

**Community Conversations: NJ's COVID-19 Storytelling Project**

Participant Number 195: Gail

Interview conducted by Y.K., November 2020

Transcribed by C.C. on February 6, 2021

[00:00- 0:41]

Interviewer: Alright, so it's Gail?

*Participant: Yeah.*

I: Cool. Gail, thanks for making the time, I know that its chilly out here. Um, but how--how are you doing?

*P: Um, I'm doing okay. But I'm blessed (inaudible 0:12-0:13) that every day I wake up got me still standing, still thriving.*

I: Yeah.

*P: Not giving up, you know.*

I: Yeah.

*P: Now I stay at the YMCA.*

I: You're staying at the YMCA?

*P: Yea, I was living in Florida for like two years.*

I: Uh huh.

*P: And things didn't work out and now I'm came [sic] to Bridges, but I'm from Newark, New Jersey.*

I: Okay.

*P: But I know about Bridges, when they used to be around the corner over there by Rector, back at Rector.*

I Sure, uh-huh.

*P: But now, now I'm back at Bridges.*

[0:41- 1:56]

I: Now you're back at Bridges.

*P: Yeah, they [sic] gonna help me pay my first month rent and security, but the thing is, it's so hard to find a landlord to--only thing I need, like I have income, but I just need that jump start.*

I: Yeah.

*P: But it's so hard with landlords, only thing you want is getting the first month rent and security.*

I: Yep.

*P: And that's it. You know? And I'm on my own and I can pay the rest. I have to--*

I: Yeah, yeah--

*P: I'm about to start working at a temp agency tomorrow, so Bridges helped me with bus cards.*

I: That's awesome, uh-huh.

*P: Until right now, but the lady at the Y said, since you have not been in jail, why did you get--your hands is [sic] worth \$17 more than, you know, working at a temp.*

I: Yea, what's, so--and tell me a little bit more about like, the landlord, you're not just--they're not offering you a place?

*P: They're not. No, they're not. And this the [sic] pandemic because at the end of the day, a lot of people is [sic] about to be homeless, they are homeless.*

I: Yup.

*P: They are homeless, people are going into they [sic] savings accounts.*

I: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

*P: And it's like, to the point, like, who do you have? Like, um, I mean--especially if you've got kids. You know, you're buying more groceries on average. I mean, it's a lot like, you know.*

I: It's a lot

*P: And since I've been back, I wish I--I wish I could go back to Florida, but you know, I just gotta [sic] settle where I'm at.*

[01:56- 03:24]

I: No, I hear you. Why--why don't you think landlords are making housing available like what

*P: Oh 'cause--you know why, because they gotta go through welfare. Welfare with the TRA. Alright, they pay your rent for a year. Landlords must accept the TRA, but then welfare will make payments for like—alright, probably do it for like four months, and then we gotta go back and then argue with the landlord, and the landlord come [sic] to us, letting us know that we go back to welfare and then sometimes welfare don't wanna pay. Like, it's very hard, like most people now are taking just Section Eight 'cause that's guaranteed money.*

I: Cause that's guaranteed, uh-huh.

*P: That's guaranteed. Like you know, welfare you gotta--they gotta make sure they send the payments out each month.*

I: I hear you. Yeah, no, I hear you. And you--you've mentioned that you're seeing like, a lot of--a lot more, like, folks that are homeless because of the pandemic, you said?

*P: Yeah, it's a lot.*

I: What--what happened?

*P: I got friends that been [sic] homeless that's my age, I'm thirty-four.*

I: Yeah.

*P: And been homeless for--since he was like twenty-three.*

I: Yeah.

*P: And finally his priority—he's now at a shelter.*

I: He is.

*P: Yeah.*

I: uh-huh.

*P: It's just hard, you know. Especially when you don't have guidance, like your famil's support, and, you know. Right now, I have my older sister since I've been back, until I get on my feet. She's married, but I'm thirty-four years old and it's time for me to get up, and, you know. But I can't look for an apartment and go to work.*

[03:25- 04:46]

I: Uh-huh. You can't look for an apartment and go to work, yup.

*P: Like it's not, it's not gonna [sic] happen. Especially the hours--*

I: Yup.

*P: You know, it's like--*

I: You have to--you have to make that choice. That's, like, an impossible choice to make.

*P: Yeah, and I need the money, like—[laughs]*

I: Yeah.

*P: I need the money, and I need the apartment.*

I: Uh-huh, gotcha [sic].

*P: When I went down to housing, um, on 500 Broad Street just now--*

I: Yeah.

*P: They wouldn't let me in, um--*

I: Why not?

*P: I guess because of the hours. 'Oh, you have to call over the phone and make an appointment.' But I just called 500 Broad Street in August 2020. They said that they were not accepting no more [sic] low-income housing and Section Eight. But the Y told me to go back personally down there, and go see for myself, but they won't let me in. So, I just got they [sic] number and I guess I'mma call them tomorrow or Monday and see. You know, I might have to run my mouth.*

I: Phew, sounds tiring.

*P: Yeah. I'm just happy that I don't have my kids with me because I'll be, I'll be--I'm already like stressed with the pandemic, like, everything, it's just--we gotta walk around with masks, and like--it's just, it's sad.*

I: Yeah. You say that you're happy that you're not—that you don't have your kids with you, where are they?

*P: They are in Somerset, New Jersey.*

[04:47- 05:36]

I: They are in Somerset, New Jersey

*P: Yeah, fourteen and twelve.*

I: Fourteen and twelve, and how are they holding up?

*P: They are doing good. I took 'em out of Newark.*

I: Yeah.

*P: I brought them to a safer area.*

I: Uh-huh.

*P: And I had my stuff together, my shit together, like you.*

I: Hah, oh.

*P: Yeah, but I fell--you know, but I fell. Now, you fall, but you gotta keep picking yourself up, keep pushing.*

I: I agree. Can—can I ask what you—like, what do you--you mean, you fell?

*P: 'Fall' means like, like when you hit the rock bottom. You get what I'm saying?*

I: Yeah.

*P: That's where I'm at right now.*

I: Yeah.

*P: You can't just accept it. You should want more, you get what I'm saying? You got to keep pushing and picking yourself up. Don't let--don't let 'no' for an answer--keep, keep going.*

I: Keep going, yeah. No, I hear you, I hear you. What--

*P: Some people is [sic] just set in their ways, and just think that 'this is it'. No, there is more out there, you just got to fight.*

I: Uh-huh.

*P: If you want it, take it. You know?*

[05:37- 06:41]

I: Yeah. Can I ask--I mean, do you mind if I ask you sort of, like, what kind of rock bottom--you know, like what--

*P: What is rock bottom? [laughs]*

I: Yeah, what--what's it's been, what's it been for you--

*P: Rock bottom is like, right now at the YMCA, that's rock bottom. When you [sic] outside sleeping, outside with a blanket, that's rock bottom.*

I: That's rock bottom, yeah.

*P: That is totally rock bottom.*

I: Yup.

*P: You go over there, (inaudible 06:01-06:03) by the YMCA, by where the church at--late night they sleep out here. Over there by 500 Broad Street, they got blankets, they sleep out there.*

I: Yeah, yeah.

*P: They sleep out--that's rock bottom.*

I: It's freezing.

*P: And then some people are stuck on drugs--there are shelters, but they, they been drugging that long, that's the only thing you know.*

I: Uh-huh.

*P: They know the agencies, they know programs, but this is what they accept, this is what they like.*

I: Yeah.

*P: You know?*

I: Yeah, and, and--no, I really hear you, and for you, kind of like, what are you hoping for? Like what are you sort of working towards? Kind of climbing out of that, sort of like--

*P: Oh, climbing out of my situation?*

[06:42- 07:52]

I: Yeah.

*P: Oh, a job.*

I: A job, yeah.

*P: You got to. They gonna give me already--a jump start, I just need to, you know.*

I: I hear you, I hear you. And your kids, they have a good set-up in Somerset?

*P: Yeah, yeah. They're not in my custody no more [sic].*

I: Um--

*P: But they're with good people.*

I: Yeah, yeah, they're with good people.

*P: I'm glad that they [sic] not in Newark, I don't got to worry about--my son is at the corner playing basketball and somebody hit him in the—or got shot, you know.*

I: [Gasps]

*P: It's very serious in Newark, like, in these streets. Like it's not even safe for kids to play out here in the playground.*

I: Yeah.

*P: 'Cause you never know when the bullet is coming. It's real, you know. Kids out here being adults, and parents are being the kids. Trying to feed their sisters and brothers. It's real, you know?*

I: I really--I really hear you. And who--I mean in addition to like Bridges and your family out in Somerset, like who are some folks that you've been able to lean on, kind of amidst all of this?

*P: Um, all my life I've been always independent.*

I: Independent, uh-huh.

*P: Like, I got a problem with pride. Like, asking people for something--I don't like the word 'no.'*

I: You don't like the word 'no.'

[07:53- 09:02]

*P: Like, I got a big, big heart. I'll give somebody the shirt off my back.*

I: Yeah.

*P: But people don't treat me how I treat them. You know. Like I had a lot of friends I took care, and had them in my apartment, you know. They crossed me over. You know?*

I: Yeah.

*P: It's crazy.*

I: I hear you.

*P: Always been independent.*

I: Always been independent. Can you--I mean its pretty--it's incredible sort of to hear that like even like in this place that you're thinking like about how you've helped out others. Can you--

*P: Now I'm leaning on other people.*

I: Now you're leaning on other people.

*P: And I don't like that.*

I: You don't—yeah I hear you. I mean--but it sounds like you've given so much to others. Can you think of an example of, sort of--like an act or acts of kindness that you've been able to do with other folks? Especially, you know, these past six, seven months. Whether it is somebody here or out in the street--

*P: I just came back from Florida, I've only been here for like two to three weeks.*

I: Yea, and where did you come back from--where?

*P: Boca Raton.*

I: From Florida, uh-huh.

*P: I had an apartment out there, and I left my boyfriend. I just couldn't do it anymore.*

I: Yeah, yeah.

*P: 'Cause I felt like I didn't have no [sic] family. I just felt--I kept going back, coming back to Jersey.*

I: Sure.

[09:03- 10:55]

*P: But it's just like, I just felt lonely, like--*

I: You felt lonely.

*P: You know? But, I can't answer that question, because it's always been me taking care.*

I: No, it's always been you taking care of—yeah. No, I hear it, I hear it. I totally hear it, I totally hear it. How do you--

*P: My mother, she hit rock bottom, like she still do [sic] dope now. But I'm happy that she's off the streets.*

I: She's off the street.

*P: Up there in East Orange. For like, only thirty-something years, you know. She got frostbite, I mean her brothers got money, but she--like I said people will just accept it, like, this is, this is--this is what--this is what they want, this is how they're accepted. And they don't want no help, they just want your money. Now my mother is staying in Trenton, she's off the streets, coping, but she do come back and forth to go get her drugs. You know, and she didn't take care of us, you know? We was [sic] DYFS child, state child you know? I took care of myself since the age of fourteen. How I learned was by my mistakes, and people—the people in the streets, your family, your friends don't have to be your blood line. The people in the streets treat you better than your own blood, you know? It's sad.*

I: Yeah.

*P: You know?*

I: Yeah. How--yeah, can think like of an example? You said that, like, people in the street--like sometimes that they--

*P: Not—more, they care about you more than your own family.*

I: No, yeah.

*P: Like more concerned, be there--*

I: What--

*P: Open the door, feed you, you know? Take you in like you're blood, you know? Your other family, I mean--what they just wanna hear. They're not sitting there saying, 'This is what I can do. This is what I can do to help you.'*

I: Yeah.

*P: You know, you don't hear that.*

I: You got--and do you feel like you sort of have kind of, like, a community here of folks out on the streets?

*P: You know, right now, I got my sister.*

[10:56- 13:03]

I: You got your sister.

*P: Yeah, I'm supposed to be meeting up with her.*

I: Yeah? That's awesome. Is she—is she out here in Newark?

*P: Yeah, she's married.*

I: Yup. Alright, I mean—that's great that you guys are gonna get together though. That, that's—that's great.

*P: Yeah, that's the closest bloodline who I'm close to, my sister.*

I: That's beautiful, that's great. No, thank you for sharing that, and like, um, es--kind of navigating, sorta like, looking for housing, looking for a job and sort of, all that process--

*P: But the thing, the thing that--the thing that I'mma say about this--*

I: Yeah, yeah.

*P: They can help you. You can--these people out here, Black people, they can get the help. They have TRA, welfare, Section Eight. They couldn't pay twelve dollars? Rent was twelve dollars, you lost a whole house over twelve dollars? Like y'all keep repeating it, repeating it, repeating it. How many times you just gonna keep hitting that rock? You know? You keep knocking at the door--you know what I'm saying? Like--but you can walk every day to the drug spot to go get drugs. [pause] You know, it's crazy.*

I: No, I hear it, it is crazy, and it's--oh man, it's hard. It's hard.

*P: It's rough out here.*

I: It's rough out here, it's rough out here. Any, um--like is there a way for you to like, find--I don't know like any kind of like, like what brings you--kind of like, joy, or comfort, or rest?

*P: Right now, right now I'm kind of in a depressed state.*

I: I hear you.

*P: 'Cause I got a lot going on, but I'm still keeping it pushing.*

I: Still keeping it pushing, yeah.

*P: I drink a lot now. You know, because my situation and what's going on. America is in a crisis.*

I: America is in a crisis.

*P: You know? It's crazy.*

I: Which, of the—[laughs] of the many crises that we've got in America, which is the one that hurts the most?

[13:04- 14:40]

*P: No--especially Trump. Trump don't care about nothing, I'm so happy that Biden is gonna be the President, is gonna fix us back up.*

I: What do you hoping for him to fix?

*P: Be there for the poor.*

I: Be there for the poor. What is it--

*P: Be there for everybody, you know?*

I: Yeah. What does it look like to be there for the poor, or to be there for everybody?

*P: When you be there for the poor, I don't know, something about the poor--*

I: Yeah.

*P: You know, I've been to nice areas, Palm Beach, like I—like, I've seen a lot, I didn't grow up in Newark, I was brought up in a [inaudible 13:28-13:29] home. You know, but as I got older, my uncle couldn't deal with me no more so they let me go. But about the poor, help the poor means, sometimes they need more attention.*

I: More attention. Like what is it--

*P: More guidance.*

I: Guidance.

*P: You know, come on. You see someone in the streets, give them money. Come on, 'come to my house,' you know? But, you can't trust them because you mess around bringing people to your house, you come back, you don't have nothing in it. [Laughs] You won't have nothing in there, you won't even see—you won't even see that person no more. You--that person been there for like, uh, two years. You help somebody out you got to be cautious with that too. You bring them in your house, you go to work, come back--everything gone, all your stuff is gone.*

I: [Laughs]

*P: You know. It's like a risk, like you gotta be cautious of who you bring in your house.*

I: Nah.

*P: I've seen it happen.*

I: You've seen it happen?

*P: Yeah.*

[14:40-16:09]

I: I hear you. No, I hear you. Alright, well. I mean--any additional, kind of like, words of wisdom--well, let me ask you beforehand. You mentioned sort of like, the--you know, like the crisis here in this country--like president, all that stuff, and how you're hoping that, you know, now maybe there'll be more like attention and guidance, um, for the poorer people, people that are out in the streets?

*P: Well, it's for everybody. America needs to stand together.*

I: America needs to stand together.

*P: Not like--American people, we act like, we're like, beefing. Like, we should be standing strong. Like, you know, you look at certain countries, you know—it's to the point where, like, people don't even like America no more. They wanna move out of America, 'cause Trump, like--*

I: [Laughs] Yeah.

*P: It's terrible, like, we got a president, goes on national TV like a comedian. He's just--*

I: Yeah, right.

*P: He's just very disrespectful.*

I: Very disrespectful.

*P: And he's rich, so he don't care what comes out his mouth. Like he's not professional, you know?*

I: No, I hear that, I hear that. And are you--

*P: Well, one thing I will say about Trump, is--I will say that he did bring more jobs. I'mma--I'mma, yeah, he did bring--everything that he did say that he was gonna do, he did. He did bring jobs, that's one thing I'mma say that--that he did for a lot of Americans. And with the, uh, people that's not from up here, like--put a stop to that, you know?*

I: Yup, yep.

*P: I guess you can say that about him.*

I: No. I hear you, I hear you. Yeah. Nah, anything Gail—anything else, kinda, you know, like to share--

*P: No--*

I: --words of wisdom, guidance, recommendations for the state.

*P: No. [laughs]*

I: Yeah, you're cold. Alright, I'll let you go.

*P: It's getting cold.*

[16:09- 17:14]

I: It's getting cold, alright. Well, I'm really grateful, you know, I hope it kind of just feels like--

*P: Do you see it, like, do you--do you ever think like being a therapist?*

I: Me? [laughs]

*P: Yeah.*

I: [Laughs] Why do you ask?

*P: Because you, um, you is [sic] a good listener.*

I: Oh my gosh, I'm so grateful for you just to be sharing today.

*P: You should look—you should look into that.*

I: [Laughs] I mean--

*P: Yeah, counselor for the poor people. Just listening, and, you know, talking to the other man, you know some people need that. Talk. You know?*

I: Yeah. No, I mean for me it--it's just like a privilege to be able to hear just what kind of like, things are like out here for you guys. And you know we as a state, just like--we can only do our jobs if we learn from you, and from the things that you are seeing. And, you have expertise.

*P: Which is true, yeah.*

I: You know?

*P: You're absolutely right.*

I: Expertise, experience, and you guys, you know, have to be the ones who sort of like--shaping the decision-making, even just kind of the way you kind of, like, conceptualize, sort of the most important task for a new president, right?

*P: Yeah.*

I: I mean, that's really important for us to hear.

*P: I mean, even the poor—even the poor's gonna have COVID. You know? People who slept on the streets get COVID. That's real.*

I: Yep.

*P: They're saying, they want him out.*

I: Yep.

*P: The poor even stood up and went--you know?*

[17:15-17:31]

I: No, I hear you. I hear you, I mean, we just—we need you guys as our teachers, so I know I'm grateful to you.

*P: Thank you.*

I: Um, alright so. I really wish you all the best in health.

*P: Thank you.*

I: And just kind of, that this process works itself out, right?

*P: Mm hmm.*

I: Alright Gail, thanks very, very much.