**Participant DDS15**

Listener: Do I have your permission to record our chat today?

DDS15: Yes

Listener: I figure I should give you a little bit of info about me. My name is <Listener> and I've done lots and lots of listening sessions with <researcher2>. That's how I met <researcher>. That's my story. Today we have really as much time as you want, or need, to chat with me. We set 45 minutes, but it could be less or more, whatever works. As I think you already know, we're going to be talking a little bit about your experience with restaurants during the COVID time that we're in.

DDS15: Yes, I do.

Listener: Can you tell me about a time that you went to a restaurant during this era that we’re in?

DDS15: In the Spring, I think April, my husband, and I had to go away from our home to take care of some business, and we did not have the ability to bring anything with us or go back home before we had to do something else. So, we knew we had to eat somewhere. We found a place where we could eat outdoors. We felt like it seemed like it would be the best thing to do, where they had a big tent out in the parking lot, where there used to be a place for cars. So, we ate outdoors at a restaurant, I think for lunch.

Listener: And what was that like?

DDS15: At first, we were one of the few people there. I think it was like a brunch, so people were coming in slowly. So, it seemed really good because there were very few people there. They had us spread apart, and the waiters and the waitresses had masks. And we wore them too, except for when we ate. As we were eating, it became apparent the table near us was going to be for 12 people. It turned out to be like a girls' afternoon brunch kind of thing, and they started coming in with presents. So, maybe it was a baby shower, or a wedding shower or something. We finished our meal and fortunately had to go on our way, but I'm not sure I would have wanted to keep eating there with that many people. It just seemed a bit overwhelming, even though we were outside. The wind was blowing a little bit. It was kind of warm, and we had a fan on us, blowing on us because it was warm. So, our air was blowing on everybody else I suppose because we were the first table near the fan too. I felt like oh no, what if I have something, which I didn't think I did, but I felt a little nervous.

Listener: Yeah, you felt nervous because of the fan. Tell me a little bit more. Like what was going through your mind around the fan? It seems like there were a couple of different components of that.

DDS15: Well, I liked it because it was close to us, and I was really hot, but then I sort of remembered reading something about being downwind from something, and it just felt unfair that we got the fan and everybody else got the air that went past people. But I didn't turn it off because I was hot.

Listener: Yes, for sure. And then also, do you remember, kind of as the group of 12 came, what was going through your mind at that time?

DDS15: I just thought about how generally they were saying gather in smaller groups. So, it just seemed like too large a group for me to be comfortable having gathered in myself, since I hadn’t done anything like that. I was surprised.

Listener: Yes, yes. Do you remember any other, as they were trickling in, any other things that came to mind? You were surprised.

DDS15: Well, they took their masks off a lot to greet each other. So, they were not very cognizant of that, even though technically you were supposed to have them on when you weren’t eating. But it was kind of early in the whole mess, so we hadn’t been told we have to keep our masks on and things like that. It’s just something my husband and I were already doing.

Listener: Yes, yes. I get that. Also, the scenario – it was hot, and the fan, and the dual function of the fan. I relate to that. Have there been other times where you’ve been in a situation like that? Or were there any other outdoor restaurants that you’ve gone to since April?

DDS15: No, we really haven't. I was thinking about that. I feel like I've thought about it several times, and either the weather was bad, or I made a different plan. I just didn't feel comfortable. I didn't know if the place had a good setup. So, I sort of wanted to go scope it out first, and I didn't have time to sort of prescreen the restaurant. So, every time I think about doing it, I kind of tell myself it's not worth it. I can do that next year.

Listener: When you think about prescreening, what does that mean? What would go into that?

DDS15: I would do a drive-by to see how they’re seating people on a day that I wasn’t planning to go, and I would just look at how they have the tables set up and how close they have people together. Just kind of see how they’re doing it.

Listener: Are there any other things besides layout and distance that you would be looking for?

DDS15: If I was able to drive close enough, I would check to see what signage they had up and whether masks are required, and people were using them.

Listener: And then for signage, have you seen signage other places that comes to mind?

DDS15: Mostly in grocery stores and things like that where I have to go get things. You know they have signs when you come in the door that say you need to wear a mask. And some of them have arrows that tell you which way to go and things like that.

Listener: Cool. Interesting. Tell me more about the arrows. Is that just so people are all going in one direction?

DDS15: I think so. I think it’s to kind of avoid bottlenecks in the grocery stores. However, every time I’ve gone shopping there, there are so few people shopping that the arrows don’t really matter. If there were more people there, I think people would mind them a little better, but usually I pick a time when it’s pretty light, either by accident, or it’s always light. I don’t know.

Listener: Um-hmm, um-hmm. And when you’ve decided to go to the grocery store, what kind of goes through your mind with that? It seems like the signage is something you’ve noticed. What other things? Just thinking of maybe an early time, when the pandemic was first starting.

DDS15: Well when it first started, I did delivery only. I actually didn’t go. And that was not unusual for me because I’ve been doing delivery in the past when I worked, before when I was too busy. And I thought well, I know how to do that, I can just do that.

Listener: What led to that decision? What was going through your mind when you decided at that time to do delivery only?

DDS15: I had a cough early on in March that turned out to probably be more related to allergies, but it made me feel cognizant of my health and just thought well I had been out somewhere where there could have been people before we knew what this was, and I wanted to give it at least 2 weeks to find out what was going on. So, I just got my computer out. I hadn't ordered with the Giant delivery for a while and just went ahead and did it.

Listener: How was that?

DDS15: Oh, it’s great. I love it. I feel a little bit decadent doing it because they bring it right to your kitchen. I’ve always loved doing it, but once I retired, I taught myself how to shop again because I thought I have time. I don’t need someone to deliver my food. So, COVID gave me the excuse to let someone deliver my good again. Recently I have gone back to some shopping in between my large orders, and that’s when I saw the signage.

Listener: Yeah. At what point – do you remember when you decided to switch back from getting delivery only to doing sometimes to the store?

DDS15: I think it happened when there was like something I just couldn't find online, and I wanted to see if it was in the store. It was like less than 5 things. Probably June, maybe, and I just thought well let me just go see what they're doing, and I'll make it quick. And I'd sent my husband once, and he told me about the arrows and the thing, so I said okay let me give it a try. And I went early in the morning, and I was fine with just going for a short trip. And then I sort of went for a little bit more and a little bit more. Now I probably do twice a month in person, maybe once a month delivery.

(new one)Listener: That’s so interesting that you think of the delivery as decadent.

DDS15: Well, you have to pay a little extra. And I was tipping the delivery people a lot because I thought they're taking the risk for me. So, it became even more decadent, but I decided it was worth it for COVID. And I felt like I was employing someone else, so that was probably helping somebody have a job.

Listener: Absolutely

DDS15: But I did kind of miss picking my own food, and sometimes they just did not have what you needed online. That happened a lot, more than it happened before, where they were out of everything – more than toilet paper. Just lots of things they were out of. You'd get about half your delivery. So, I started ordering twice as much food as I needed knowing I would get half as much.

Listener: Um-hmm, um-hmm. Good strategy.

DDS15: And that worked until my refrigerator broke down. So, now I go and shop and buy small amounts of food because I only have two small refrigerators that were in like entertainment areas of the house until I can get my new refrigerator. But they are having a lack of refrigerators so it's taking 3 months now.

Listener: Wow. Okay. And when did the refrigerator die?

DDS15: That was August.

Listener: Oh wow, that’s really rough.

DDS15: The 29th of October is the new date. We’ll see. They’ve changed it 3 times.

Listener: What went through your mind when the refrigerator broke?

DDS15: Actually, not much. I was just like well it's annoying, but I'll just get another one. I just didn't realize there was this incredible backlog of appliances because of COVID. I had no idea it had affected these things.

Listener: Um-hmm, um-hmm. Yeah. Wow. So you have a smaller fridge that you’re working with until then?

DDS15: Yes. We actually have two. We had one in a bar area, one in the entertainment area with the TV.

Listener: Um-hmm, um-hmm. It sounds like sort of the combination of that and the pandemic is requiring a lot of strategy around kind of order twice as much to get half, and they don’t have the things that you want. Can you think back to a time when there was something you really wanted, and they didn’t have it? Or, how have you thought about that as you’ve learned about the difference in getting groceries now?

DDS15: One thing for the orders is I never used to put that they could substitute with something else. I always wanted the brand I wanted, or the thing I wanted, but if there was something I just needed, that had a substitute available, I would click that button, and so I'd get a different brand of milk, or whatever it was that I wanted, just to be sure I got something. The other one, if there wasn't what they considered a substitute, I would order two of the same thing, and if I would get both of them – like 2 different brands – I’d order two things similar and then I’d just freeze one, or keep one for later.

Listener: Um-hmm, um-hmm.

DDS15: That worked with toilet paper too because occasionally they said they had it, so I'd order 2 different types, and then invariably one of them suddenly ran out just before my order.

Listener: Yup, yup. Earlier – I sort of keep going back to the fan – it sounded like there was a bit of a tension between your concern of potentially getting other people sick and additionally being concerned about getting sick yourself. I’m curious if there have been other scenarios where kind of both of those have been going through your mind?

DDS15: We did eat inside a restaurant one time also to try that. That worked okay because they put us in a wing of the restaurant that had nobody else, but we had to go past a lot of people. And there was a waiter and then people in the bathroom. And there was a little 2 year old girl who Mommy was trying to get her to put on the mask. All of that just – it wasn’t that I was feeling like I was getting anyone sick at that moment, or that they were getting me sick, but it just felt uncomfortable. You were inside, you knew the air was recirculating, so that just made me feel compassion for parents with kids going through this, and for whatever reason having to go out to eat. Also, for waiters and waitresses trying to deal with all this. I want to go out and eat, but my brain says I don’t need to, I can cook at home. So, I keep staying home. So, I tried each of them once – one outdoor, one indoor – and I really haven’t tried it again, but I keep considering it. So, I haven’t completely said no.

Listener: When you consider it, what’s going through your mind?

DDS15: Well, like we have a restaurant up the street I really like. They were doing delivery, but now that they're open, they don't do delivery. It's a small family run place, and I'd like to support them. So, they're the one I want to go prescreen and take a look at their outdoor dining and see whether we could try that while the weather is kind of good in the Fall here. I want to support them, but I don't want to risk my health.

Listener: Um-hmm. Yeah. I'm just thinking about kind of like the desire to support all these folks’ jobs – the waiters and the family-owned restaurant. I get that. When you think about that one time when you went for the indoor dining, it seemed like there were a couple of different things going on. There was kind of an awareness of the recirculated air. Were there any other things that you can remember in the space, or in that experience, that contributed to the feeling of discomfort?

DDS15: I think it was mostly because it was the first time I was trying it. It had been so long since I’d been out. It really wasn’t terribly crowded, and they were trying their best. I knew, if I needed to go out – because I was out somewhere where I had no choice. I had to do something, and outdoor was not possible. So, I thought well, I'm going to try this one time because I need to eat and I’m going to do it, and if I love it and I’m feeling great, I’ll do it again. And if I just feel like I’m not ready for it, I’ll wait. I think maybe seeing everyone in masks, it’s reality. It’s something to get used to, but it just doesn’t make it as much fun, I’d guess I’d say. Or more relaxed, it’s not as relaxed. We know there’s a heightened sense of wanting to stay well.

Listener: Absolutely. It’s interesting, thinking back to what you said earlier about the group of 12 at the outdoor place, where they weren’t wearing masks that much, and that kind of created some discomfort. And then sort of the other half of that is just the general people wearing masks and that also creates (audio blip) feeling.

DDS15: Right.

Listener: So, when you think about it being Fall, and you’re thinking about when it gets colder, how are you thinking through – it seems like you’re having kind of the tug to want to go back to restaurants. What do you have going on in your mind when you think of it getting colder and indoor may be the only option?

DDS15: I’m pretty sure with indoor the only option, I won’t do it unless I absolutely have to be out somewhere where I have no choice. I never was a big person to eat out a lot. We did order in some. We’ve probably increased our ordering in more than we have in the past and that way I can still support the restaurants, if they’re willing to deliver. So, my thought is if they have to close their outdoor areas they might start delivering again.

Listener: So, for the ordering in, have you done that the whole pandemic?

DDS15: Yes. They were a little slow in the beginning because we had a lot of food, but there were some times when we needed to. We ordered from places that we had used before and kind of tested the feeling of doing that. They were able to do contactless delivery and so we felt okay with eating cooked food that we ordered in.

Listener: Um-hmm, um-hmm. And so it sounds like the fact that it was cooked was important to you. Can you talk a little bit more about your thinking with cooked versus raw, or uncooked?

DDS15: I’m just thinking, and I could be wrong, that at least heated food that has been cooked should be fairly safe. There was something about handling the bags and things like that. I let my husband get the deliveries and he takes care of it and so far we haven’t had any problems.

Listener: Nice. Are you still doing cooked food only?

DDS15: I’m just trying to think. I can’t even think of what I’d order in for dinner that wouldn’t be cooked. We do order in the groceries which, of course, there was all the stuff going on with do you wash them down and all that kind of stuff. I was never that worried about it. I would just set the things aside that were dry goods and then put the things away that were refrigerated and just kind of wait a day and then eat them the next day – or starting the next day. I’d just give them 24 hours, but I never washed everything, like I heard some of my friends doing. I just felt like just giving them some time, in case there was any contact. But when we order hot food, I feel like I can just eat it right away.

Listener: Yes. So, that’s interesting. When you kind of made the decision to sort of have this system of the dry good 24 hour and then all of the other stuff, how did you come up with that?

DDS15: There were some places that were saying you should wash everything, but most of the reports I saw said it really wasn’t necessary. So, I kind of split the difference and said well some of them said if you just set it aside and give it 24 hours it should be okay. Maybe it’s just in my mind, so I figured well I don’t need it anyway, so I’ll just try that. And I wash my hands after I deal with the bag and things like that. So, I just wash my hands carefully. Same thing with the ordering in. We just wash our hands of anything we’ve touched that anybody brought to us.

Listener: Um-hmm, um-hmm. And then have there been other times when you’ve been out and about, maybe not eating, but you’ve had times where there were like groups close to you that were like the group of 12 that were at the outdoor restaurant? Have there been other times when you’ve kind of come close to folks that were maybe not doing the same thing as you?

DDS15: I take a lot of walks and things like that. I’ve been to different parks that are open air and for the most part, I’ve been very comfortable being in the open air, walking and finding that a large percentage of people are wearing masks, or they keep their distance if they have them off. Nobody has really like come up into my personal space without a mask and made me uncomfortable. People with masks kind of nod and smile. And people without masks seem to keep their distance. So, sort of like an understanding that I will go off the path if I don’t have a mask.

Listener: Yes.

DDS15: And I walked around Washington, D.C. like that too. I went down because my nephew lives downtown, and we’ve taken walks around. City versus country, same. People seem to have the same sort of understanding of personal space. I have not seen people trying to get too close together.

Listener: Um-hmm. That sounds reassuring.

DDS15: I think people care enough to try.

Listener: It sounds like when you think about going to restaurants, a lot of it is about supporting the restaurant, especially with the family-owned one by your place. Prior to COVID, can you think back to a really great in-restaurant experience that you had, where you were like really comfortable, and you had a great time?

DDS15: Sure. Lots of them. Do you want me to talk about it?

Listener: Is there one that kind of comes to mind that was a really great experience?

DDS15: I can think of one that was really great.

Listener: Do you want to tell me a little bit about it?

DDS15: A friend had had a funeral meeting at a restaurant that I really liked, and I enjoyed the big group atmosphere, but it had a nice, cozy area. So, I told my husband we've got to go back there and actually have a nice, cozy dining experience. It was great. They had fireplaces, and nice tables, and good food. We had a good time.

Listener: Nice. So, you went the first time, and it was a funeral, and that was the first time you had been to that restaurant?

DDS15: Yeah. I'd never realized it was there, and I was like, oh I've passed this by, I don't know how I never walked in there. They were using a room in the back, so we didn't really eat out in the main area. So, I thought I want to try the actual restaurant someday.

Listener: Umm. Nice Yeah, that sounds great with the fireplaces, and cozy. Did you just eat? Or did you eat and then just sort of hang out for a little bit?

DDS15: I think we went right after work and did like drinks and then had a full meal and just kind of relaxed and then went home.

Listener: Um-hmm. Um-hmm. You mentioned earlier that you somewhat recently retired. When was that?

DDS15: A little over two years ago.

Listener: Oh wow. Okay. What was your work before?

DDS15: I was a social worker predominantly, for most of my career.

Listener: And then how has it been doing a different thing, being retired?

DDS15: Fantastic. I highly recommend it.

Listener: Oh, nice. What’s fantastic about it?

DDS15: Well, it depends how retirement is for each person, but there are many things I love doing that I just didn’t have enough time for, so I can choose now what I want to do with my time. I did prepare for it and save for it, so I have enough money to do what I want. So, that makes it fantastic.

Listener: What are some things that you wanted to do that you’re doing?

DDS15: Well, I wanted to travel more. Not doing as much as that. I wanted to visit a lot of different museums and I did that for the first year. Went downtown with my husband, who still works, and just took the day. Just wandered around D.C. and went to whatever I wanted to. It was great. I got a lot of that out of my system. Then visited with friends a lot who were retired and just kind of did a lot of things in my home that I’d been wanting to do and hadn’t had time to do some different projects on the house.

Listener: What kinds of projects have you done?

DDS15: Well, they aren’t things that I do personally, but I arrange for people to do, and it stresses me out to arrange them. So, I was happy to wait until I retired. That is house getting painted, repairing some problems we had in our basement and kind of getting files and drawers organized. I’m taking a lot of stuff to the dump and recycling.

Listener: Nice. How is that for you?

DDS15: It was kind of cathartic. A nice feeling. I’ve been here 17 years and I had boxes I hadn’t even opened from when we moved in 17 years ago that were things that – I knew what they were, but I didn’t know what they were. Now, at least I’ve sort of organized the mess a little better, so I know what everything is and made sure nothing was getting too destroyed from poor storage and things like that. Still got a ways to go, but I’ve gotten a dent made, a large dent.

Listener: Nice. It sounds like a lot of progress.

DDS15: In fact, we had one of our projects stopped by COVID because they were supposed to come the week that they said nobody should do anything from state to state, and the people were coming from Maryland. They're like, "oh, we can't come to Virginia. You need to delay this." We're like, "that's okay, we'll be happy with you to delay this." Later they were able to travel again, and we were able to get it done, and we just stayed in the rest of the house and they did the work. Then we just went in and okayed it and then they left. It all worked.

Listener: What went through your mind when you made that plan of you would stay in one part of the house and they would do the work in the other?

DDS15: Well, it was pretty simple because it had a separate entrance. And there was a door dividing the spaces already. So, we went in first before they came and cleaned everything out, with masks. They were just following up on something we'd arranged a long time before. We just made sure they knew what to do. Then when they had questions we'd go in with masks. But we really didn't need to be there. They knew what we wanted and got it done.

Listener: Great. Sounds like it was smooth. How long was the delay from when it kind of got paused to when they came back and did the work?

DDS15: About 2 months.

Listener: Oh wow. What was your attitude with that delay?

DDS15: It was not an emergency that needed to be done. Like if we needed plumbing, like a water leak or something, they would have come right away. But they were delaying anything non-emergency, and I was like absolutely. Until we know what's going on, until they got their PPE for their staff, all those things. I said, "there's no reason to rush."

Listener: Yes, yes, yes. And then as far as your desire to travel more, what are your thoughts on that? Have you done sort of any local traveling around?

DDS15: Yeah, a little bit. I’ve done a couple of things to local parks. Tomorrow I might actually go out for my first trip to a winery, if I don’t chicken out. Somebody called me yesterday and I thought well? She wants to go tomorrow. We’ll see how I feel after this interview. I don’t know what I’m going to say. Maybe I’ll talk myself out of it.

Listener: Oh, why?

DDS15: It’s beautiful weather. We know we can sit outside, so I think we’re going to do it.

Listener: Yes, yes. And is it a winery you’ve been to before?

DDS15: Yes

Listener: What went through your mind when your friend asked you to go?

DDS15: I just looked up the winery. A) to be sure they were open. B) to see what their procedures are with COVID. As I suspected, they don’t let people sit up next to the bar. You get a takeaway box that you can take to a picnic table in a field. It’s not the same as it used to be, but that’s one reason we want to go on a weekday. She only works part-time so we’re going to go tomorrow afternoon, so that hopefully it’s less busy than the weekend.

Listener: Um-hmm, um-hmm.

DDS15: We both agreed if it looks too busy, or it looks unsafe, we can walk away. So, we’re going to go and see what it’s like.

Listener: Yeah. And it sounds in some ways similar to your grocery store approach which is like well it probably isn’t going to be that crowded, and in that case, it sounds like the whole experience is outdoors?

DDS15: Yes

Listener: Nice. Are there any other sort of local outings? That one sounds like a fun one.

DDS15: Well, my niece came into town, and she had to stay here until she got her COVID test so she could go visit her new niece, little baby that was born. And she talked me into taking her in the Washington Monument, which I've done before. Also, I looked online to see how they were doing it, and they were only letting 4-8 people up at a time. I said this will be fun because the last time I went they jammed 30 of us into that elevator and I thought this is crazy. I said this might actually seem normal. So it did. We did great.

Listener: Um-hmm. Going back to the winery, just for a minute, when you looked online to see the information they had, what kind of info did you find?

DDS15: So, they immediately had like a little square at the top saying “due to COVID we’re not using the bar area. This is how it goes.” That was the first thing you would see and then it gave a little more detail farther in about what their hours were and which days they’re open. The old stuff was still there, but clearly the COVID part came first. And it was very gentle and friendly. It just said you’ll need to wear your mask unless you’re drinking and get your things and then go to the tables that are separated.

Listener: Um-hmm, um-hmm. Gentle and friendly sounds nice.

DDS15: Yeah, very clear. And it just made me feel secure to try it because they’re doing something. If there had been nothing on there, I might have looked at a next one that’s further away and see what that one is doing, but I just picked the closest one.

Listener: Yup. Yeah, that clarity of the information and then also like the tone sounded still inviting, like it would be fun still to go there.

DDS15: Yes. And the weather looks fantastic tomorrow, so that was another thing. I checked the weather and then the website.

Listener: Yup. Did you and your niece do any other exploring around?

DDS15: We did a lot of hiking in the woods around our house and a lot of walking in parks. There were sometimes people there. We always wore our masks and did that, but we didn’t go to any other indoor spaces except the Washington Monument and her brother’s house.

Listener: Great. It sounds like you’re finding a lot of great ways to get out and be in nature and be outside throughout this whole time.

DDS15: Yeah, really trying to just get out and do something.

Listener: When you say you’re trying to, is there something that’s hard about doing that?

DDS15: Well, for a while I stayed in a lot, and I thought I've organized everything I can in this house, I need to get out. I need to not be totally afraid of the world and find ways to be outside successfully because this is not going away quickly.

Listener: Um-hmm. At the time when that changed for you and you started being a little more open to going outside, do you recall like a time or a day when you were like okay today I’m going to go outside? And what was going through your mind at that time?

DDS15: I don't remember exactly, but I probably discussed it with my husband, and we probably went somewhere together first, like around the neighborhood. Put our masks on and just gave it a try. It's sort of fuzzy, but I think I started with my own neighborhood.

Listener: Yeah. It doesn’t need to be a specific time.

DDS15: It wasn’t like an “I’ve got to get out of here.” It was just like I’ve got to try something. You just sort of add little things in. So, he’s the one I’m talking to about whether we’ll try this local restaurant or not.

Listener: And when you talk to him about kind of all these decisions, what goes through your mind? Or what kinds of things come up?

DDS15: Well, he is out in the world more than I because he is working, sometimes having to go into work, although he works from home predominantly. He’s also a volunteer fireman and so he really knows, first-hand, COVID procedures and things like this that they’ve had to learn in online classes about these things. So, I kind of respect his opinion.

Listener: What a resource.

DDS15: I know. I’m really lucky. And he knows that I tend to be nervous about stuff. So, I know that if he felt it was a wrong decision on my part, he can figure out how to talk me out of it. He’s pretty much waiting for me to feel comfortable. I’m sure he would have been out sooner.

Listener: Um-hmm, um-hmm. But he’s good at making the compromise with you?

DDS15: Yeah, yeah. And he’s got plenty to do at home too, so he doesn’t have any trouble with that. But same thing with ordering food, or going shopping, or going to the restaurant, it’s a mutual decision between us both because it affects us both. That's all. You've got to be on the same page or one of us is affecting the other in an inappropriate way. He did want to volunteer for the fireman stuff earlier than I felt comfortable him doing that, because I wanted to see more about what they were doing. But, eventually, he went back to volunteering.

Listener: Um-hmm, um-hmm. And can you remember when he was sort of anxious to get out and do the fireman work, what was going through his mind?

DDS15: Well, he felt like he was losing his skills if he didn't go do it. He kept telling me that. He needed to practice. He also knows that they had instituted procedures with limited numbers of people and things that he felt it was safe. And he just didn't want to lose his skills, but one day they really needed somebody for something specific, and I said, "well go try that and then come back and tell me how it really was." I wanted it to be a reason. I didn't just want it to be, "I feel like going." I wanted them to need him. So, they really needed him, so then I was willing to let them have him. And I said, "if it's bad, you're living in the basement." That happened to him once at work. He had to live in the basement once for two weeks because there was exposure at work. And that’s when they stopped letting him go into work.

Listener: Oh, wow.

DDS15: Yup. He didn't get anything, and his co-workers immediate to him didn't get it, but somebody two things down the chain did get it.

Listener: Oh, wow. Yeah.

DDS15: So, I kind of held him close for a while.

Listener: Yeah.

DDS15: It’s annoying to live in the same house, but not see each other for two weeks.

Listener: I’m sure. I’m sure. And so what was that like? Did he just stay down there the whole time and you brought him food?

DDS15: Yes. Yup. There’s a stairway in between our upper and lower level. So, I would put his food on the bottom stair and go upstairs and blink the lights and tell him it was time to pick up his food.

Listener: Oh, wow. Good system.

DDS15: It worked, and we developed lots of other systems like that. He didn't have real good sleeping arrangements. That was the worst because we don't have a real bed down there, but we came up with better solutions as the 2 weeks went on, besides the blow-up mattress.

Listener: Um-hmm, um-hmm.

DDS15: I don’t think he wanted to do that either, again, so I figured he would be careful if he could. He just measures his exposure with if he’s out somewhere and something unexpected happens that he could not control, then he knows he will go and do the same thing.

Listener: Um-hmm. It seems like you guys have a great system in place.

DDS15: Yes

Listener: Even if it’s not that fun.

DDS15: Yeah, exactly. We know we can do it, but we’ll be better at it now. But now all the refrigerators are downstairs. Now that would be bad. We should not have that happen until we get our new refrigerator. Thank goodness it happened before the refrigerator died.

Listener: Yes. Something came to mind and just slipped away. Oh. It’s sort of interesting thinking about you had said that part of the conversations that you have with all these different activities with your husband are sort of the strategic side of weighing risks and comfort levels, but then it also sounded like when you went out to walk in the neighborhood there was another part of your thinking that evolved when you sort of did the activity together. Can you tell me a little bit more about your thinking when you went out together and kind of took on the new activity together?

DDS15: I think it was mostly to be sure we were on the same page in how we both felt and what we saw once we went out there. We hadn’t really been out together. He’d been at work, or at home, and I’d just been at home. So, it was sort of like emerging from a cocoon. Comfort level and all that grew. Then we started doing bike riding and we tried it with our mask, without our mask, to see if we could survive that. Things like that. So, we sort of do walking first and then other things. We haven’t done any indoor physical activities like going to a gym or anything like that though. Everything is outdoors.

Listener: Yeah. And with this cycling, how has that been going?

DDS15: Well, it kind of was okay, but I just felt very restricted with the mask, and I wasn't sure how far I could go with the mask, even though I think I was breathing fine. I'm just not a big cyclist, so he pretty much does the bike by himself now. I'm not a big biker though. It's not just COVID.

Listener: Yes. It sounds like walking and sort of exploring outside is more what you like?

DDS15: Yeah. We did cancel a trip to the Shenandoah that was in the summer for my birthday because I felt like I really didn't want to do indoor dining and/or being around a lot of staff people and a lot of traveling people. I just didn't feel comfortable, and we've been there many times. It's a fun trip, but it didn't feel like it was going to be fun. We did go to a national park in our area, and I got my senior pass when I turned 62. Locally, at Great Falls. That's what I really wanted, and we just took a walk there, and that was fine.

Listener: And the Shenandoah, was that a resort?

DDS15: Yeah, there’s a place we go – a couple of places we go. We had just booked a place before COVID. We had done this in January planning for something fun. They were very fine with us canceling. There was no cancellation fees or anything like that.

Listener: Oh, nice. Yeah. It sounds like the indoor dining; I hear that that was maybe a big consideration.

DDS15: Yeah, and I wasn’t sure how it was going to work. It’s a big place. It’s a lot of people. It didn’t appeal to me at that point and I didn’t need it. I had plenty to do otherwise.

Listener: Yeah, it sounds like the waterfall was still a great birthday?

DDS15: Oh, it was so good.

Listener: Was that a waterfall you had been to before?

DDS15: Yeah, but I could go back to Great Falls anytime. That place is fantastic. You drive past it a lot to go to other great things. So, staying close to home was good. We also did finally go to an outdoor whisky tasting with some friends down at Washington’s Gristmill. That was all outdoors also.

Listener: What was that like?

DDS15: I forgot about that. We did do that activity. That was in September. They had a little tent. You would just print off your tickets online, and you'd go through a thing. They just made sure you had a mask and you'd go down the hill to where they had a little tent, and then you'd sort of wait 6 feet from the people in front of you, and they'd go pick up their drinks and move off to the side little table. Then you’d pick up your drinks and move off to the side little table. We got to taste some George Washington whisky and celebrate our friend’s birthday. So, it was very nice.

Listener: So, you went with a group of friends?

DDS15: Just two other people. They only were allowing groups of 4-6, I think, to sign up together. So, we just did 4. As my friend said – we’ve done things like this a lot. What we normally would have done after that is we would have gone to a restaurant inside and spent a couple more hours together, but nobody felt like doing that. We just parted ways and went home. So, that was the thing that felt different. Doing the whisky tasting, outside, that could have happened anytime, anywhere. And we just stayed a little more apart than we probably would have. But for noise reasons, I always like to stay apart. But not going to an indoor place afterwards to relax with them was different.

Listener: Can you tell me a little more about that? Just missing that part of what the plan would usually be.

DDS15: Well, you get, I think, a little more conversation going than if you're just sort of wandering in a field. And you can just spend more time with your friends. And we're just used to going out to dinner with them, probably once every two months. They haven't felt like it, and we haven't felt like it, but we do a lot of Zoom stuff. We do little Zoom wine and cheese nights and things like that. So, we still see them, but we just don't get to be like we normally like.

Listener: Um-hmm, um-hmm. And then how frequent are the wine and cheese nights?

DDS15: It’s about twice a month.

Listener: Oh wow, that’s great. Is the wine tasting with your husband, or is that with just other friends?

DDS15: The whisky tasting thing was with my husband, myself, and our two best friends, a couple that we hang out with. The online thing has a few more people involved, about 8 people that seem to want to do it. It's a little looser group. Between 8 and 10 people, or 4 to 10 people, depending on who shows up.

Listener: Yes. I was actually thinking of the upcoming wine event?

DDS15: Wine is my girlfriend's idea. It's going to be just me and my girlfriend. We talked about also the car, about driving there. She said, "well we can both wear our mask in the car." And I said, "well, the other option is I could borrow my husband's convertible, and then we don't even have to worry about being inside the car, and we can have the airflow." So, we were thinking about that. That's one reason I haven't gone places with other people. You have that car ride where you're really stuck in the car. But I did it with my niece because we stayed together, and she got a COVID test, and I knew she was fine. But I haven't really driven in the car with anyone but my husband until I'm going to do this thing tomorrow. This is going to be a big step.

Listener: Yeah. Are you going to do the convertible?

DDS15: As long as he doesn’t need it.

Listener: With your niece, that was your first time doing a car ride together. Can you tell me a little bit about your thinking then?

DDS15: This was special circumstances because her brother had had a baby. She lives in Chicago, and she doesn't have a car anyway. I just felt like even though there was COVID, this was a reason to make an exception. She found a non-stop flight to D.C., and she had to stay somewhere until she could get a COVID test, and I said, "just come here. If you get COVID on the plane, then I'm getting it too because I'm going to welcome you into my home." She's also very, I knew, fastidious and wore the goggles on the plane and wears the mask. She'd wear gloves every day if she could. So, I know she's very clean and neat, and so I thought if someone can avoid it, it's probably her. But I was very happy when she got her test and she was okay.

Listener: Yes

DDS15: I knew, from the get-go I was going to pick her up at the airport and just deal with it because she's family, and when else do you have the first niece born in your lifetime. She lost her job due to COVID, so I really wanted to make sure she had something good happen during COVID.

Listener: When did that happen?

DDS15: The visit was actually last week.

Listener: Oh, I was thinking also when did she lose her job?

DDS15: Oh my gosh. Right in the beginning. She was just starting a new job. She just flew to training in New Jersey, and then all the stuff came out about COVID, and they had to still fly back before anything was going on. So, she flew back and then after that her job was all about flying places and doing things, and they said everything is canceled. She's lucky and got unemployment, but it was just like gone in a flash. Other people I know they got furloughed for a long time and paid for a while, but this one ended pretty quickly because it was really all about travel.

Listener: And it seems like it was important to you to sort of support her in having something positive happen after that.

DDS15: Yeah. She's had a lot of hard knocks in her life and I just thought she doesn't need this one – missed her niece being born. She didn't want to come for the birth. She was okay with that. My sister was actually here for the birth. That was different, but as an aunt, she just wanted to see that baby.

Listener: Um-hmm, um-hmm.

DDS15: She had a very good visit.

Listener: That’s so wonderful that she got to do that.

DDS15: My husband supported me on that too because it would affect him, obviously, if she brought something in the house. But we talked about that too and decided family was worth taking the risk.

Listener: Um-hmm, um-hmm. You’ve shared so much great thinking and information about what your experience has been. Are there any other – I know we went a little bit off of thinking about restaurants, but the whole picture is important. Were there any other things that you felt like sharing about the restaurant experiences?

DDS15: The only thing I remembered was in the beginning, what I did, when I felt like I couldn’t go to the restaurant is I bought gift cards from the restaurant and I haven’t used them yet. I just bought them so they could have some business. That to me was the fastest way to support somebody. So, I did that. If I decide I can’t go in again I’ll probably do that, or I’ll just see if I can pick up some food and give them a big tip, or something like that. I just felt like I had to do something, so gift cards were the first thing that I did before we even ordered out.

Listener: Yeah, yeah. I’m glad you remembered that. That’s a great point and it seems like giving a big tip is also important to you. That came up, both with the delivery . . .

DDS15: The same thing did happen in the restaurants. When we did that, we did always give a big tip since they were taking the chance too, to have to come to work.

Listener: Did you learn kind of that. . .

DDS15: I just think it’s something we instinctively felt. We’ve always been generous tippers to begin with, but it just felt like this is a weird world we’re living in. And there weren’t many people in the restaurant, so we were getting good service. So, there’s no reason not to give a big tip.

Listener: Um-hmm, definitely. Well, if we’ve covered everything, I think we’re maybe at a good closing point.

DDS15: That seems fine with me too.

Listener: Thank you so much for your time and sharing your thoughts. I think that’s it.

DDS15: Good luck with the study.

Listener: Thank you so much.

DDS15: And have a good day.

Listener: You too. Bye-bye.