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Interviewee: Daniel Spencer

Interviewer: Madeline Hagan

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Madeline Hagan: I am here today with Dan Spencer. My Name is Madeline Hagan I am an undergraduate, a junior, at the University of Montana who is studying history and philosophy with a minor in African American studies. Again, I'm here with Dan Spencer. Could you say your name and spell it for me?

Dan Spencer: Sure. My name is Dan Spencer and I am currently the director of the Environmental Studies program at the University of Montana.

MH: Wonderful. So today we are going to be talking about the Coronavirus and how Dan's life was affected and I'm going to start by asking just a few basic questions about yourself. Where are you originally from?

DS: So, I grew up on the West Coast, mostly in California, but I had kind of an eastward migration. I went to high school in Colorado, college in Minnesota, graduate school in New York City, and then I made my way and I taught at Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa for about ten years and then I've been in Montana for about 20 years now.

MH: And how did you find yourself in Missoula?

DS: I started coming to Montana back in the 70s. I worked for several summers in Glacier National Park. I also worked as a geologist teaching geology field camp there. So, from 1976 to 1983, eight summers. I spent every summer in Montana and fell in love with the state figured I would try to figure out how to live here. But it took me a long time to get our here. But I had a sabbatical leave in the year 2000 from Drake University. I took it here at the University of Montana. Long story there, but I then was able to move out here in 2002 and I've been teaching here since 2002.

MH: How did you go from Minnesota to New York?

DS: I was working in a graduate program first a Masters of Divinity and then secondly, I went back again for a PhD, really focusing on the intersection of social justice and environmental issues. I've done a lot of work in Latin America and human rights issues, primarily in Central America. And Union Theological Seminary, where I went in NYC, has a strong record of social justice, both in an urban environment, but also internationally as well. And that's where I wanted to study.

MH: How did you get interested in environmental studies?

DS: I have always been interested in the environment. I grew up in a family that did a lot of camping as kid. So, I spent a lot of time outdoors. And then I studied geology and geology has a really interesting intersection with environmental issues. So, when I was in college, I went to Carleton College which is a small liberal arts college in Minnesota and has a very strong record on environmental issues. I've just always been interested in environmental issues. My PhD was kind of the intersection of environmental ethics and social justice work, particularly around LGBTQ issues and also around Latin American Liberation Theology. And so, I had that in my background, and then I taught for 10 years in a philosophy and religion program at Drake University. So, I was doing more traditional theology, ethics, and religious studies, but when I moved out to Missoula I started teaching. I actually taught in the philosophy program. I taught liberal studies. I taught in the [Davidson] Honors College. I taught environmental studies. I taught courses as an adjunct anywhere I could get them for a while. And I developed really good relationships in the Environmental Studies Program here so when a position opened up, I applied for that position. And so, I moved from Philosophy and religion to environmental studies at that point.

MH: And what is your work like as the chair of your department?

DS: Well, you know, it's a lot of administrative work. We are responsible for the personnel issues in the program, for the budgetary issues, for setting the curriculum, and then there's just a lot of administrative stuff that you have to do there in terms of all the financial issues. Things like that.

MH: Can you describe what your work life was like before the virus, just kind of day to day?

DS: Well, I always joke that...I mean I always start out by saying I love being a professor. I love working at a university that's, for me, the most exciting place to be. But it's also very demanding. I used to joke that being a university professor means you have a 12-month job, but it has to be done in nine months. So, you know, basically from the end of August, mid-May, you are just *on* and so every weekend, every evening it just feels like there's always something going on. So, I love it, I love the teaching. We do a lot of research and a lot of services, community work, I work serve on a couple community boards, things like that as well but it's very full time and you are really happy when summer comes around and you can catch your breath. Get some of your own research and writing done during that time. That's shifted a little bit now that I'm a program director, because I do a lot more administrative stuff. I don't have as much time for the teaching. That's a little frustrating because I love the teaching. I love interacting with students like that but it's generally pretty good.

MH: Do you remember the first time that you heard about Coronavirus?

DS: You know, I remember in January reading about this new virus in China and so that was the first time I think I became aware of it sometime in January. That was the first time I think I became aware of it sometime in January.

DS: It came home to me, and I mentioned this when we were doing our pre-interview a little bit. It came home to me in a very personal direct way because my husband Patrick Burke, who is a U of M [University of Montana] alum, actually a philosophy alum here, he ended up being hospitalized in Oakland, in the Bay Area, from the first week of February through the first week of March for a neurological disorder. And that was the time when all of a sudden COVID was everywhere. I remember, I spent the first week of March out there with him and that was when they had the first cluster of cases in Washington State outside of Seattle. So, we started hearing a lot about it here. And then you may or may not remember, but at the end of February there was a cruise ship that was off the San Francisco Bay Area that they wouldn't let dock because it was full of people with COVID. Well that was right when I was out there in that first week of March with Pat. We were trying to get Pat back to Missoula and how to figure out how to do that safely. And so, March 6th, was the day we flew back and that was the day that the cruise ship was allowed to come into Oakland and the passengers disembarked.

DS: So by that time it was really interesting to see that when I was there that first week of February I don't remember much attention at all in the hospitals to Coronavirus, but by the time I came back for that first week of March, there was much more attention. When we were checking into the hospital people were, you know, quizzing you about Coronavirus. But in retrospect, it still was fairly casual compared [to later precautions in hospitals]. There weren't any active cases at that point there.

DS: But when we flew back on March 6th, Pat was immunocompromised, and so we were quite concerned about that. We were the only two people on the airplane with the masks on. I got disinfectant and we wiped down our seats. It felt a little awkward. It felt like an excess to do it because nobody else on the plane was doing it. But like a week later, everybody was doing that on the planes. I mean it just changed so quickly.

DS: We got back to Missoula on March 6th, and I think the first active case in Montana happened that next week. But we had one week before spring break. Then we went into spring break and they made the decision right before spring break to switch to going remote. You may remember things changed really rapidly.

MH: And did he [Pat] have to go to the doctor here [Missoula] frequently during this time?

DS: So, it was interesting. We had one meeting with a doctor when he got back. And then they essentially closed the hospitals down as well, so he's been using telemedicine. The big issue was that Pat's neurological disorder led to paralysis of his legs and his arms, so he was doing physical therapy to relearn to walk and use his arms. The challenging thing there is you really need a physical therapist to be working with you directly. But we made a decision, once he got

here. He had one visit from a physical therapist in our house and one visit with an occupational therapist in our house, and then they began to do the whole sheltering in place, so we decided it was a greater risk to have somebody coming into our house. So, we started doing the physical therapy via Zoom, via telecommunication on that. The same thing with his physicians.

DS: So, he's actually going back today. He had to get an MRI a few weeks ago, and he's back in the hospital, but it's only been in the last few weeks that he's actually been able to go back to meet face to face with his physicians.

MH: And what are the hospital precautions that they're taking?

DS: So, when I was actually there a couple weeks ago. I was supposed to have had my annual physical in March that got cancelled, but they were opening up again, so I went back to St. Patrick's hospital about two weeks ago to get my physical and I was very impressed. When you first come in the doors you have to have a mask on and if you don't have a mask, they give you a mask. They take your temperature. They sanitize you. Everything like that. And then I had to have some blood work done in the lab. So the laboratory had to very careful social distancing and it was interesting because they have you a yellow card and you are supposed to put it on the chair when you sat down—the chairs are spread quite a ways away from each other—and then when you got up to get your blood drawn, you left that card on the chair and nobody else can sit back in that chair until they disinfected it. So, somebody would come out and disinfected out there. Everybody had masks. So, they were being pretty careful about everything. But that's the concern. I mean hospitals are, you know, are notorious for places you can get sick because there's so much ambient stuff with the virus, but I think they were being pretty careful.

MH: Has telemedicine worked...do you think effectively?

DS: For Pat's case it did and that was fortunate because his acute care took place when he was out in the Bay Area and now, he's mostly been doing the physical therapy. I think I mentioned to you before but sheltering in place turned out to be a real blessing for us. The first week I was back I was working at the university so my brother and sister in law came from Washington State to be with Pat during that week because he having a difficult time moving around, you know, he certainly couldn't use the bathroom, cook meals, anything like that. And then spring break happened the next week. So, I got to be around during spring break and then we went to sheltering in home so I could be at home and do all the life maintenance activities during that time.

DS: At the same time Pat's made really good progress. I was going out twice a day with him, an hour each time, first with a walker, then he graduated to using hiking poles. I was really doing physical therapy with him. I had flexibility in my schedule so that I could take the time during the day to be with him and then be working the rest of the time at home. It really helped. So, we were fortunate that way.

MH: Yeah. You mentioned working from home. That's, I think, the biggest transition for a lot of us. How was transitioning when you also had this other major thing happening in your life?

DS: Well, ya know, again, I was pretty fortunate. I was only teaching one class this semester, and it happened to be a graduate seminar, so I only had 12 students. My colleague Neva [Hassanein], she had a class with, you know, 100 students so she had to transition to doing it asynchronously. She was going into a video lab and recording lectures ahead of time.

DS: I had polled my class and they wanted to continue to do it like our regular classes via Zoom. And the nice thing about that is I can do that via Zoom, and I can record the class at the same time so if, for some reason, someone couldn't be there. I could upload the recording to the class Moodle* site so they could stay up with that. Fairly smooth transition.

DS: In addition to that, you know, just having to adjust to how students are submitting papers and getting things back on online. As program director here, I see a lot of people during normal times. I have five hours of office hours and they're always filled. Students sign up ahead of time, so people are constantly coming in and out of my office a lot and so sometimes it's hard for me to get work done when I'm in Rankin Hall because I'm constantly interrupted. Whereas, when we are suddenly in remote, I still held office hours by Zoom, but it's interesting, very rarely did students check into those. I found it much easier to set up specific appointments with them. But it meant that I had much more uninterrupted time, frankly, to get work done. I was able to get a lot of my other administrative work done fairly well that way.

DS: The harder thing was transitioning to a home office. You know, here [in the school office] I'm working with a nice computer, I've got a good ergonomic chair, I've got a desk, all my files and stuff are here. At home, I have my little laptop and one of the things I noticed a couple weeks in was that I was getting really severe shoulder pain. Because I think I was spending all this time hunched over a laptop, so I had to pay a lot more attention to body posture and things like that. After a couple weeks—I have a standing desk at home—and I moved the whole standing desk operation into our guest bedroom. I did all my Zoom meetings there because I was finding that when you have so many Zoom meetings, you are constantly sitting. So, I did all my meetings standing up and I started paying a lot more attention to doing yoga and just doing things to be physically fit. So, I realized I couldn't just have a fly by night operation and I really had to rearrange my space and it's much better that way.

MH: How do you think that the students' transition was, and what their experience was? Have you heard any stories from your students?

DS: My graduate students I think did pretty well overall. I think it was harder for the undergraduate students. One of the things we talked about to our faculty was to remember that we might be teaching two, or at the most three classes, but a lot of students were taking five and six classes. And they're all going to zoom and online, and that's a lot of computer face time.

DS: We also were sort of struck. We got to the end of the semester—we had a faculty word day in early June where we actually did it together social distanced in a backyard—but everybody was commenting on how tired everyone was. I mean, I think we underestimate just how exhausting it was to move to Zoom when the rhythm of your day is so different. You're not getting up and moving to a different class; you're not walking outside; you're not interacting with people; you're not having meals with people and so it was very tiring for a lot of students.

DS: I think for the undergraduates...we did lose more students. It just didn't work well for them to move to zoom. I think most did okay with that. I just got a 48-page report I'm going to be reading here. There was a survey of a lot of the students on how the semester went so we can learn from that and do better in the fall semester on that. But it's a lot harder to sort of stay in touch with people when you're not seeing them, you know, all the time coming in our class. We can just touch base with them that way.

DS: On the other flipside I had a lot of zoom meetings with prospective students who are thinking about UM, which I normally would have just done by email or they would have had a campus visit. But I had a lot of visits for prospective students. We have 22 students coming in with our new graduate student cohort for environmental studies. So, I normally we don't ever get together until our orientation in August but this time I had a zoom meeting with them at the end of May, and 21 out of 22 of those students came to that Zoom. They all got a chance to meet each other. They set up Facebook pages to be in touch with each other. So, there's some ways I had a lot more interaction between students who are having some problems with registration and things like that. I mean, I went from having never used zoom before to being pretty proficient at this point [laughs].

MH: Sounds like it! And what do you know about what fall of 2020 is going to look like?

DS: In what sense?

MH: Do you know how, like, approximately what percent are going to be face to face if professors are going to have the option to go online?

DS: That's actually all still being worked out. It's going to kind of be an interesting juggling act because there are a number of professors who...like, I have a colleague who's in his early 70s so he's at a vulnerability, you know, at a high age group for vulnerability. So, he's decided he's only going to teach remotely in the fall because of the concern for that. And so, the colleges and the deans have surveyed faculty. We've been worried about and we want to see who wants to teach face to face, who would like to teach online or remotely and we're trying to figure out the best accommodations on that.

DS: We're, and this is still being done, but surveying all the facilities at the university in terms of what classrooms can accommodate what. So, classrooms that might have accommodated 34

may be only able to accommodate 10 students now at a time due to the social distancing. So, we're not even quite clear that we have all the classrooms available to accommodate everybody who would want to teach face to face.

DS: I think a lot of people's first choice would be to teach face to face—we all prefer to teach that way if it can be done safely. But we don't even know whether we're going to have the facilities to accommodate all that. So, some of us may end up doing a combination of some face to face and some online, remote teaching. I think all of us are preparing, even if we're planning to start face to face, we're all preparing for the contingency of having to switch to remote again like we did in the spring semester if there's a resurgence in the virus.

MH: Has mandatory mask wearing come out in any of the conversations so far?

DS: Yes. The discussion came up and right now we follow the guidelines of the Office for the Commissioner of Higher Education known as OCHE—they're based in Helena and they set the policies. Actually, it's interesting, just this morning on Montana Public Radio they were interviewing Brock Tessman. Brock used to be the dean of the Davidson Honors College and now he works in the Office for the Commissioner of Higher Education. He was being interviewed by the state legislature about this because their policy right now is to recommend that students wear a mask but not require it. A lot of faculty is saying we don't want to go back into teaching unless it is required that everybody in that classroom has a mask.

DS: This is one of those funny things, you know, in terms of age demographics. People, you may have been hearing, people sometimes refer to the big flu epidemic 100 years ago, the Spanish Flu. The interesting thing about that was the most vulnerable age group at that point was people aged 18 to 28 years old. It was young people that were really vulnerable and now it's flipped on its head and young people—are getting sick and occasionally get seriously sick—for the most part are much less affected. But older people, like, I'm in my early 60s, you know, my spouse will be 70. We're in an age group where we just have a higher risk factor and so faculty are concerned because a lot of us are in that age group. We may be ourselves or we may have someone immunocompromised in our home that we have to be careful about so we're trying to figure out how to juggle being safe. Safe for our students but also safe for us with the teaching needs as well.

DS: There was a lot of recommendation from faculty that mask wearing be made mandatory. We'll see whether that happens or not, but I think there's some faculty who, if mask wearing is not made mandatory, will probably not return to the classroom.

MH: And, have you seen what other universities across the country are doing? Via news or anything like that.

DS: I've been reading up a lot. The Chronicle of Higher Education has had several articles, the New York Times has had some. It's been interesting just to see what all the different things that

people are trying to contemplate how they can do this. And there's really a wide variety of different options that people are looking at here.

DS: I mean it's interesting, the California State University System, which is the largest university system in the country—over 500,000 students—they decided to do entirely remote. So, if you're at Cal State in San Bernardino, or Chico State, or San Jose, they say they're all going completely remote. I don't know what the UC system is doing. I know, I mentioned to you, my niece goes to University of Oregon and they're still kind of contemplating about face to face and things like that. It seems to be a combination of trying to do face to face where possible and being prepared to have some combination. You know, on the flipside, is even when we do face to face, we still have to accommodate students who are maybe immunocompromised who can't safely be in the classroom. Even there we are probably going to have remote options as well. So, I'm trying to figure out how do I teach face to face, but also use the Zoom camera so that students who can't be there can. I can record the lecture, and they can be watching it...this is one of the issues that came up, I'll show you in a second here [gets up out of chair].

DS: So, this is a mask I've been currently using. It's one of these N-95 masks. And the concern is, can we really teach with a mask on? You can't read my lips, if someone has hearing impairments, with your sound muffled. It's harder to do that. So, you know. But on the other hand, we really want a model mask wearing behavior. So, the other possibility is plexiglass shields. We're talking about maybe we can have plexiglass shield to make sure that the faculty person is at least 10 feet from students. And also, if that's the case, if there's plexiglass, I would take my mask off to teach because I think it's much more effective than trying to teach through my mask. But we are trying to really figure out the safety protocol as well.

MH: Did you think that your department as a whole transitioned well to online?

DS: I think pretty well, you know. It was very fortunate that we had spring break. I mean, that meant there wasn't much of a spring break. We all worked really hard during spring break to get that time. From talking to people, you know, I think most people have done pretty well. I haven't had a chance...it was harder to do course evaluations. You know, normally we have fill them out with the class, so we had to do them online. So, I got the course evaluations back for my class and I looked through that. I have a sense of what went well, what didn't go well. I haven't seen the evaluations for the other classes yet, so I don't have a very good sense about that, but I think most experiences worked fairly well.

MH: Let's switch gears a little bit. I'm wondering what the transition to being home was like on your personal life. What did you do to keep occupied and what was quarantining like?

DS: Well, I will say, you know, as I mentioned before, for me and my husband Pat it was a real blessing and benefit that I was able to work at home for that particular situation. The hardest thing by far was that we have grandchildren here in town that we see a lot, or we did. We went 10 weeks without being able to hug them and give them kisses. We started doing once a week

drive by dates where we'd stand out on our balcony and they would drive by below and we'd chat. Things like that. I did a social distancing Easter egg hunt for them. So, I sanitized a bunch of Easter eggs, stuff like that. They drove over and we stood up on the balcony and they ran around.

DS: But my grandson would call me, we talked a lot on Facetime and when we're talking, he'd end every phone call with, "Grandpa, when am I going to be able to hug you again?" You know, it just melts your heart. There's some different things I learned about. There's a really cool application called "Readio" and you can, it's like a Zoom application, but you can read a book together. So, the book comes up and then he gets to turn the pages and I would read them. So, I did that an hour a day. You know, because he was in kindergarten, all of a sudden, he has no access to his friends, either. It's much harder for his parents. They both are now working at home with a six-year-old and a two-year-old. Trying to, you know, keep them going, but also trying to keep their work life going. Normally we love being supportive grandparents. We say that we'll take the kids, but we couldn't take the kids.

DS: So, one of the things we did about three or four weeks ago now, we decided to form our own "quaren-team" you know, with them so that we...they've been very, very careful and all that. And I've been very, very careful. We've not gotten together with anybody. We'd all been alone for a while. So, we decided we'd combine the six of us and still not have any other contact. So that's been wonderful. I've been able to take my grandson hiking, and we took him to our cabin. They came over and we had Father's Day brunch on Sunday. So, expanding our bubble to include them has been really helpful. That was the psychic strain, you know.

DS: Fortunately, Pat and I have gotten on remarkably well. I mean, I think it's really hard. I mean all of a sudden, even people you love dearly, obviously you're with them 24 hours all the time. It's really hard. But you know, we're really lucky here in Missoula because we can get out with public lands. We have a lot of public lands. The governor [Steve Bullock] when we went to shelter in place, the government encouraged people to get out. So, we actually, I think probably did more hiking than normal because we just got out almost every day for some kind of short time. I can count it as some of Pat's physical therapy, but also as part of my mental therapy. We also live kind of on the countryside, so we can take our dog out. So even though we weren't interacting with a lot of other people, we were completely confined.

DS: I mean, I really felt for people in cities, studio apartments that are in a high rise. You're gonna be in a one room for three months. I mean that's just going to make you go absolutely nuts. So, I felt a little bad some ways. We are hearing about how challenging COVID is for New York and things like that. And we were pretty, you know, it was pretty cozy comfortable for us here. We had a nice home to live in. We were able to work from home. I did all the shopping—Pat didn't have any contact—but I'd grab a mask and go shopping once a week. So, it wasn't a real sense of deprivation at all. It was definitely a strange change of pace.

MH: Yeah. So, you mentioned your grandchildren and they're transition to not being able to see friends and stuff like that. How does a parent, or even a grandparent, go about explaining coronavirus to a young child?

DS: Not a two-year-old. You really can't. I mean, she just has to adjust to that. Collin...I, mean you explain it the best you can, but I remember he was really aware that it was coming. They used to live in Spokane. I remember, this is in early March, he was talking about it. He said, "well I know coronavirus got to Spokane but maybe it won't cross the border, maybe it won't come to Montana." You know, he was really aware of the implications happening there. He sent us a card that was just the sweetest thing. It said "Dear, Granddad and Grandpa, I miss you so much. I know that coronavirus makes it hard for us to play. I hope we can play again soon." You know it's like, ohhhh [heartfelt noise and laughing]. We tried to do as much as...That's why I said we tried to do the reading radio thing. We did Zoom meetings and stuff like that. He and I learned how to play cards via Zoom. So, we'd do certain card games and we could play together.

DS: It's, you know, it's been three, almost four months now. He hasn't had a chance to see his friends, things like that. So, thankfully we're moving into summer when the weather is going to get us outdoors and stuff like that. But I think it's much harder for families with young children, things like that. First, the homeschooling as well as working and then not having a support system in place.

MH: Did his kindergarten have, like, any infrastructure set up? Did they have meetings every day?

DS: They did just twice a week. I think on Tuesdays and Thursdays. They did one hour of Zoom and Thursday they always had show and tell so each child would do a show and tell item. They got to see each other a little bit like that. I know they did set up a few Zoom playdates with other, you know, other kids like that too. They could talk to each other via Zoom. But yeah, I think that's hard.

MH: You mentioned hiking. Has there been anything else that you've done outdoors or otherwise for activity?

DS: A lot of hiking. I've been riding—I still ride my bike a lot so that's really good. I mean, I live about six miles from the university and I usually bike when I come back and forth. So, that's been nice to be able to do that. I have a cabin not too far over by Bozeman. I've been there a couple of times. Once by myself and my dog and took a bunch of work over there. Another time, after the semester we took our grandson over there. We've actually been reading a lot of books. I know a lot of people watched a lot of movies and Netflix. We watched some, but it's been more...I have a ton of books that I can never get to during the school year. So, it's been nice to have lots of time to be able to get some reading and stuff done.

DS: And the other thing is we've been doing a lot of yard work. And we have a lot of delayed stuff. Like one of the things I mentioned to you is that we're painting our house now because we had several weeks of travel scheduled for the summer and that all went by the wayside. So, I just started painting and I'm starting right after this meeting. I did my first painting yesterday, prepping the house. I spray and wash the whole thing, getting washed out things like that. So anyway, we're getting ready to start painting so that's the other thing.

MH: Wonderful! Have you watched any new movies or new TV shows lately?

DS: You know, we're pretty boring. We watch the PBS News Hour every night [laughs]. We got started watching—this was actually during the sheltering in place—a show called “The Good Place.” Are you familiar with it?

MH: I am!

DS: If you're a moral philosopher...I was introduced to it while Pat was still in San Francisco, so I introduced it to him when he got back because it's so cleverly done. You know, there's so much moral theory in there. We got totally addicted to that but, of course, we only got three seasons through that and a few other shows. That's one of our differences. I really enjoy watching movies and Pat's not a movie person. So, not as much as I would have liked.

MH: What has Pat done for fun? Does he like hiking and going outside?

DS: Yeah, he's...you know. The big challenge with the recovery with—it's what's called Guillain-Barre Syndrome—is really significant fatigue. So, he can work for three or four hours a day but then he really has to rest after that. But he loves the garden. We have a big garden and we also have a big orchard, so Pat does a lot. Early on when he didn't have much mobility, I was doing some of the pruning of the trees and things like that, and I got the garden rotor tiller ready to go. But he's been spending some time out every day. He's got a beautiful garden going again. So, we do outdoors yard work and stuff.

MH: Wonderful.

DS: He also loves to hike. We are going to try to do a short backpacking trip over Fourth of July weekend, which, we'll see if he can carry a pack.

MH: Good. And let's talk a little bit about the environment. I had listened to an NPR [National Public Radio] segment a while back on how carbon emissions were down, but single use waste was up since the coronavirus started. But again, the single use waste has less of an environmental impact than the reduced carbon. Have you seen similar arguments around? What do you think about the environmental impact of COVID?

DS: Well, I think that's really interesting. One of the things I noticed right away was the change in air quality. So, have you seen the pictures of, you know, Delhi, India, where for the first time in years people can see the Himalayas. I didn't realize you could see the Himalayas from there, but then the air cleared up and you could see that. They showed Los Angeles, all these places where the air pollution went way down. So, both carbon emissions went down, but also just actual air pollution went down significantly. That's the benefit there. I was just listening to a piece on the Amazon, though, that one of the real challenges with the pandemic is that government regulation, protection of conservation, and the ability to do that has gone way down. So, there's a lot more poaching of wild animals and there's a lot more illegal clear cutting of the forests. So, it's been a mixture in terms of what environmental things.

DS: I think a lot of people had very little awareness about the incredible amount of waste that our medical systems produce because every mask, gloves, anything is designed to be single use. So, bio waste has been a huge issue. All of a sudden people are aware of it, because when they couldn't get the stuff, they needed they're having to reuse things like that. But that's a huge use. I think it'll be interesting to see when we come back to campus because they're talking about giving every student, every faculty person a personal sanitation kit. Probably a couple masks, themselves a hand sanitizer, some things like that. They're refillable and that, but we're going to see a much greater use of cleaning supplies.

DS: But what I have also been fascinated by is that it's been this involuntary dress rehearsal for how to organize our economy differently. So rather than getting on an airplane and going out to a conference for three days we've been doing Zoom meetings and we're realizing there's a lot of work we can get done that doesn't require face to face. That doesn't, require, you know, a huge office infrastructure building. So, I think we're going to see some very interesting transformations of our work habits and that could have some very positive, beneficial, environmental benefits as well. So, we still have to see how that works. But it is interesting.

DS: I noticed, I don't do a lot of driving anyway, but I was filling up the car, the gas, like once every three weeks or four weeks during shelter in place. Once a month basically, because we just weren't driving. Now that we've opened up more, as we've gotten out of the house more, that we've been driving to go hiking stuff like that, but nonetheless, that kind of consumption is outweighed. So, I think we're learning all sorts of different pay offs that are going to facilitate different ways to configure things. I think it has some great positive environmental impact as well yeah.

MH: I liked your little phrase about reorganizing our economy. I think that in many ways, even outside of environmentalism, we are learning about reorganizing economies, whether that be providing for people who don't have financial stability. It was made really clear, once people weren't able to work. Have you seen anything like that in the Missoula community that pertains to social programs to help people in need?

DS: You know, I think what is one of the really sobering sides of what's happened in this pandemic is it's exposed incredible levels of inequity and inequality in our society. You know, which jobs were vulnerable to not being able to continue. So, you know, the spiking unemployment was not fair and equitable and it's just so spread across society already. They are really vulnerable people, working class, people of color, women in particular. So, that's exposed a lot of that. I think we're going to have to kind of readdress that.

DS: One of the main things that I've seen is that...I belong to a little Lutheran community church out in Bonner. So, we haven't been able to go to worship, but we did organize with the Missoula food pantry. Our church is one of the collection sites for rural areas out there for people who need food. Once a week they take 60 or 70 food baskets and volunteers from the church bring it out on the truck. People come in from Potomac, from Clinton, from a lot of communities. There's definitely a lot of food need. They've actually had people who have been driving by who have seen the food centers and stopped by and said "can I get food here? We're almost out of food." So, I know that that has been kind of a hidden impact, but it's been going on.

DS: The thing that's been so strange about the sheltering in place is that, you know, our exposure to the rest of the world is primarily through our screens. We just haven't been...I mean, I've done some shopping, and I, frankly, have been kind of stunned at how much traffic there still is on Reserve [Street], things like that. I think activity has picked up quite a bit more. You see people out quite a bit more than that first month where we were just completely closed down. It was like a ghost town on the university campus. I came to campus once a week to pick up the mail, and just to make sure that everything is getting done, and it was just like a ghost town. It's still very quiet on campus, but I was over there earlier today and there are people around. People tend to not be wearing a mask when they're outside and wearing a mask indoors. Almost everybody's wearing a mask now which is good to see.

MH: Are you at all worried about reopening, with the different phases?

DS: Yeah, I am. Just because there are certainly unknown questions. I also, and don't take this out of context. I don't mean this to be insulting, but I'm worried because of the behavior of 18 to 22-year olds. I mean, I remember being at 22—you don't think about that. My niece just graduated Colorado College this spring. So, she lives in Washington state and she and her dad drove through Missoula in April and on the way, they camped in our driveway. We had a pizza dinner with them on either side of the fence, complete distance. She went back down there, and she drove back again a few weeks ago. She's a good kid, she said she's conscientious, things like that. But you know, she just talks about what she and her friends all do. I have to say just watching the behavior around Missoula at the parks or hiking or folging, a lot of young people simply are not paying any attention to CDC guidelines. So, I worry about bringing 10,000 young people back together and then expecting us to suddenly conform to a very different set of expectations. I just think there's a lot of things up in the air about what it is actually going to look like.

MH: Do you think the phasing that has come out of the governor's office has been appropriate? Or, do you think, or wish, that it would have been a little bit more slow?

DS: Well, that's a hard one to say for here in Montana because we have been very fortunate to be in a very large state with a large rural population. We largely missed a lot of the really severe things. So, even now, we just had a death in the state yesterday, but that's just the 21st death in all this time. During that same time there have been, like, 70 automobile deaths. So, we've been lucky. But the cases are starting to surge. We went five weeks without an active case in Missoula and a week ago that changed. I think there's 9 active cases out of Missoula right now. So, it's changing. But the flip side is, you know, there's now more economic activity. Many people lost their jobs and status and that has been really difficult. It's hard to say.

DS: I am worried about the gateway communities to Yellowstone National Park. Those places like that where you're getting a lot of people coming out of state. Those are places that are really vulnerable. It's frankly kind of amazing we've had as few cases as we've had. I think in part because we closed the university before the cases started to spread. So, people went home, and, you know, if we'd had everybody come back to the university, I'm sure we would have had more cases.

DS: Two members of my church who're Native American and one of them was back on the Navajo Reservation where there has been a significant outbreak. He picked up COVID without realizing it and came back here and gave it to his partner. So, they're both quarantined and stuff now here. But the Native American communities have been, you know, particularly vulnerable to this. But you know. All it takes is one person who traveled someplace and comes back. It's hard to know what is going to happen in the two months between now and whether we open up again—less than two months now—and whether we hit a plateau, whether it really continues to increase. I think there's just a lot of unanswered questions.

MH: How do you think other states have handled the reopening?

DS: Well, I'm going to make a political statement here. Early on, when Steve Bullock was one of the very first ones to do it, I said to Pat, "I'm so glad I'm in a state that has a Democratic governor." Because we were just watching where the Republican governed states in the South, you know, like Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Texas. They're basically paying no attention to this and they open up. They closed down late and they opened up early and now look what's happening. It's just liked a wildfire.

DS: There's a medical expert at the University of Minnesota who was on Face the Nation or Meet the Press this weekend—he gets quoted a lot—but people are talking about, you know, "do you expect there to be another surge?" And he said, "what we're seeing right now is a wildfire." This is like a fire that has gotten out of control. You keep adding more fuel to add and the conditions get hotter and hotter. That's what the conditions are right now. So, I'm very

worried. And I think we're going to have other states—and Montana's increasing too, but not nearly as rapid as some of these other states. But if you look at the map right now, the whole South and the West Coast is just surging again.

MH: I'm going to turn more towards the news and what's been going on in our country right now. Have you seen any Black Lives Matter protests in Missoula? And what has that looked like?

DS: Well, I participated in two myself here. This is kind of a judgment call because, again, I had to protect my husband and I've got to be very careful about exposure. But, you know, the George Floyd killing took place on May 25th and we started hearing about it the next day and then the first videos came out. And I was just...just stunned. To a lot of us it was just traumatizing. Just imagining that. And some of us felt, like, you know, we have to do something. And so that Friday was the first demonstration in Missoula. It was at the [Missoula] County Courthouse.

DS: I had to be working on campus that day, so I rode my bike down there with my mask and it was classy, it was great because it was in front of the courthouse, so people were pretty spread out. We had over 400 people there. Almost everybody had masks on. We were spread out, so I was able to go to one other one down at the courthouse. I don't know if you've been following the situation with the armed folks, the militia folks that have been coming too. I haven't been to one where they're there because I haven't been able to the last few ones. But I saw that one that took place in Caras Park a few days ago, they didn't advertise it ahead of time except through the network because they wanted to avoid having this kind of confrontation with the [counter] protestors. But that's been kind of a bizarre dynamic.

DS: They had over 1000 people in Billings, 1000 people in Bozeman, in *Kalispell* which is such a very conservative place, several hundred people, so that's encouraging to me that there have been Black Lives Matter, you know, BLM protests in lots of communities in Montana and all across the country as well. In almost exclusively white communities, people are still so concerned by this and find ways to voice that.

MH: Yeah, for sure. Can you still hear me [technical difficulties]?

DS: Okay, yes. Yeah. I'm sorry about that. One other thing about that was, you know, just for me personally that was very painful was that I lived in Minneapolis for many years in the 1980s and so I know exactly the neighborhood where George Floyd was killed. One of the things that was hard was that some of those initial protests, later in the evening, where there was a lot of physical damage and rioting. One of the neighborhoods that was targeted was my own neighbors in South Minneapolis. So that was personally painful to see a place dear to me where restaurants I used to eat at burned down, the bank burned down, the post office burned down, the police station burned down, all these in our neighborhood. Which was a, boy I loved living in it. I mean, it was a very vibrant, diverse—it still is a vibrant, diverse neighborhood. But it's

hard to see, particularly because a lot of those businesses were owned by immigrant families, or by first generation families I totally understand the anger and the riots, but it is still very hard to see it turn into harming the communities themselves or be targeted was painful.

DS: I have a lot of my old friends who—I was living in an intentional community for many years, living in that particular neighborhood and many of my old friends live there. So, they've been very involved in the rebuilding and reorganizing, things like that. I'm just sending support from afar. So, it felt very personal to me because where it initially happened was the first house I ever owned and things like that.

MH: Can you comment a little bit more on the intersection between the protests and the coronavirus? You mentioned everybody is wearing masks, kind of social distancing, but we're still seeing massive groups of people coming together.

DS: Well, I think it's pretty interesting just as a kind of social statement. But what was fascinating to me was that, the only political movements being paid any attention prior to George Floyd being killed was the Right wing folks were pressuring, you know, going to the Michigan State Capitol and pressuring them to open up more, and bringing their guns and open carry. Even though those are relatively small groups, they made a lot of noise. That pretty much disappeared once the Black Lives Matter protests started. We've seen this massive mobilization there. Yeah, it's a risk. I mean, it's a danger. We will see what happens in the next few weeks with spikes and things like that. I've been impressed though that the vast majority of people participating in these protests have been wearing masks. So that's at least a positive thing, whereas the folks on the right don't.

DS: I'm just appalled by the lack of leadership that's coming from the president's office. You know, like holding these mass rallies in indoor arenas, people are unmasked. It's just the height of irresponsibility. And that the president [Trump] has now made it a political issue about whether or not you wear a mask. It just is insane. Things that should never been politicized now become culturally divisive and politicized now. So, now we have a whole segment of the population that won't wear a mask because they believe it's not patriotic to wear a mask. That's just so destructive.

MH: How do you see that going forward? Are you concerned? Are you looking forward to November? What do you think is going to happen there? Do you think the coronavirus is going to be politicized? Are you worried about voting? I know that's a lot of questions, but....

DS: No. I'm very worried about the next five months. I mean, I think even before the coronavirus that it was going to be an ugly period and it was gonna be a very ugly campaign to begin with. And then I think it is suspected it could be even uglier. Although, who knows. If Trump continues to insist on holding his rallies and they begin to start exposing the coronavirus, that's going to put a huge amount of pressure on him to continue not to do that. We'll have to see what happens.

DS: The pandemic is showing no signs of slowing. I mean, I remember back in March when it was first hitting in Italy. We really had a handful of cases here and people were looking at Italy with horror because they were getting up to 30,000 deaths. The health officials were warning us that we're only 12 days, two weeks behind Italy's curve. We're going to be in a similar place. It was hard to believe it at that point. Then people started talking about this scenario, we can have 100,000 deaths by August. It was just hard to imagine. Well, here it's mid-June over 120,000. And, you know, we're still getting the cases are surging and stuff. We have a president who doesn't want to...He wants to turn the page, doesn't want to pay attention to that. So, we've got this reality that is just so bifurcated in terms of people living in very different worlds.

DS: I mean I'm guilty of that. I mean my world is shaped by PBS and NPR, by reading the New York Times. I mean, I can't watch Fox News because it makes me crazy. I know there's other people who...their world is shaped by those things. So, in many ways we live side by side, and these different realities are hard to come into contact with each other. But the one thing is, you know, you can deny science and facts as much as you want, but the coronavirus pays no attention. It's going to continue marching along. We've got these empirical facts in terms of how many people are getting it, what's happening to us with deaths and things like that. It has the potential for being a very frightening time. That's partly why, you know, we have to consider reopening the university in the middle of that, I mean not just the university [of Montana] but the school systems around the country. It's just a challenging time to think about how we do that.

MH: Absolutely, yeah. What is something that's given you hope during this time? Whether that be politically, personally, anything like that.

DS: I will say, frankly, that the responses to the George Floyd killings and the other killings, the protest movements have been...On the one hand, I've felt so much anger, almost immobilizing because I can't do more right now. But on the other hand, seeing the people in the makeup of the movements...I have never seen such a diverse, multicultural space. I mean, your generation is just inspiring me right now. Because, you know, I think it's just like a scab being pulled off a wound. All this pent-up pressure from the coronavirus, the inequality that was hitting people of color, particularly African American and Native American communities. Pulling that off and now just seeing so many people, mobilizing for significant change.

DS: The other side of this is that even, who knows if this will be long term, but the initial polling is also showing that this is...even *Republicans* are saying something has to be done about police brutality, something has to be done about systemic racism. But I think we may look back and see this incredible turning point, the same way the "I have a Dream" speech, that [Martin Luther] King was. We're going to look back...I've never seen this level of mobilization at every level of community. You know, it's one thing to see them in Portland, or Los Angeles, or San Francisco. But they're happening in all these small little communities all over the place. So, something's happening and that gives me a lot of hope.

DS: The second thing is I think that, you know I've said, that the coronavirus is like having a forced time out. We've been living...I mean, one thing we haven't talked too much about here is climate change which is a huge issue. We just cannot find a way to deal with it because the economic trade-offs are so too challenging to changing our lifestyle. Coronavirus has come along and has forced us to change our lifestyle in ways that actually have positive environmental benefits. We haven't had a choice. We had to stop driving our cars, and so on. It seems like we're learning new ways to do that that could be very important in helping to address climate change. We're learning that we can start to think systemically rather than just little tweaks here and there. It's clear we're going to have to change system level kinds of things, whether it's policing systems, whether it's our healthcare systems. I think our economic system as well. It gives us an opportunity that we've been forced to take some time out.

DS: We're practicing some different behaviors, but it's also giving us a chance to think differently about how we move back into thing. Having said that, you asked about November 2nd, and I do think these elections are incredibly important in terms of what direction the country moves. I know I'm not supposed to speak politically when I'm sitting in as a chair for the university, but I think we've got two very start alternatives facing us in terms of election. I do think that there's a real possibility for significant social change coming out of the scope if it goes a particular direction.

DS: I really hope, not to put it back on your shoulders here, but I'm really hopeful that Generation Z...all this energy that's been extended in the protests, really important, really productive, can also be extend to registering to vote. You make a huge difference. I think we could have a really empowered young generation here. It's been fascinating to see what the mood is like on campus when everybody comes back after all this mobilization, having that energy come back to campus as well. I hope it does.

DS: I know we can find ways to carry that forward. Have you had a chance to intersect with any of the protests and stuff there in Portland, Oregon?

MH: Yeah, I have been out almost every night.

DS: Have you really? Yeah, yeah.

MH: It's been incredible and very motivating. I am so glad that people in Montana as well have been out there.

DS: Just to see it happening all over the country that way. I don't do a whole lot of social media, but it sounds to me it has been really helpful, you know, checking on Facebook to see, whatever, all my friends are doing in all these different places. I mentioned I have a sister in Portland. My nephew, her son, is African American. He's adopted. He's a 14-year-old. And I have lived in fear for years as he gets older and older as he's transformed from a really

charming, cute little boy. He's still a wonderfully charming young man, but he's a big fellow. He is going to be a big African American man. I've had really good conversations with my sister about this. We're both terrified. But I mean, I think hopefully some really positive change can come out of this, you know, effect things like police and things like that. But I have two nephews, one white, one black. I love them both, but they live in very different worlds. When my white nephew, who's older now, but he would have problems and it's just boys being boys kind of things that gets black boys killed, black men killed. So that's...It feels deeply personal to me. My sister Mandy has really wanted to participate in those protests, but she's felt very vulnerable because of having an African American son at home. She also doesn't want to bring the virus home. So, she's been watching from afar. Not participating directly, but is really happy it's happening, but also really fearful for her own son.

MH: It's a crazy time.

DS: It's a crazy time [laughs]. You asked one question, and they intersect with so many different issues. It's kind of hard to keep them apart because they're all interconnected.

MH: Yeah [laughs]...well, Dan, I think we're good. Thank you so much!

DS: [Laughs] All right!

[End of Interview]