

Evelyn Zeckser and John Hund: Life during the Pandemic

Video Transcript

JOHN: You know, out in ranch country in the Flint Hills, we say it really doesn't have much of an effect on our day-to-day activities, which is true to a certain extent, because especially in the springtime, we work by ourselves burning pasta or fixing fence, getting crop fields ready. But the biggest impact that it has had on production agriculture is a crash in beef prices because of the disruption in the supply chain. And so we're all aware of that. Like most rural communities, our church is kind of the center of our social functioning on a weekly basis. And so that has certainly been interrupted. We haven't had church services at ours for a long time.

EVELYN: I miss church too. It just doesn't seem like Sunday if you don't go to church. I went this morning, but I could not understand Pastor Graham. And there were about thirty of us there, just so different. And I don't like it that way. I don't. But I got a feeling it's going to be a while before we can all go to church together again. Well, last week was the first time I was back to the hairdresser. And I miss my coffee club. We always had coffee together at the bakery on Thursday morning. So I miss that. There was ten to twelve of us, sometimes eight. And then I quilted one day a week, and I miss those girls. But going into summer, staying at home hasn't been that bad, because I work outside, and I love to be outside with my flowers. If it was going into winter, I would be bored, and I would not be happy.

JOHN: I've leased Evelyn's pastures for... I've leased your pastures for between twenty-five and thirty years. So Evelyn's become more like family, and her husband, Elmer, too. And I'll tell you what I noticed about Evelyn. I don't see her a lot in the wintertime, but in the spring and summer, I see her a lot because I'm always in her yard. Whenever I pull in the yard, she's out there working, at a hundred years old. And I suppose we all know that she's a hundred years old, but she doesn't work like she's even sixty years old, pulling weeds, tending to everything. And she doesn't quit, I'll go up and check cattle, I'll be back in a couple of hours, and she's still out there working in the yard. But the thing I noticed about her early on when we started to visit, just a little bit, safely at her back door, she took all this very seriously. She played by the rules from the beginning, made sure that there was social distancing, never took any risks with gatherings. And to this day right now. I don't know, is that typical of your friends? Everybody's taking this pretty seriously?

EVELYN: Yeah, I think almost everybody wore a mask in church today. Well, during church, we had put them on when we come in, and we put them on, and when we went out because it was closer contact with people. But we each, you know, they put a bulletin and space us out. So I

wasn't sitting close to anyone. I've been going to church at my son-in-law's, what do you call it, tablet?

JOHN: Yeah. On Facebook.

EVELYN: Yes. And that was nice, because I could really understand Pastor Graham there. It was really nice. In fact, I kind of prefer that instead of going to church, because I could not hear Pastor Graham this morning. I think we're all just trying to cope. I think the older people are more conscious of it, are more careful than the younger ones. But I think we're all doing pretty good about coping with it. And it is what it is, and we have to deal with it. I think this is going to last a while. I think people will still be getting it.

JOHN: Well, my son runs a research institute, a medical research institute in New York City, and he sent me information, global epidemiology information early on. That was in early March, and said, "Dad, this is not the flu. Where it's headed, we don't know." And that's the insidious nature of it. And that's all, he was quite the prophet because that's all come to pass. All my ancestors were education oriented. My dad made sure that I, you know, I'm a K Stater. But the fact that we have K State as a research institute there, I'll tie this into what I noticed this spring. Now we're all getting together as neighbors. And one of the most dangerous, challenging things that we do is burn the Flint Hills. And we have to do that to maintain it because fire created it. And that's what sustains it. So when we get together, there's maybe twelve, fourteen guys, because you need all the help you could get. We only see each other once a year. And I'm thinking, boy, I wonder how this is going to go with social contact, and almost all of them played by the rules.

And when I look at that, if you're in production agriculture today, science rules. Science leads the way. So if you're taking care of cattle, crops, horses, you're automatically going to listen to the experts. And so we have that mindset. And so when they tell us it's dangerous, do what we say, we do it.

EVELYN: How long does he think this is going to last?

JOHN: Nobody knows.

EVELYN: Well, what does your son think?

JOHN: Well, there's all these models and it keeps changing before the sun sets. They used to say it doesn't affect children, now it does. South Korea was a perfect model and now they're having a resurgence now. And so they're starting to close down some schools and churches. So we don't know. He doesn't know. But he agrees with you, it'll be with us for a long time.

EVELYN: OK.

JOHN: And until you identify that last, what he calls patient zero, it will be here. When you think one person, patient zero, started a pandemic around the globe in a matter of months, I realize we travel more often than we did in 1918. But we don't have a vaccine and we don't have a treatment. It won't be gone. You're right, it won't.

EVELYN: Well, what I feel like it's just going to keep on going.

JOHN: Yeah, my son says it will be like what we deal with now that we can't really cure, but we can vaccinate against like measles, pneumonia to whooping cough. We've kind of got that, but it's still there.

EVELYN: So there isn't a vaccine that is going to cure this?

JOHN: Not yet, they put the accelerator down and they have organizations from around the world that are working on it.

EVELYN: Yeah, it scares me. It scares me. I've just been content to stay at home.

JOHN: Does this compare to anything that you experienced at all?

EVELYN: Well, the Depression.

JOHN: Oh.

EVELYN: You know I lived through that. And no, I'll never forget that. All I'll just say, we always had plenty to eat because we always had a big garden. We canned a lot. We had cattle, we had hogs, we had chickens, but we didn't have any money. There was no money.

JOHN: Did they ever quarantine anybody with polio?

EVELYN: Yeah.

JOHN: OK, and what did that look like.

EVELYN: When you had chickenpox or anything like that, measles, you was quarantined. I know one time I was working in town for a family and I caught whatever the kids had, I don't remember what it was, but I had to go home and be quarantined for a while. What worries me the most, I just think of all the people that's going to get it yet, and so many are going to die yet. And it's just going to happen. Some of them get over it, some of them don't. And I think the elderly should be more careful because they are the most vulnerable.

JOHN: When Evelyn and I talk about what she's experienced in her life, generationally, there have been people in my family that have been asked to fight and die. World War One, World War Two, die alone in a strange land. The Korean War, the Vietnam War, the endless war in the

Middle East. And that was their sacrifice for their country and for their fellow people. We're being asked to wear a mask and stay at home.

[Music break during credits]

EVELYN: My birthday is January the thirteenth, and I'm a hundred years old. I can't believe it myself. I had a wonderful birthday, a wonderful, and I got so many cards. I think there was 165 cards. I can't imagine being dead yet.

JOHN: Well, I hope you don't think about it alot.

EVELYN: I don't think about it. I guess I'm still enjoying life.

JOHN: That's it.

EVELYN: I was still enjoying...