



Saskatoon, May 24, 2023 – Story 02 Transcript

SUMMARY KEYWORDS: nursing homes, Sherbrooke, wife, safer, people, room, walk, hospital, talk, Filipino, years, advocate, mayor, lottery tickets, place, jeff, heard, person, sidewalk, legs

00:04

Jeffrey: What is the date today?

Interviewer: I'm interviewing you for the COVID in the House of Old archive and also Remember Rebuild Saskatchewan project. So I'm wondering if you could share your name.

Jeffrey: Yes. My name is Jeffrey Siemens. I live in Sherbrooke. House six, I can't remember what it's called. Yes, me and my wife live in Sherbrooke. She shares a room with me. And through COVID. It was a hard, really hard time. Because for while, hearing my wife every day, you know for the three years and a half and saying, "Will we die in here?" I said, "No Jen. We won't," like trying to keep my wife calm. And I knew that there was something in place for us, we would get vaccination shots. I'm glad our vaccines didn't have to cost anything. That great thing. Because with this, with the vaccines, it was saving our lives. The thing is, another thing is through it all we were locked down quite often.

02:04

But also, I think it would seem to be like it was a problem, because for my wife, because she couldn't see see anyone for a while because there was a lot of things that we couldn't do. For a while, we had to stay in our rooms, I would say almost six months, then after a while, then we got to leave our rooms to go into our houses, in our kitchen and little living room. But that was not so good. And also going to like what Lorraine told you about the going outside to see family members through a fence, and that wasn't ideal. But the thing is, they put that in place for a reason. So we don't all of us, met people in nursing homes or hospitals were more susceptible to get whatever was out there. And I think the Board of Health was trying to make sure that we were safer. It wasn't ideal, because now our own family members got to leave the house, leave their houses because they weren't in the same predicament that we were in. Right? Like in the nursing home team. Hospital team. They were all buckling down so no one around the hospital or nursing homes got sick.

COVID^{IN THE} HOUSE OF OLD



The thing is I lived there. There's an opportunity to, for me to get a hold of City Hall because I'm an advocate for all of the schools and nursing homes across in Saskatoon. The reason that came about is I got, I had an accident, someone from trying to push me through the sidewalk onto and a car hit my stump.

And the mayor simply found out that I was, I got hit and got one of the MLA's to come down and simply asked me what I wanted. I simply stated, no money. Safety, we gotta get more safety aspects for people that are in nursing homes, schools. Some people couldn't hear or see, they couldn't hear. They heard the walk lights saying what they should say. People couldn't hear, they didn't see the hand or else some for staying still. But also someone walking. That way you can walk.

07:21

Thing is with me getting everything. All of the feedback that I got from different people. Jeff, you got these things involved for all of us so we can all be safer. There, there was a person from Regina asked for implementing more safety, in general, to that safety aspect. This person also asks for money. I'm just the city councillor saw I was doing someone safer, being safe. It was people are saying thank you. Not that they have asked me do you want money for helping us? I said no. No, what you're being walking safe. Walking to a corner and we're on schools or nursing homes and you have that right to be safe crossing the street.

09:09

So the one biggest thing that got me is I do, my wife says I do have a big mouth. Yeah, and you can get that in. I don't mind. It was eh was just big mouth was getting something in and I kept on pestering city hall, when is this going to happen? I don't think they liked what I was asking. But still everything that I asked for was check marked. Saying it was all approved. So just getting started was the, was the sidewalks, the road. Thing is, I'd say the it was also making sure that when they did the the fencing, it was good that way because some of the people in the nursing homes wouldn't think that they should. When workers were taking care of different items that they would want to race to then cross the street. There was one guy in a power chair, didn't want to look both ways. So he just went by and a bus was coming toward him. So the thing is, I'm glad we got these walk lights in. And it's more safer and people have been using it and that makes me feel happy. What I, now with the accident that happened and asking for these different things that way people, young people, older people, animals are safer. And don't have to worry about that they don't have to worry about that they don't have to worry if they're going to be safe or not. That's a given. And I'm so glad, I'm not glad that. Yeah, being in a nursing home, it's a different experience.

COVID^{IN THE} HOUSE OF OLD



These care aids are here to make sure we're safe. You know we may not like it. Part of the fact is they are here to make sure that we're safe inside our own place. For a while it was the homes where I didn't get any symptoms at all from COVID. My wife did and turns out she got septic. She, I saved my wife's life.

She was, she asked me, Jeff, can you call the nurse and I quickly called the nurse. I was in bed. I couldn't move myself. So, I called the nurse and simply said, Jen really needs help. So, can you please come down right away? They did.

14:02

Interviewer: She's lucky that she had you there.

Jeffrey: I'm lucky that I have my wife. And the thing is, is maybe what nursing homes should also have is like a little screen from a room and have it through a TV screen or something. So they know what Jen needs because Jen has a soft voice. Sometimes these people that are different voices like Filipinos they usually talk Filipino a lot and the thing is they have worked with the people that are their nationality. Some nationalities they have to talk regular English but most of the time they when they're not if at night they don't have, we don't have any say on whose if they're not, they're talking Filipino in your room and they're supposed to do your care, the tenants is not met, right? And the thing is when I try and talk to them they talk Filipino and they're not on their break, they should be away from the room or away from the house. And instead of talking their own language and we don't understand and when we need something, they're still talking Filipino to their co-worker, and you know what it seems like I don't matter. My thing is, we, some of the time, it seems like where we're we are not heard at all. They tell us to shut up, shut up. And so the thing is, some of the Filipino speaking people that are working. There's a couple of them, I don't want to say the name. But this has happened. And you feel isolated. Yeah.

And there's when people are charged rather than we try and talk to him. And if we talk to him in a certain way, we're threatening names or lives, we're trying to say can you help us and instead they're talking to their coworkers and they're supposed to do our care. There's also, sometimes we get abused from these care aid that the slight touch on my hips or stomach. They have called me fat. Yes, I'm fat. I can't help it. There's not that much exercises for someone that has no legs and also cannot help themselves. So what, what do you want us to do? We're all different, we're not all the same, because, we're not. We're, we're human beings. We're individuals .. If you treat us, we treat you with compassion. Seems like we don't get compassion.

COVID^{IN THE} HOUSE OF OLD



Now my wife in the other hand. We try and get her somehow, like she can't use her legs at all. She's paralyzed from the waist down. And seems like they got to, she has to transfer all the time but the thing is, she doesn't get to sleep. These care aids should be also helping her out but instead there's a, don't help her out much. She has a different way of; she has different things that she bags and stuff. And I wish these care aids would help her out more. Empty them and everything like that and really she has to fight. She doesn't have to.

21:17

Interviewer: Do you, you said earlier that your wife was really worried during the pandemic? How does she feel now?

Jeffrey: Yeah, she's so happy. She can touch her family. Touch friends and family. And also we're not cooped up in a room. Four walls. Now she feels like she has her freedom. I simply said Jenn, we're married, I don't own you. What the thing is, it's like this. Whenever she needs something from me, I'm there for. When I need something from her, she's there. But also the sometimes it's, it's got way better now. And also I'm an advocate for the people that are dying. I go to palliative care, I. When my mom, first time. No, my Mom. No, we when here. Me and my wife were in here seven years.

Interviewer: Did you meet here?

No, we met at Harry Landau on Avenue P. Met her at her grandma's place. My dad was singing for the Gospel Leads church group. And first time I saw I said after the they were done. They had a little luncheon and I said Miss, "Can I help you with whatever you want?" And she says, "No. My grandma would help me." Got shot down, quite a few times.

24:06

Interviewer: How old were you when you're

Jeffrey: I'm 56, almost 56. We're 14 years apart. I look at age is just a number.

Interviewer: Yeah, I guess Yeah. Happy she makes you when you talk about

Jeffrey: Well the thing is If I didn't have her, I was married before. But my ex-wife was always looking for a baby. She was closer to 600 pounds and she wanted a baby. And doctors have told her that time if you had a kid you could kill the baby and yourself. She says to me one time, she says if I am dead I can't look after my baby.

COVID IN THE HOUSE OF OLD



And there's no sense, but with me, now with me I never got my grade 12. I was in and out of hospitals but when I got hit like I had like I said getting off topic but when I got hit, it was the year after we moved from the hospital to Sherbrooke. So when we got here and the year after that I got hit. And I was in and out of it before that time trying to get things done for everybody else for people that needed it and since I got into being in a wheelchair because of my legs got cut off. The reason why I had my legs cut off is when I was 19 I got one leg, I got one leg I got a diabetic needle in a razor blade and also a scalpel. When I had surgery on the heel cord, right heel cord, I uh, the surgeon says, "Jeff what if I told you I left that scalpel in your heel?" And I said that would be stupid and it's sure enough and scan here was a stupid scalpel. Like the thing is you couldn't really sue the surgeon, in the States you could. But the things is, what happened happened for a reason and I don't doubt that he got sued, but not from me

28:36

Interviewer: It sounds like you use your voice to try to advocate for other people. That's really important.

28:38

Jeffrey: Yeah people are more better than what money is. Because, uh, with the city bringing up, with everything said and done it cost around \$29 million dollars to get everything done, but its not all done yet.

Interviewer: You mean the curbs and the stuff.

Jeffrey: Yeah, like instead of stop signs around 14th Street and Acadia Drive well actually be regular lights. Yeah. And it, I brought the Eric Anderton and he helped me with pamphlets getting pamphlet made. My pamphlet was three pages long in all the residential streets or regular streets that needed fixing. I was there. I also state my phone number if you need anything also call City Hall, let them know who's advocating for you to get these things done and they will get done.

Interviewer: so can you tell me Is there something that you think that could have been done better? I Sherbrooke or in general for people in long term care I know you said earlier you think they did the best they can but is there something you would have liked to be different next time.

30:45

Jeffrey: I think real factor is they should have had two people to come in earlier instead of later because most of it is the residents get scared mostly. Because once you're out there going out for different places to to a park, to a concert, to a game, and then you can go to that. It sucks but there real factor is there's something in place that way we can be inside we might be scared. But one thing I would have said people not talking in their native tongue but talking in in English, and also giving them support not criticizing. That I

COVID IN THE HOUSE OF OLD



think would have made it a lot more better, because then your residents wouldn't be scared. I think people that put down your weight, put down other things, and yeah if that person gets scared. I have had depression through through COVID and, now my depression has risen up more, and they're saying the wrong things. I would put myself down so much. My wife would have stated the same thing. Jeff always puts himself down, but he doesn't put anyone else down. We, I try and do treat people the way you want to be treated. That's the golden rule. Some of these care aids don't think that. They say quiet, you keep quiet, you don't tell him what I'm doing to you. If we're abusing you know you shouldn't say anything or else we'll deny it. I think what not every room should also have is a little video cameras because why do they have video cameras in hospital hospitals, hospital patients rooms. If there's any any slight of anyone getting hurt, emotional physically or else if they're trying to kill themselves.

35:16

I think what we need is we got to always treat people the way we want to be treated. They don't go this way. Mostly the people that are Filipino, they think that I can run the nursing homes. I think what happening in nursing homes, it could be a good thing, it could be not so good. What my wife got scared of is why can everybody else walk in people get some freedoms then we're a person from a nursing home can do? Nothing, but no walking person can walk in any place go to any venue or else any mall any time and not get caught. One of my siblings do not think of COVID as a bad thing. He never thought COVID was, like him and his family could go to go anywhere, do anything. But now since COVID is slowly getting out of our lives. And the worst part of it is having one of our family members passing on, and we don't have any way of going there, and going up closer to their grave, and saying something or else praying and peace. It is a lot harder for us because we're in wheelchairs, walkers. Or we can walk without a walker. But our wholes instead, we're not steady enough, comes in play and we need more help than anything.

38:50

Interviewer: That limits your ability to go and do

Jeffrey: Yeah. Yeah. But the thing is through COVID with me, I knew that the government had something in play for us to make sure we're safer. Yeah, well, we gotta have more needles. That's what I hate. Yeah, but what I think is all these premiers, mayors they had our best interest at heart. Yeah, they go out sick but also they got some things in place for us so we don't get sick. And I gotta say, thank you for the premiums, the mayor's. And I like the thing is with the fencing, it was making sure the older people that couldn't get out left. And like thing is, it since one person tries to take the fire light and press it and make all mayhem. And then somehow she gets to leave and she's gone and everybody worried what happened to her.

COVID^{IN THE} HOUSE OF OLD



Interviewer: That happen?

Jeffrey: Yeah, quite often through the pandemic, someone would pull the fire alarm. And then they will try to leave. Thing is, it got a little bit better. I think this whole world has got a little bit better because of different things in place.

Interviewer: Thank you for sharing.

Jeffrey: Thank you.

Interviewer: What I heard from your interview is that you have a really strong voice and you've used it to make change in the community. Maybe you want to be heard a little bit more inside the place where you live.

42:02

Jeffrey: And story would really help out everybody. And thank you. It's people like you that makes this world go around. Yeah, like the thing is, I tried to be an advocate and I'm still an advocate at heart. And I'm glad I can help someone else out. That my whole goal is making like a couple quite a few years back when I first moved into the city, I was in a group home and now I bought these lottery tickets - 10 Tickets for \$10 at the time. And one friend of mine, he won \$30,000. So, I said every time he went up one ticket, first ticket, he won \$15,000 dollars. And he passed it to me and yeah, you win. I got a policy. If you win out of pack of 10 lottery tickets, whatever is the prize is, that yours. The last ticket, he's crossing his fingers. And is told at the time and won another \$15,000. And so he gives me the ticket. I looked at it and I said remember my policy. If I buy you a pack of 10 tickets and you win twice on it, doesn't matter what the prize is, that yours. So he says Jeff, thank you because with all this money, \$30,000 and I think I won \$5,000 at the time. And I said,

I'm glad you won. I said the smile that you gave me was all the payment in the world. So like the thing is, it's not all about the money. It's all about the safety. Helping someone else out that way. If they do come across me and say thank you, that that's all I need.

Interviewer: Thank you, Jeffrey. I'm going to shut off the recorder now.

46:02

Jeffrey: Were you still recording?

Interviewer: I'm still recording.