

Basic Detail Report



Title Interview with Tom Porell

Date 2022 December 13

Primary Maker Samariya Smith

Medium born digital audio file

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Description (a) Interview with Tom Porell. Interviewed by Samariya Smith on

December 13, 2022 at the House of Bread, 27 Chestnut St, Hartford, Connecticut.

(b) Photograph of Tom Porell taken at his interview. He was interviewed as part

of the Connecticut Historical Society's Community History Project discussing his

experience during the COVID-19 Pandemic. At the time of the interview Tom was

the operations manager at the House of Bread in Hartford, Connecticut. Tom

recalls rapid change during the spring of 2020 and the first real disruption to his

life was deciding whether or not the House of Bread would close. Tom described

how staff protected themselves and patrons by using gloves, plexiglass shields,

hand sanitizer, social distancing, and preparing to-go meals for patrons.

Remaining open during the pandemic was mentally taxing for the House of

Bread staff. Tom described the measures that Hartford took to help the

homeless population and how covid helped cut through red tape to get help to

people who needed help. He felt that Connecticut did a good job trying to help

people during covid. Tom talked about the burnout for social workers during the

pandemic. He explained that he did know people who tested positive, but many

of the people coming to House of Bread did not go to social places or attend

social events where they would contract covid. Tom first contracted covid after

a personal vacation in 2022. House of Bread did not mandate vaccines, but they

did mandate masks and received some pushback from patrons. Tom pointed

out that when covid was in the news, the drug epidemic was not in the news

anymore even though there was still a drug problem. During covid, many towns

surrounding Hartford sent residents in need to Hartford because the smaller

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towns did not have the infrastructure to assist them. Tom supports absentee

voting. He felt that the January 6, 2021 insurrection helped solidify a bridge

between “two different Americas.” During covid, Tom and his wife began

birdwatching in their back yard as a new hobby. Tom stated that during covid he

lost the ability to take care of people in a familiar way, particularly by not being

able to lead a mission trip to Appalachia for a couple of years. During covid Tom

found out that there is a very supportive community around Hartford and there

are great people willing to help.

Dimensions Duration: 1 Hour, 4 Minutes, 6 Seconds