Project Name: Chronicling the Pandemic

Title: Interview with William (Billy) Sabatini

Date of Interview: July 8, 2020

Location of Interview: Online

Interviewer: Terilee Edwards-Hewitt

Transcriber: Karen Wilcox

Abstract: William (Billy) Sabatini was born and raised in New York and attended Pace University studying literature and communications. He worked in the radio industry in New York and Los Angeles at stations including WCBS-FM, WNBC, and KCBS-FM, before moving to Washington, DC and then Alexandria, Virginia to work in the early satellite radio industry at Worldspace. While living in Alexandria with his family during COVID-19 he began a photography project. The Front Steps Photography Project documented families under quarantine in front of their houses. During late spring and early summer in 2020 he photographed over 400 families. The project raised money to buy meals from local restaurants to feed healthcare workers.
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*Mr. Sabitini during the interview*
Introductions [00:01]

Terilee Edwards-Hewitt (TEH) | So, this is Terilee Edwards-Hewitt, and it is July 8, 2020. And I'm interviewing Billy Sabatini. And we're going to talk a little bit about his background, a little bit about the reaction [of] what it's been like living through COVID-19, and then about his very cool photography project that you've been working on. So, thank you very much.

Billy Sabatini | My pleasure and thanks for having me.

Growing Up in New York and Attending Pace University [00:44]

TEH | Um. So, I guess I wanted to start off, we were talking before I started recording that you're—I'm originally from New York, and you're originally from New York.

Billy Sabatini | I am. Born in New York City. Manhattan. Lenox Hill Hospital. And lived in the Bronx. My parents were from the Bronx, you know, and so we were—we were born and raised in the Bronx. Moved to the suburbs when I was about thirteen. So, Westchester County, which is right above—.

TEH | Oh, yep.

Billy Sabatini | Right above the city. So, we spent—moved up there in sixth grade and then spent the rest of my grade school and high school years in Westchester. Went away to college to University of Buffalo for one year. I wasn't having it after one year, so I came back home, and I went to a school near my house called Pace University.

TEH | Oh, excellent.

Billy Sabatini | Which is where, which is you know, it's funny, growing up—growing up there. I always saw Pace. I worked right near Pace in the summers. I was a lifeguard at a pool. And Pace was always right there. And I was like, who would go to that college? Who would go there? I mean, it's like in our town, how good could it be? Never even considered it until, you know, I went away for a year, came back and I decided to go to Pace. And I'm not sure at the time I thought maybe it would just be for a year or two, and I'd go somewhere—a real college. No. It was great. I found my people. I got involved with the student newspaper, and that was—and that was it. That's where I met—I really got involved in communications and the media through Pace University.

TEH | Oh, very cool.

Billy Sabatini | Yeah.

TEH | Yeah. And what was your major?

Billy Sabatini | Well, it ended up being communications. When I first got to Pace, Pace was known as an accounting school, so I was like, sure, I'll take business classes and accounting classes, which I did. But then—then I got involved in—in somehow, I forget how, in the student newspaper. And then, you know, everyone there was communications majors and so I changed my major to communications and then I sort of graduated.
with a—actually, it was called literature and communication. So, I graduated with a literature and communications degree from Pace. Yeah. So, you know, I found my way. I had one major at Buffalo, a second major at Pace, and then finally what the third major is really, really what I wanted, and what I liked, and what I made my career in. Communications.

**Career in the Radio Industry [03:23]**

**TEH** Cool. And what did you do in communications or what do you do in communications?

**Billy Sabatini** Well, I've been in, I've been in radio, now digital media, my whole career. But I got started, it was through an internship at Pace. They had, or at least one professor had tie ins with some radio stations in New York, in the city [New York City]. And it was this station—this big station WCBS-FM. You're from New York, you know WCBS-FM, which was like this legendary station where, you know, they played oldies and all the big time DJ’s from like the [19]60s and 70s worked there. And so, it's like this kind of iconic station. And I got an internship. You know, I applied and went down for the interview, and I was hired, and it was like big time, you know. Big time New York City radio. So that was my kind of first introduction to what would eventually be my career. From there, I worked it, I worked as an intern. And they hired me kind of part time. And then, I'm trying to remember all, I eventually got hired, kind at a pseudo full time, I was still in college. So, I worked a couple days a week and then weekends I worked producing some of the radio shows. And then one of the, one of the DJ’s there that I worked with producing his show on the weekends, he was, he was moving to a different station, WNBC, which was another iconic station in New York, and he offered to take me over. And I did. I went over to NBC, ‘cause, you know, again, it was 30 Rock [30 Rockefeller Plaza, a skyscraper which houses much of NBC's national broadcasts]. It was like this—I grew up listening to NBC. My dad used to listen [Don] Imus, you know, in the car. And. So, I went over to NBC. Even though I was just an intern, at CBS I was getting paid as though I was part time, but I wanted to go to NBC because it was this iconic station and it was all these big time, you know—Howard Stern worked there. And Imus worked there. So, I went there. And then eventually, I eventually ended up going back to CBS-FM as a full, as a salaried employee. And that's where I kind, I spent like gosh, eight years there. It was you know, off of that one internship. And, you know, you think back about, things. Like, oh my gosh. What if that one internship didn't happen? What would I be doing, or where would I be, or—? Because it brought me, you know, it brought me across the country and back, and all that. So, I just wonder, that one—you know, I often think back, and I remember the actual class where that Professor mentioned the internship. And to be fair, it was a class that was really easy. I think it was some media class. I forget what it was. And so, I didn't have perfect attendance in that class, and the times that I went, kind of didn't pay attention a lot ‘cause,
you know, it was pretty simple. But I happen to be there that day, and I happened to be paying attention, and he mentioned the internship, kind of in passing. As soon as he said it, I'm like, wait, what? You know. New York City internship? Radio? And then I got it, and started my career in—in radio

**TEH**

Very cool.

**Billy Sabatini**

Yeah.

**TEH**

Now a lot of times in radio people have to move around a lot, did you have to do that?

**Billy Sabatini**

Well, not a lot. But they do, especially if they're on air. If you're, if you're on air, you gotta go wherever the job takes you. And usually you're not going to start in New York City. If you're on the air, I mean, you're not going to, you're not going to start there. And so I worked in the programming department. Writing shows, producing shows, doing the stuff behind the scenes. And I knew that was my strength. I wasn't gonna be a, I mean I did that in college, and it really wasn't my calling. I knew. I mean, back then, but I also knew that if I did want to pursue that, I would have to have to start in, you know, God knows where. Iowa or somewhere and then you have to work your way back up to New York's the number one market, and—.

**TEH**

Right.

**Billy Sabatini**

I loved being in number one market. I loved being in New York. And so, I realized that wasn't the path that I wanted to take, having said that. So, I worked at CBS-FM for years and an opportunity came at the CBS station in Los Angeles. Kind of our sister station in Los Angeles. I was very friendly with the Vice President who ran all the FM stations in the CBS Empire. He was the General Manager of the New York station, then he got elevated to the VP for all the CBS stations. So, I was very friendly with him and, and he told me about this opportunity in Los Angeles at the CBS station. I applied, interviewed, and I got it. And so, I had this big decision to make. You know, I had got, I had this offer in Los Angeles and I was in Los Angeles during the interview when they offered it to me. And I just remember sitting there and going: Oh my gosh. I don't know anyone in this city. I don't know anything about it. Everything is back in New York. I never thought I'd want to leave New York. I mean, New York is, you know—.

**TEH**

The center of the universe.

**Billy Sabatini**

It's—yeah. Center—right. Center of the universe. And I never actually considered it until then. And I eventually, so I did it. I decided to, you know what. Gotta take these chances and it's not like I'm moving to, you know, Missouri. It's Los Angeles. You know. Number two media market. So, I did it. And I worked there at the radio station, and it was, you know, it was a step up. So, I worked at that radio station, which was KCBS-FM, for five years. And then, an opportunity arose here in DC. This, this same Vice President, who I knew at CBS, who got me out to Los Angeles. He was working, uh, at a kind of a new—back then
it was, this was in like 1998. Satellite radio wasn't yet a thing. There's no XM, there’s no Sirius, but there was this new company in, based in DC called Worldspace. And what they were doing was satellite radio around the world. Not doing it here, but around the world. And again, now we have a frame of reference. Everyone knows what satellite radio, but back then it was—. No one knew what it was, and, you know, including me. And you know, I would—I talked to this guy Rod—who's kind of my mentor in the industry and he was telling me what I couldn’t get my arms around it. He's like, I know, I know. No one knows what this is. Long story short. They're based in DC. I joined Worldspace. They were looking for, they had been through years of building the satellites, getting regulatory, on getting regulatory approvals around the world trying to broadcast in all these crazy places. So, they’re finally at the stage of the company where they needed to start producing content and you know they were gonna build this content department. And my mentor Rod was running the content group and so he had to start hiring people to—so, he hired me as the Director of I think, music programming, it was. And my role was to start creating brand new radio stations that would get, again, think XM or Sirius would have, you know, a million channels. Some created in house, some not created in house. So, we were, I was in charge of creating the music channels which would be created in house, like the Worldspace branded channels. It was phenomenal. It was a, I ended up staying there for ten or eleven years, I think it was. It was phenomenal. Great opportunity. Being on the cutting edge of this new industry. It was kind of, it was radio but supercharged. It was, you know, things that I'd never have thought about in regular terrestrial FM radio. It was this whole new model. And it was really exciting. And I should add when I was in Los Angeles, I had those five years. I had met my wife, who’s native Californian from San Diego, but she was living in Los Angeles. Her whole family's from California, from San Diego. Never had any desire to leave southern California. I mean, we had just gotten married. I think it was probably less than six months when we got married where this opportunity came up to come to, East Coast. She’d only been to the East Coast once before and this was when we were dating. I took her back home to New York, and we did that. That was her first and only time in the East Coast before that. But, you know, she was up for the challenge of, you know, moving across the country to a completely different environment. Obviously, the East Coast. And we've been here now twenty-one years or so. So, never thought we'd [laughs] last that long here actually.

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You know. I’d go into work and like, okay, where to live? And half the people are like, gotta live in Maryland, gotta live in Maryland, and half of the people are like, gotta live in Virginia, you gotta live in Virginia. And then there’s some people in DC. So, you’re like, oh my gosh. Where do you go, right? And somehow we just decided, I don't know. We just, in the course of driving around on weekends and maybe talking to people, we liked Alexandria. Liked, you know, going into Old Town. And we’d heard about Old Town before. And so you just gotta focus your efforts somewhere. We decided to focus our efforts here in Alexandria. So basically, we've been here in Alexandria for the all, all twenty plus years.

**TEH**

Well, that's great. Very cool. And yeah, and you definitely have to learn a new area when you are moving into it, you know, not having any other connections.

**Billy Sabatini**

Right. No connections. No frame of reference. No nothing. And that can be, it can be kind of paralyzing because there's so many places you could live and you're getting so many differing opinions on what state's the best, forget about, you know, which city in the state. Or that state’s horrible don't go there, or that one's hard. We have no basis of knowledge. So we just decided on Alexandria, and that was that. And we've, and I’m glad we did.

**Start of COVID-19 [14:17]**

**TEH**

Well. Excellent. Thank you. Um. I wanted to just talk a little bit about COVID-19 because this is, just in general. So we’re, you know, getting—trying to record history as it happens.

**Billy Sabatini**

Sure.

**TEH**

Which is something in radio I can imagine you're familiar with. So when and how did you first hear about COVID-19?

**Billy Sabatini**

When did I first hear about it? I mean. Just—just like everyone else, I guess. I'm a big consumer of news and I try to stay on top of things. And, you know, like everyone—I imagine it's the same journey as everyone. In the beginning you heard about this thing far, far away and a few cases in Wuhan [China]. The Wuhan, and I think they even called it the Wuhan virus back then, and you’re like, okay, something to keep an eye on, but no one sounds alarmed yet, so I guess it's cool. I guess like everyone else experienced. You turn on the Today Show in the morning and every day they have another story about it, and another story. And a longer segment. And then, I guess, like everyone, early March was when like, okay, this is getting serious. Or late February, early March, this is getting serious. But I also remember that we went to, it was the NBA game, the last Wizards game here. I think their last game before everything stopped. It was I think March 10 or something. And we went to that because I'm a photographer. Obviously. Which is why we're talking. And over the past couple of years I've gotten credentials for—I kind of worked my way up and I've gotten a lot of credentials for different sporting events and I've shot,
shot all the Mystics games last season during their championship season. The Washington Spirit of the National, of the Women's Soccer League. Tons of high school sports. You know. High level high school sports. And so I've been very active and very active in getting credentials, etcetera, etcetera, and applying for different credentials. And this game, the Wizards against the Knicks was my first NBA, where I’d got a credential for the game. And so I went. And again, it wasn't, you know, we did question: should we go to this game? But again, it wasn't, it hadn't really hit as, like, oh my God, this is stop everything. So, we went and my family came. They had, they got them seats in the arena. And I was down shooting. And right after that game, I think the next day, is when they canceled, I think that, like the next day or the day after is when they canceled the NBA season. And that was really, that was really hard. This is crazy. This is, this is serious. Maybe we shouldn't have gone to that NBA game with —. And it wasn't sold [out], it wasn’t packed. I think it was a combination of, you know, neither team is very good. But also I think people were starting to sense maybe we shouldn't be in large places. And it certainly, I think it was the first game with the NBA putting some new guidelines of protocols in place where the press couldn't interview the players anymore because they were trying to socially distant, in some way, but again, it wasn't like DEFCON [Defense Readiness Condition (DEFCON) is an alert state used by the United States Armed Forces, ranked from 5, the least severe, to 1, the most severe.]. What is it? One. What is the highest? It was like, hey, this could be bad, let's be smart, let’s be safe, everything's fine. So, there was that sense. And I remember seeing friends, people I knew there, and we didn't shake hands. You know, we —. We understood. But it wasn't the, it didn't really, for me, at least, it wasn't until after that game, the next day, when they stopped the NBA season, when I was like, oh my gosh. Okay. This is big time. Again, it had just been building since January when you first started hearing these stories. But I think for me it was, it was right after that game when they canceled the NBA season when I was like, okay, this is crazy, this is serious. And then I have a daughter in high school. And that's right around the time where they started messaging about schedules, and we're keeping an eye on this, and then finally, like everyone else, they canceled, you know. They had contingency plans. I forget what they were. But it wasn't shut down. The first few communications were about, maybe short day, I forget what it was. And then, you know, maybe a week after that is when they said, ‘We're stopping.’ And so, when those things started happening, obviously, it really kind of hit home and we all understood, how serious it was and is. So I think my experience probably was like most people. It was a gradual, wrapping your head around it. ‘Cause I think it's human nature to say, oh this, this really can't happen, especially here. This can happen there. And it won't happen here. And maybe we're just hearing these things and it's not going to be as bad. But then, finally, you’re like oh my gosh. This is a deadly epidemic and it’s very serious and we have to heed all the warnings and advice that we're hearing, that we should do, and we have to take it seriously. But I think
that takes a while for your mind to kind of wrap around that 'cause it,
'cause you don't think it can happen or will happen.

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| TEH                             | So, it sounds like it didn't directly affect your work a lot, but it sounds like maybe for non-work things that that may have changed. Did you have, you know, 'cause it was stay at home if possible. How was that experience? |
| Billy Sabatini                  | Well I think like everyone, it's like stages of—. In the beginning, maybe it's a little bit of a novelty. And you know with the times that I wasn't going into work, then were my days were shorter. They were—. And so the times that I was not at work, we did hunker down. You |
know, I was home, except for the grocery store. Kids were home. My wife, who runs a business in Alexandria called Together We Bake, it's a nonprofit in Alexandria. They had shut down operations as well. So, everyone was home, so I think our experience was like most people where we were kind of bunkered in. Again, I would leave for work. I've got to admit, I did have feelings of: is this the right thing to do? We're, everyone's home. Am I going to go to work and get something and bring it home? All those things that everyone feels and especially in the beginning when it was a lot more, I don't know, it was a lot more unknowns, I guess. Or it was just, there were definite feelings of: Gosh, should I be doing this? Should I be leaving the house? Because everyone else was home, home, home. I mean, no-one else really left. But I would go to the grocery store, you know, with [a] mask, obviously. But I think our experience probably was like most people where in beginning it was okay, because it was new, and it was, you know. But then, as it wore on, especially for, let's say, my daughter, who's a Junior in high school and you're cut off from seeing your friends all at, and I mean, boom, stops. And she's a social creature. And so that was, I think, hard. The hardest probably for her. Because that was really sudden, the way their school stopped. It was, it just stopped. There was no like grace period or they went in two days a week and then one—it was like, boom. Done. And so, I think our experience was just like everyone else's where it, it just, you adapt as you move forward, but it gets tiring. But I will say for me because I was going to work, and I was doing my photo project throughout that, maybe I had a little different experience where I wasn't locked in as much as everyone else in the family. So, I think doing the photo project helped me because I got out. And I was out. And I was seeing people. Granted from socially distant, distances. So, that kept me engaged, and busy, and I love photography, so it's fun for me to do. So that kept me maybe from having the same experiences as others who were definitely locked in for that whole period.

### The Front Steps Photography Project [25:50]

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<td>Kind of. It's called The Front Steps Project. I mean, some people call it The Front Porch Project. You know. Same difference. I had seen on my Instagram feed. You know, we all have, we scroll through Instagram. In the beginning of the pandemic, I’d scroll through. And I kept seeing these pictures of people in of their houses from this one, this one guy I follow. He's in Connecticut, right. And so, I'd see him. You don't really stop, you just like look, what's that? But you just keep going, going, going. But after days and maybe a couple weeks, I'm like, what is this guy doing with these pictures of these random people on their, in front of their houses? So, finally, I stopped to read in the captions or in his bio or something, and I saw what he was doing. He was doing this thing called the Front Steps Photo Project. So, I’m like, that is a cool idea. So, I wrote to him. I messaged him on Instagram, and I’m like,</td>
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hey man, I love what you're doing. Because I wanted to do that, but I didn’t want to like steal his idea. I thought it was his idea at the time. And so I wrote to him, like, hey man, do you mind if I do this? You know, he's way up in Connecticut. Do you mind if I do this down in Alexandria? And he wrote back. He's like, hey man, not my idea. This wasn’t my idea. And he told me. Apparently, these two women photographers in Massachusetts, I'm blanking on the town name. Somewhere in Massachusetts. They had started it. They just had this idea and they started it. [www.thefrontstepsproject.com] And, apparently like every, people like myself saw it and it just exploded. Not just in this country, but everywhere. And so they have an Instagram page called the Front Steps Project. So it's part of that. I mean, it wasn't really, I’m not really part of their initiative. But I think, you know, everyone who does it, I guess, is part of that initiative. I just saw this idea, you know, second hand through another photographer and I'm like, I really want to do that for my town. I didn't see anyone doing it here. I thought it’d be cool to do for Alexandria and document, you know. Just the concept is cool. In this period when we’re all locked in the houses. Families are together. Kids are at college and there were here, everyone's home. When is that going to happen again? It's a great time and chance to document this period in time. Pictures always, I mean, I look at pictures now from like thirty years ago or twenty—. And you get when you see it, you can remember exactly everything about it. You can remember what you were thinking, what you were—. I mean it’s amazing what a picture can do. And so, I figured, that'd be cool, and so people can have these pictures documenting this slice of life and time. When they're home together and they're feeling certain ways. And, you know, who knows what. Thought that'd be cool to do. And it was. And my hope was that I capture people, in kind of, in full quarantine mode. If they're, they've been with their family for weeks and weeks. If they're frustrated. I kind of want, I wanted to show it to be like a real slice of life. I didn't necessarily want people to dress up and pose like a family portrait. I wanted people to be real. And, again, just to document this very specific time and thing that everyone's going through together. So, that was my goal.

TEH Cool. How many photos have you taken so far?

Billy Sabatini I have done, I did about, oh, shoot, it is like 400. And I think was like 413, or something like that.

TEH Wow.

Billy Sabatini Oh, yeah. No, I didn't set out to do, I didn't really set out to do that many. I didn't, well actually, I had no goal. I had no, I just, I reached out to a couple friends. I’m like, hey, you know, this would be cool to do, and just people I knew. And I did that. And I was like, okay, well, I'll do a few and it would be just kind of fun. And then a friend of mine who is in Texas, who's doing the same thing. I reached out to him. And I'm like, hey, you know. And we talked about [it] a little bit. I'm like, I'm going to create a Google form and have people sign up. And so, then I created a Google form where people could register for it. In the
beginning it was slow. I’d get a couple. Or five. Or, I go, okay, it’s not really—that's what it'll be. I'll get a handful of these. And then all of a sudden, slowly but surely, it just exploded. And I think what happens is—you do them for some people, and then those people, they’re like influencers on social media. And either they tell people about it. They post it on their Facebook page and people see it, and they're like, whoa, what's that? And it just spread like—like a virus. [Chuckles]

TEH [Chuckles] In a good way.

Billy Sabatini Yeah, so it really, it just like overnight, almost, it just kind of like exploded. But you can see how that happens through social media and through people hearing about it that way, and then the people who posted it, they, they either created a link to me, or—. So, people found out about it. And then they just signed up. And then on my list, I think on my sign-up list I have over 700 people.

TEH Oh, wow.

Billy Sabatini So, I'm obviously not going to, I mean, I kind of paused it here for a bit. And I don't know if I'm going to continue to do it or not. Depends maybe how this goes. And I felt that certain point, like, well. When is it, when is it not quarantine? I mean, it hasn't been quarantine—. We're in Phase Three, I guess. And so, at a certain point, I felt like, I don't know if I should continue to do this because the whole intent was to get people when they're locked in and in quarantine and families together. So, we'll see. We'll see how, we'll see how it all goes. If we're, if things regress a little bit and people are still back at home, and—. But doing those four hundred families was intense. I'm telling you. It takes a lot of planning and a lot of logistics in coordination with people. But it was fun to do. I mean. I was totally fun to do.

TEH Was there any objects you thought people, like, would use?

Billy Sabatini Yeah, you know. I tried to encourage that ‘cause I'd seen some other, in other places, where this has been done. Some people got really creative about, you know, their quarantine pictures and had props and whatnot, so, some people did. My favorite, I think my favorite, there are a bunch of ones that I really liked. And there was one family who I think they had like four kids. And I get to the house. And they had this nice kind of porch in front. And the mom comes out. Because I texted her, ‘I’m here.’ And she comes out. And you can tell she's like, she was tired. You know, as we all have in quarantine. Her kids were up the street playing and her husband was in the back building like this rock. She comes out. And it was very like chill kind of family. And so finally they gathered up the kids. She went and got the kids, the kids came on their bikes into the front yard. And the dad comes out of the side yard, who's building, like I said, this kind of rock wall. He comes out with like his saw. One of the kids had his baseball bat, and the other kid had a, I forget what it was. And they all just kind of assembled on the porch, like not right next to each other like a pose, but just kind of staggered states of, and the mom was like, okay, well, where do you want us? And I'm like, perfect, everyone stay right there. They had
different props. And it wasn't planned, It wasn't like they grabbed things just to—they all just kind of assembled there waiting for direction with the things that they were doing, and I'm like this is exactly what I'm looking for.

TEH Right.

Billy Sabatini Capture people as they are, in the middle of what they're doing. Where as soon as I'm done shooting, they go back to it. You go back to building a rock wall or sleeping. Or whatever it may be. And to me, I really liked that one, the way that one came out because it wasn't posed, per se. They were just kind of like, standing there, separated by a space, and I thought, one of my favorite ones. And some people got really creative, which I loved. It was really cool. It was really fun to do. It was really fun to do because I met—I've lived in this town for twenty plus years. You know. Ninety percent of those people I had never met before. So, it was great to meet all different people. There were neighborhoods that I'd never been to. I mean, I never knew existed. Or, if I knew they existed, I didn't spend—Alexandria is a lot bigger than I, not thought, but you know. You tend to stay in your general area. I went all across the city. Spent a lot of time in like Beverly Hills, and Del Rey, and—. And so, it's just kind of cool to explore different parts of the city. Meet different people. Converse with people. So, it was kind of it was kind of fun to do from that perspective.

TEH Oh, excellent. So that definitely sounds like that during the stay at home, you know, that was an active, or stay at home, you know, as much as possible, that was something you can do, that gave you enjoyment. Were there any other activities that you, and or your family did?

Billy Sabatini Mm-mm. Not really. I mean, we tried to, we really tried to observe the stay at home.

TEH Well, yeah, I meant more like at home—.

Billy Sabatini Oh, yeah. Well, yeah. We tried to have, we really didn't state this, it just kind of happened, where, like [a] dedicated night, let's find something on Netflix to watch together every night as a family. Because, you know, everyone's—. During the day, especially when you’re just home all day, either on their own devices or doing their own thing, going on the same house, you're separated because—. So, we would, and it's something we’re still doing. Just every night find something to watch together. And that I guess started during this whole pandemic. And it's carried out. And it's fun, it's good. It kind of keeps you connected at the end of the day. And we get to spend some time together. Even if we're just doing different things throughout the day. And now it's different because there are more things to do. My wife is back working. I'm working. And all that but, especially in those early days, it kept us sane maybe, a little bit.

TEH Um, you mentioned Instagram. Did you find that you were reading social media more, less, or the same?
Um, I think the same for me. I've always been and not that I am proud of this or like it, but I'm a big consumer of social media. I mean, digital media was part of my job for many years. At the organization that I work at I was the head of digital media for up until about two years ago. And so, digital media was part of my job. And so, I always—made sure I was on top of things and a big consumer of social media. Because it was my world. And I need to stay on top of things, but also it's very addictive. So no, I'd say for me it's the same. There wasn't any change for me personally. I think, I would say with my kids as well, especially to my daughter, maybe more, because you know those, those hours filled with school, weren't filled with school anymore. Yes, they tried to have online, but it wasn't the same. It wasn't the same as being, you know, in school for eight hours a day. You know phones in the locker or wherever they keep the phones during—. So, I'd say probably affected her the most where she was on it probably more, because that's what kids do.

So, has the situation with COVID-19 changed the way you think about your community? That could be community from a large-scale or a small-scale.

Well, you know, maybe. And the biggest reason I started, I did this photo project was because I thought it'd be good for the community. I thought this is a really hard time, and a confusing time, and scary time for people. And something to get back to the community to, not to sound trite or cliché but to, if we could just make people happy, a little bit, even just for a short period of time. Or something as simple as giving them a family portrait. That could provide some joy in some people's lives, as a community. So I looked at it as really kind of a community, something to give back to the community in a time of need. I guess maybe I really hadn't thought about that before and necessarily giving back to the community like that where—. And it's something so simple, really. It's something I like to do. It was fun for me. But it's also, people would keep telling me that, and they really seemed to really appreciate this. As simple as it was. And so I really enjoyed that whole community aspect of it. But to be honest, I really hadn't thought about it like that before. So, yeah, I guess it changed my mind. And in thinking that, sometimes very little things can add or contribute to a community and the joy to being in community. And it did really give me a sense of wow, this is a really cool. Because, like I said, I met so many people, so many families. And talking with different people. And it really did give me a sense of this whole community. Like I said, you tend to just stay in your general area you know. You don't really experience the larger city slash community. That was kind of interesting and eye opening for me to do. And fun. And interesting. Yeah.

Very cool. Um, is there anything else I haven't asked about with the COVID-19 situation or the project that you wanted to talk about?

I think you asked everything. Yeah. It just started out as just a simple
idea. One that I didn't really think much about or how big it might be or how interesting. And all those things that I talked about would be—just that it really surprised me. How much I really enjoyed it. And how much people really, really did appreciate it. The one thing I should add is, after the first, because when I first started doing it people would offer me—. They were so grateful, they would offer me money—I'm like, no, no, this is a community, I'm just doing this for the community, giving back to the community, and like I said bring a little joy, a little joy to people in this really hard scary time. And so, like about a week after doing it, it's like, I should try to raise money for a worthwhile Alexandria project. So I talked to my wife about it and we talked, because, again, she's involved in a nonprofit. And one thing that we knew of was Sue Goodhart of Goodhart Realty. She had started a GoFundMe Page, where she was raising money for people. From people. And that they would use, they would use the money raised through the GoFundMe to support local Alexandria restaurants with a different one each week. And they would buy meals from that restaurant for that week. And then take the meals and bring them to the hospital in over Alexandria, the Alexandria INOVA hospital. So, I really liked that because that was a real community. Number one, it was supporting local businesses that are really suffering. All the restaurants, you know, back then. So, supporting the restaurants by buying meals and then donating them to the frontline healthcare workers. That really appealed to me. So I mentioned to Sue I was going to do that. And so I put that on my website, so people could see, you know, what I was raising money for. And then I would when I was there, the people would ask me about it. Or they said they already donated. Or they were going to donate and etcetera, etcetera. So, I saw — because you know there's a list on the GoFundMe, you can see who donated and whatnot. So, people who participated in the Front Steps Project contributed over $5,000 to this GoFundMe.

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<td>Billy Sabatini</td>
<td>I was really happy about that. I mean. Like I said, people are really appreciative of getting this done. And they were more than happy to donate to a very good cause. I mean, again, the cause was fantastic. Supporting businesses. Supporting healthcare workers. And so that was really, that was really cool, and something I hadn't really thought about in the front end, just ‘cause I was hesitant to ask people for even a donation thing, to ask people for money [for a donation.] But then I thought, you know what, this would be, people really seem to be really appreciative and they're trying to offer me money, which I don't want to take, so let me have an alternative. I can steer them to this GoFundMe. And that's what I did. I have a link on my site where you can click on. It takes you to her GoFundMe. And so, people did.</td>
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<td>TEH</td>
<td>Excellent. That's a great cause.</td>
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<td>Billy Sabatini</td>
<td>Yeah, yeah. I really like it. And there’s so many good causes, so many good causes in the city. You know. There's Alive [a non-profit that works to improve the lives of those in need in the Alexandria] and all</td>
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these other places. But I thought this was a really cool, a really cool effort that spoke to the very specific need of right now. Especially back in the early days when the restaurants were suffering and healthcare workers need to be, you know, were working real hard and needed to be fed. So, it really, I thought it was a really good idea.

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