okay, well, I was outgoing more. I was going out more. I was, you know, around people more. And before COVID, I had a better attitude on things because I was around different people. But once COVID came out and shut everything down, you know, my attitude got messed up.

Matt

When you say messed up, what do you mean? Do you mean you got, like, angrier or I don't want to put words in your mouth but, what do you mean?

Chris

Yeah, I got more closed off from people. It messed my psyche up from not communicating with people. You know, I didn't have the tolerance. I don't have the tolerance now that I had before COVID. So now I really just don't want to be around that many people.

Matt

Gotcha. So in a day before COVID, what would you do throughout your day?

Chris

Well, throughout the day my biggest thing was you know, I was around different people. I would go out for walks because you know, I got cancer. So I'd go out for walks, and just go in different little neighborhoods and talk with people, reach out to people and people would reach out to me, and I would go to the park. I would go to the library and read. So you know, when they started closing those things down it just kinda messed my psyche up.

Matt

Gotcha. And are you close to the need for a family?

Chris

Yeah, I'm close to my oldest daughter. And I'm close to my oldest sister. I mean, I'm close to all my family, but them two especially.

Matt

Yeah. You had since the pandemic, I think you had a loss in your family. Correct?

Chris

Yes.

Matt

Okay. Was that due to COVID-19? I can't recall.

Chris

Actually, I guess you can probably say yes and no, My mom was 96 years old. You know, everything was starting to fail. And my sister who was taking care of her did catch COVID. So, I mean, she may have passed it on to my mom or my mom had passed it on to her. I don't know. Because, you know, my mom never went out. So I don't know, my sister had to bring it in, I guess. Due to her age and everything she may not have told me but COVID could have played a part in it.

Matt

Yeah. Yeah. I was wondering if that wouldn't happen as well. So you said your sister and your other family members, do you feel like they've been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic?

Chris

I have a brother that's nine months older than me. He comes and sees me every now and then here. He caught COVID and he said I'm the one who gave it to him. But, you know, when he caught it, my COVID was over. I had gotten tested and I was good. But he said I was in the car with him after that, and then after that he went to VA hospital and they told him he had COVID. So he figured he got it from me, but he didn't get it from me. I was already here a week, you know. I mean, after we came from the hotel and I took another COVID test and I was clear.

Matt

Actually, I wanted to go more into that. So what were your feelings or what was going on in your head when you got COVID? When you were diagnosed COVID positive? Because it happened here at the shelter.

Chris

Okay, what went on in my mind, I was going through the blame game. Who's to blame for this? Who do I know who gave me this, you know what I mean? And then I got off the blame game because I figured you know, it's going to happen anyway or it wouldn't have happened. When I got off the blame game I went into the worry game. Like how much is this really going to affect me, you know what I mean? Because I'm already compromised. I already got a low white blood count and I already have breathing problems. So I was just worried about how much is this going through me? Am I gonna have to go to the hospital, get on a respirator, this and that. But I didn't have to, and I got it but I didn't get it as bad as some others in here got it.

Matt

You're talking about the shelter, right?

Chris

Yeah. Yeah, you know, because some of the people in here got it bad where they did have to go to hospital and stuff. And I didn't have to do that. Mines was more or less like the flu. You know, I just had really the flu symptoms. And then after about seven days it went away and I was good.

Matt

Okay, so just to clarify, there was an outbreak. You stay at the Salvation Army homeless shelter currently, and there was an outbreak within the shelter and the shelter shut down. At that point, what were the challenges or concerns you had with everything going on? I know it was pretty hectic. In your own mind, what were your challenges and concerns happening right at that time when there was an outbreak?

Chris

Well my concern was, where do I go from here? I didn't know the Salvation Army was going to put us in a hotel. So we did have some place to go because there was no way I really could have went to my sister's because my mom was there and she's 96. I couldn't take it to her. And I couldn't go to my daughter's because I got grandchildren there. So my concern was where would I go if I have nowhere to go? That was my concern.

And my challenge was, you know, basically doing what I was asked, what we was all asked to do, like to stay in a room you know, kind of stay away from each other and stuff like that. And you know, you can only sit in a room for so long, even though it's comfortable. But you know, you can watch TV but pretty soon you want some type of contact. So our challenge was, I just have to be patient and sit still. And that's what I did. And like in seven days, I was good to go. Even then, I still didn't want to be around some of the people because some of the people still was infected with it. So it was like a talent just to be patient.

Matt

The effects you had on your health, you said was just like a minor flu. So in regards to this, you know, the COVID-19 pandemic, what are your hopes for the future? What would you ideally like to see happen?

Chris

Well, yeah, my hope is.. I already got one vaccination, I go back to 28th of this month to get the second shot, you know, and once I get my shots, I hope to never get it again, at least within this next year or two. My health is going to definitely get worse with the type cancer I have. Eventually it'll get worse, it's not going to get no better. Unless they come up with a cure which they haven't done yet. But, you know, I hope and pray that I can stay COVID free at least for the next two years. And, you know, I can concentrate and spend my time really on fighting my cancer. Because that's one of the biggest things on my mind now and you know, I get a little ache here, little ache there that really I never had. The first thing going on in my mind is oh, I got a tumor here, I got a tumor there because I got metastatic cancer and it spreads all over the body at any time. I'm trying to get out of that mode where I have a little ache here a little ache there like I said and it doesn't go to my head that oh it's a tumor. My goal is to unify with my family like I was unified before COVID. You know, I was staying with my daughter before I came here. I was staying when my oldest daughter, me and my youngest daughter had a falling out. So that's why I left and came here. But we always still tight, you know what I mean? I'm tight with my family. Now with the COVID, we're tight but not as tight as we were. Like I go there and cook, barbeque, babysit, but I really don't want to do that now because COVID is still on the upswing. Well it's going down but it's still not safe for me, I don't think, until after I get my shots to go around my grandkids, you know. So and my youngest daughter actually just had a baby. I really don't want to go around the baby until after I had all my shots and stuff. But yeah, that's my hopes, you know, get back close to my family and do things.

Matt

So all those meaningful interactions with family are being kind of postponed for now because of the pandemic and that's a big deal for you and I assume a lot of people who have that as a support system.

Chris

Yeah, you know, my biggest hurt, my biggest hurt was right after we went to the hotel, my mom passed away. It was her funeral and stuff and you know, my oldest sister told me I couldn't come. And that hurt.

Matt

Because of the covid 19 pandemic?

Chris

Yeah.

Matt

Oh, gosh. Wow.

Chris

Well, I respected what she said, you know?

Matt

Mmhmm, yeah.

Chris

She didn't do it maliciously. She was just looking out for the rest of the family.

Matt

Yeah, yeah. That must have been tough, not to be able to go.

Chris

I'm about to cry now but I got myself together, because it just hurts so bad. But, yeah, you know, my mom knows.

Matt

Yeah. Okay. All right. Well, that's pretty deep. I don't want to ask you this specific question but like, when you were.. When it happened in October, the outbreak at the shelter. Prior to that, I know that you and everybody staying here were kind of inundated with all the news and all the information coming out about COVID-19. And, you know, knowing that it can have a very negative and very bad effect on people who already have compromised immune systems like yourself. I can't imagine how fearful I would have been in your position in regards to that, and seeing all that news. Can you explain a little more about how knowing that your immune system is compromised, how that affected your fear when it came to, you know, being diagnosed COVID positive?

Chris

I can tell you, like I said, when it really kind of hit the shelter here. I know I'm already compromised. My first thing for me, just needed somebody to blame, you know, somebody brought it in here, somebody gave it to all of us. And I think you may know who I blame, but, you know, I since regret doing that because anybody really could have did it. But that was my thing because I just knew I didn't go out here on the street and get it. Because I really tried to be safe and do what the guidelines say to do. It still really didn't mean a whole lot, you know what I mean? Like I said, I just needed somebody to blame besides myself. I felt as though if I blame myself, then you know, who else? So it falls on me. And I didn't want it to fall on me. The cancer I have, I kind of blame me for that. And I don't know, it's just something I didn't want to do, I didn't want to blame myself for going out here and getting COVID-19 and you know what? I just wanted somebody I can stick the blame on. So I didn't have to look at myself.

Matt

Okay. So kind of anger was not anger, but you're sort of upset a little bit at how you may have gotten it.

Chris

Well, I was pretty upset because the person I blamed it on, you know, basically went out to work every day. And basically, we could go up there and see her at work every day. When I go up there and see her, she never had a mask on. It's retail so she was dealing with a lot of people, a lot of customers and stuff. So that's why it was so easy to blame that person. And so it angered me. Because, like I said, I would go up there and she'd be around customers and people and stuff and wouldn't have no mask on. But every other worker in the store had their mask on, but her. And I said, "Well, what? They don't make her have her mask on?" But anyway, it really did make it easy for me to blame her. But you know, I can't say for sure that she was the one that brought it here. Although she caught it really bad. But I can't say for sure I caught it from her or really anybody else. You know, I came out of the blame game. I said, "Well, you know, I have to forgive to be forgiven." So, if I blame someone else for giving it to me, I have to forgive them because I gave it to somebody eventually. So how am I going to be forgiven? How can I forgive myself if I can't forgive them? So that's the way I looked at it.

Matt

Okay, just to clarify, you don't know for sure if you've lost anybody due specifically to COVID-19? I know that maybe your mother might have caught it. But you said she was really sick before that as well. But you don't know anybody else who caught it?

Chris

Not like that, nah. I don't know anyone that actually passed from COVID.

Matt

Gotcha. Okay. All right. Well, that's all I have for now. I think that was all the questions, I kind of went a little bit of a roundabout way. But thank you, Chris, for your time. I really appreciate it. Is there anything else that I need to do, Julianne?

Julianne Davis

No, Chris, thank you so much for sharing your story. Your story is so important for our community to hear and also to be added in writing, you know, to the historical record of the pandemic. So thank you for everything you shared. Do you mind if I ask you a quick couple follow up questions?

Chris

Yeah, sure. Go ahead.

Julianne

Will you share with me more about your cancer diagnosis, what kind of cancer do you have?

Chris

Okay, I have stage four metastatic breast cancer. Only 3% men ever get it and I just happen to be in the 3% who got it. That was real hurtful for me when the doctor told me that and told me well, there's really nothing we can do for you, you will eventually die. Right now I have tumors and they're not really attached to vital organs or to my bones so long as we can keep them from doing that I'm in pretty good shape. But eventually they will attach to something, a vital organ or in my bones and it ain't going to be real good. But you know until then, I just keep hope alive. And you know, maybe they'll come up with a cure before then because they're working on it every day. But I take my treatments, I'm doing really good. My doctor tells me you're doing real good you know, like I said it's not attached to nothing, and some are even shrinking. So you know, the treatment I'm on is good because I'm not on chemo or radiation because they figure it would make it worse. They were doing this through their studies. They said it made the cancer I have worse. I'm on hormone therapy, which they say is much better. And you know the only drawback about it is it puts you in menopause and I get everything a menopausal woman gets, the hot flashes, the tiredness. Yeah, I get everything and sometimes it's really brutal. So you know, I do understand women's health when they say about menopause now.

Julianne

Wow, yeah.

Chris

It's all good.

Julianne

I'll be keeping you in my prayers. I'm so glad that you're getting treatment and that so far you seem to be responding positively to it.

Chris

Yeah, well I mean, to be really honest, I have to be positive because being negative about it, I'd probably already be done. But, you know, I have, like I said, my older sister’s my biggest support, and my oldest daughter, she's a good support. And they are supporting me and my whole family does, you know, so even if I didn't want to live for myself, I kind of live for them.

Julianne Davis

I'm really impressed by your positive outlook. Hearing your answers during your interview, you know, it's really uplifting to hear your outlook.

Chris

Thank you.

Julianne

I just have one more quick question for you. And it's a little bit obscure. Okay, if you could go back in time and tell your pre-COVID self something, what would that be?

Chris

It would be, and I know I harped on this during the interview, but it would definitely be, "Chris, don't play the blame game." You know, it's not for you to say or blame. And it's not, you know, this is something that was given to me. And so, who am I to blame somebody? You know what I mean? I'm not nobody to blame nobody. I caught it. I got over it. It's time to move on. Or I could still be stuck in that game right now. But I don't and I'm not. I'm just going to keep moving on and live my life the best that I can do on this COVID, because it's still here and everything.

Julianne

That's really beautiful, because I think that a lot of us are doing that in our own ways because it's easiest. That's beautiful. And how long did the shelter have to close for when the outbreak happened?

Chris

Well, we were gone for at least 16 days. We were at the hotel for at least 16 days.

Matt

About half a month. Yeah. A little over half a month.

Chris

Because we had left I had just gotten a job, a part-time job. But when I got back they still had it for me. I still went to work and I did good. I'm laid off now, it was seasonal. It was for the Christmas season. But you know, it was good for me.

Julianne

Oh, well, that's good. Good. Um, was there anything else about your experience during the pandemic that you wanted to share?

Chris

Only thing I will share is kind of eat healthy, which we did even at the hotel, they brought us food and we kind of ate as healthy as possible. I know for me, that worked out a lot because it gave me energy and it kind of gave me drive. Drive to want to go out, but didn't go out. You know, but it gave me energy and a better thinking head. I had better thoughts and stuff in my head.

Julianne

Yeah. Do you think eating healthy and eating well helped you to recover quicker?

Chris

Yes. Yes. Definitely.

Julianne

That makes sense. Cool. That's all I have. Chris, thank you so much, again. Your interview was just so insightful and important. Thank you so much.

Chris

Okay. Thank you.

Julianne

You're welcome

Chris

It's good to get stuff off your chest.