

2020 Wuhan COVID-19 Lockdown Oral Histories

Frank Interview

May 15, 2021

Virtual Meeting

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Frank Interview

ROBERT BROWNING: Okay, my name is Robert Browning, working in conjunction with the Reuther Library at Wayne State University. Today's date is May 15, 2021. This interview is with Frank about his experiences in early 2020 during the COVID lockdown and afterwards. At the moment, Frank is located in Pennsylvania. This interview is being recorded remotely and will be housed at the Reuther Library, which is part of Wayne State University.

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Okay, so I begin with the question, are you in any way associated with Wayne State University?

FRANK: No.

BROWNING: Where are you from originally?

FRANK: The United States.

BROWNING: Okay. Where in the United States? [00:01:31]

FRANK: I was born in New Jersey, but then I moved to Pennsylvania when I was a kid. Um, lived there until I moved to China in 2004.

BROWNING: Okay. Could I ask what do you do for a living?

FRANK: While I was in China, I was working for the British Council as a psychometrics and assessor, language assessment. I have a Master's in Language Assessment. Right now, I'm looking for work, but I'm working at a temporary position as a case, or contact tracer, for COVID.

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BROWNING: Okay. Well, so you were in in China since 2004. So, approximately sixteen years, right?

FRANK: Yeah.

BROWNING: What initially brought you there? [00:02:26]

FRANK: I was working for an insurance company or something. I didn't really like it. I was just getting bored with [it]. I'd done some travel before that for work and I always liked it. So I just kind of Googled jobs that get me out of America. Teaching in China came up. So I applied for a position as a teacher and I got it. And, yeah, I left. I was meant to only be there for a year, but I kind of liked it, so I just kind of stayed.

BROWNING: Did you live primarily in Wuhan?

FRANK: The first two years I was outside of Wuhan, in small towns, and then moved to Wuhan and I stayed there until probably, 2015, 16, something like that. And then I moved to Guangzhou for work. But my wife is from Wuhan. Her family is there as well. So we always maintained close contacts to Wuhan.

BROWNING: Right. Okay. [00:03:48] And so jumping ahead, jumping forward quite a bit to late 2019, early 2020. Could you tell me what you were doing the days or even months before Coronavirus began or even before the lockdown began?

FRANK: Sure, so I guess kind of, you know, we were living in Guangzhou. We had an apartment there. My wife had gone back with our daughter to Wuhan to visit her parents. They were celebrating something. I forget what it was, but my mother-in-law had a stroke on September fifth. Around then, or I'm sorry, [on] October fifth. And then she died on the second, or October second. So I had gone back to Wuhan once she had a stroke and I was staying there. We had to go through the funeral process and all that stuff. You know, stay with her father, but then I was traveling back and forth between Wuhan and Guangzhou for work and other provinces or cities

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in China because I was traveling a lot for work. But I guess I got back to Wuhan all together for the last time on January seventeenth. [00:05:17]

BROWNING: Okay. So when did you start to hear of the Coronavirus?

FRANK: Yeah, I guess at the end of December. I was actually just looking through my WeChat messages just to get a kind of a look at the timeline. It was towards the end of December, we started hearing things about the virus. I actually got sick. Um, when was it? On January fifth, I had gotten sick. So I had seen notes or messages in WeChat where I was talking to coworkers. And I was, like, Oh, it might be the Wuhan virus or something. And everybody was laughing and nobody outside of Wuhan had heard of it—

BROWNING: —right—

FRANK: —at that point. But, yeah, and, for me, it was like I felt kind of foolish for thinking about it, like, Is this this new virus? Ah, it's probably just a flu or something. [00:06:24] But, yeah, I guess that's when we started first hearing about it.

BROWNING: So was it just like a cold? Or do you think it was—

FRANK: No, so I was back in Guangzhou when I got sick. My wife and child were still in Wuhan with her dad. So I had gone to the clinic, it was a Western clinic. And I was, like, I'm sick and I'm kind of worried it's this Wuhan thing, so they did tests and they told me it wasn't the Coronavirus. But, looking back at it, they hadn't identified it as the Coronavirus at that point. They didn't have any tests for it certainly. So I don't know how they came to that conclusion. They said it was some other virus that caused pneumonia, but it was just a blood test. I don't know. It wasn't like a test they do now for COVID, which is a nasal swab and stuff. A blood test would be for antibodies, but they hadn't isolated the virus yet. So I don't know what they're coming out of with that information. [00:07:36]

BROWNING: Did you ever get an antibody test?

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FRANK: I did. Months, maybe a year later. My daughter and I both got the antibody test and it came back negative. But the doctor said that that's after over a year, so that's to be expected. I didn't have it.

BROWNING: Right. Okay, so like when you started to hear about the virus and stuff like that, I mean, what were you thinking? What were your feelings about it?

FRANK: At first it was we didn't think it was that big of a deal. I had come at the tail end of SARS, when I first came to China. That was towards the very end of SARS and I remember that. I mean, getting information on that wasn't a massive thing. [00:08:32] From what I remember, we barely heard about it in the States. Just kind of in the news a little bit. So when we started hearing about this, we didn't know how much of it was a rumor. A lot of the information was coming through my wife who's getting it on WeChat and Weibo.

BROWNING: Right.

FRANK: And so I kind of took it with a grain of sand. We just didn't know. For a little bit, towards the lockdown, when stores started closing and stuff—I don't know. I don't want to say excited, but it was it was kind of like a strange time. Felt like we were in a movie or something, like a zombie movie. I remember making constant jokes with friends and stuff. Oh, we're stuck in the apocalypse. Because, again, I didn't really think was that going to be that big of a deal, um, but that changed. [00:09:35]

BROWNING: Yeah, um, and it changed—

FRANK: Sorry, it's probably on the twentieth, or so, we started stocking up on food. That's when, I guess when we started seeing things close and stuff. I remember going out and getting stuff to make bread because we didn't know. I figured things like dry goods and stuff like that.

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BROWNING: Right. I mean, the twentieth is when they declared that it was transmissible between humans, basically, which is also the day I left China, but anyway. So, I think, I would assume that from the twentieth a lot of things start happening with you. But, I guess, when the lockdown began or just before the lockdown began, what were you doing or thinking?

[00:10:42]

FRANK: Uh, so I was just working from home, from the apartment in Wuhan, so I was still keeping up with my job and stuff. Just kind of sitting in the house. It got real boring. You probably know what the apartments are like in China.

BROWNING: Yep.

FRANK: You know, it's small, kind of. We were staying with her father, so it was the three of us plus him. It was very hectic before that with the funeral and with her mother and everything and we just kept on going with a funeral. Just like dinners and different ceremonies and stuff like that. So it was on one hand very kind of hectic and the other hand when that wasn't happening, it was very boring because we just couldn't leave the house. Um, couldn't take Annabel my daughter [out]. They didn't want her to leave the house, so I always had to stay in the home and if any shopping had to be done, [name redacted] would go and do it. [00:11:44]

BROWNING: How old was your daughter at the time?

FRANK: Three.

BROWNING: Okay. So, I want to get into, I guess, kind of some sensitive areas with you here about your father-in-law. When did when did your father-in-law start showing signs that he was sick?

FRANK: Yeah, that was probably on the twenty-third. January twenty-third.

BROWNING: Oh okay.

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FRANK: Uh, which is the same day the hospitals closed and the city kind of closes as well, I think.

BROWNING: Uh-huh, so when he started to get sick, what was the plan of action, I guess, or what did you try to do? [00:12:30]

FRANK: So he was always an active guy and stuff. He couldn't stand being stuck in the house and he kept going out and walking around and stuff. And we kept telling him, You can't be doing this. You can't leave the house. We don't know what this is, but he went out anyway. And then, on the twenty-third, or around there, he started showing symptoms, so we wanted to get him tested. So by then it was too late for the hospitals. I mean, you couldn't get in. My wife went to the hospital with him to try to get him a space in line and couldn't. There were hours long lines and stuff. And, even then, they were just kicking them out, said, You got to go. So I saw a message, um, again, looking through my messages. Message from my wife, like, We're coming back and spray the house with bleach, just trying to disinfect it. And so he came back and just we put him in his bedroom and tried to keep him separate as much as possible. [00:13:48]

BROWNING: Did you try to take him to another hospital or a different hospital?

FRANK: Yeah.

BROWNING: Huh?

FRANK: Yeah, and I remember my wife telling me that a nurse, or somebody like that, had told her, kind of confidentially, Don't let them kick you out because if you don't get in here, you're not going to get in anywhere at this moment. And [we] still couldn't get him in, though he wasn't bad at that point. So there were a lot of people there who couldn't breathe or anything like that. So they were, I guess, prioritizing them and told her to go home.

BROWNING: Um-hm, so, how did your wife and your father-in-law get to and from hospitals, or get around to different— [00:14:41]

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FRANK: Uh, we had a car.

BROWNING: You had a car, okay.

FRANK: It's a SUV. So there was some videos and stuff of them actually—well, this was later, much later, closer to when he died, but they were camping out at the hospital parking lot waiting to get a space.

BROWNING: How long were they camping? How long were they out there?

FRANK: A couple days.

BROWNING: Couple days. Wow. Okay, so was there any other kind of challenges with helping him? [00:15:27]

FRANK: So I guess when he was back with us, it was again, we just tried to keep him separate from Annabel. She got sick on the twenty-fifth, I think, started getting a fever. Fortunately, it wasn't very severe with her. Um, but while I was in China, he wasn't very bad at all, I don't think. He had a fever and stuff. The fever would come and go, but he wasn't severe.

BROWNING: So, eventually, he did get into a hospital, right? [00:16:13]

FRANK: Um, I think the last day. It wasn't in the hospital. It was just in the hallway of the hospital. They never admitted him or anything.

BROWNING: Okay.

FRANK: So during that time, also, when he got sick and the hospital was closed and then Annabel got sick, that's when I started getting worried about and thinking about leaving China and taking Annabel out. Because my concern was that we were right down the street from the children's hospital and another hospital. And when the children's hospital closed and then [if] Annabel got sick, my concern was, Well, what are we going to do if it gets serious? Even if it's not COVID. If it's anything, if she gets sick or hurt in any way, there's nothing—there's literally

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nothing we could do about it. I mean, I'm on medication myself for—that I had been for a while—for depression and anxiety. So I was taking antidepressants and stuff like that and I couldn't get them anymore. So the hospitals refused to see me, so I couldn't even get medication. [00:17:21] So I'm thinking about what are we going to do with Annabel? You know, if something happens, and we have to get her to a hospital. So we started looking into leaving Wuhan. I signed up for the information on the embassy try to get on [a plane], but I was still sick then at that point. Annabel was sick at that point. So they wouldn't give us a seat on the first flight that left. Uh, so it was just, yeah, just constant communication with the embassy trying to figure out another flight. If another flight was going to leave, or not.

BROWNING: How did you—this might be an obvious question—but how did you find out about these flights out? [00:18:20]

FRANK: So at that point, I was talking to people back in America. My family back in America started—we told them about what's going on. They were, I guess, reading the news and stuff, calling the embassy in America or calling the governments in America and stuff. And so I think it was my brother found out about the first flight, so he sent me information about it. [Coughs]

BROWNING: Okay, so you didn't get on the first flight?

FRANK: No, they wouldn't let us on.

BROWNING: Okay. And but what about the next? Were you on that second flight out?

FRANK: I think it was the second flight. It was the last flight, anyway. I forget how many flights there were all together. [Coughs] But, it was the last one. I think it was the fourth. [00:19:20]

BROWNING: Okay. So how did how did that work? How did that play out? I mean, when actually it was confirmed that you could fly out. How did that work?

FRANK: You mean the actual day of?

BROWNING: Yeah.

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FRANK: They told us to go to the airport. We were going to drive there and we had the car. But all the neighborhoods and stuff that we where we lived, all throughout Wuhan, they were all closed. They wouldn't let people leave. [Coughs] So, you know, we had to find out how are we going to get there The embassy was, like, Yeah, you just got to get here to the airport. [00:20:12] So we called—went to the neighborhood, um, I don't know what they're called. They've got government workers that kind of are in charge of that area and we had to get permission, so we gave them our license plate. They cleared it and then we drove to the airport. Uh, it was kind of surreal. I mean, you've been in Wuhan. You know what it's like, knowing what the streets are like. It's really packed.

BROWNING: Yep.

FRANK: But we were the only people on the streets. The highways, all the way to the airport. Couple cop cars that would just wave us on. Yeah, it was kind of crazy. We got there in the afternoon or something. Said goodbye to [name redacted]. So we had decided that she was going to say with her dad. It was a pretty hard decision to make—

BROWNING: Yeah.

FRANK: —whether we leave or not. But if it was just me, I would have stayed, but my concern was Annabel again. [00:21:22] So said goodbye, went into the airport—completely empty again. There were a couple of flights leaving. So there's the Americans. I think the French had a flight going out too. So there's kind of like two camps going on, just waiting. I think we ended up waiting for like thirteen, fourteen hours in the airport. It was just me and the baby. Nothing open, we just had to sit there. I guess they kept delaying us leaving or the flight taking off. The government kept delaying it, or something. They didn't really tell us anything. So it was probably—I don't know—twelve, midnight, one, something like that when they let us on the plane. And it was just a huge cargo plane. They had put in some seats, but it wasn't like a passenger plane or anything like that. [00:22:21]

BROWNING: Right.

Frank Interview

FRANK: Oh, they told us my wife couldn't come, because they had no seats. So, I mean, that kind of figured into the decision for her to stay and, well, we can't get a seat anyway and she wants to take care of her dad.

BROWNING: Right.

FRANK: But we got on there and it was like half empty. There were way more empty seats than they had said. Uh, but, basically, kind of just passed out after that. You know, after standing, running around with, after a three year old in an airport for twelve hours. We just kind of fell asleep.

BROWNING: Did you, may I ask, how did you explain what was going on with your daughter?

FRANK: Uh, we just said we're going to visit grandma in America. A three-year-old is not really going to understand what was happening.

BROWNING: Yeah, understandable.

FRANK: Yeah, she just gone through the funeral for my mother-in-law. She didn't really understand that so— [00:23:34]

BROWNING: Uh-hm. So you, basically, sleep on the plane on the way back, but when you arrived—well, first of all, before you got on the plane, did you have to like prove that you weren't sick or anything like that?

FRANK: Yeah, they did fever checks and things like that, but I mean no blood tests or anything like that. They actually did stop me, the Chinese, because of Annabel's—well, she didn't have a visa. She had an entry and exit card, which is what some children get before they can get a visa, but it was expired. They weren't going to let us leave, but then they were, like, Well, since this is a special occasion, we're going to let you go. So they let us get on the plane, but I just had a fever check. Nothing.

BROWNING: That had to be a little nervy there.

Frank Interview

FRANK: But to be honest, I was more kind of pissed off at that point. Because it's one or two in the morning. I was exhausted. I just wanted to get on the plane and this guy's telling me my paperwork's— [coughs] [00:24:48]

BROWNING: Not right. Yeah. All right, so you basically you sleep on the plane for most of the time.

FRANK: Yeah, we landed, I think, in Anchorage or something.

BROWNING: In Anchorage? Okay.

FRANK: Yeah, it was a direct flight to the west coast. First, we landed in Anchorage. Just stayed on the plane. Refueled, or whatever, and then flew on to San Francisco.

BROWNING: Okay.

FRANK: To Fort Miramar.

BROWNING: Okay, that's near San Francisco or—

FRANK: I think so, yeah.

BROWNING: Okay. So when you arrived at the military base, military fort, what was kind of expected of you there? [00:25:34]

FRANK: Yeah, so, right away, they gave us paperwork on the airplane. You know, questionnaires, like, Have you had it or are you showing symptoms? So I filled it out truthfully. They took us away right away and took us to a children's hospital and put us in isolation. So we were, Annabel and I, were there for three or four days in isolation. We had armed guards. What are those government guards called?

BROWNING: Military police?

FRANK: No, what are the ones—they get fugitives?

Frank Interview

BROWNING: Uh, Marshals?

FRANK: Yeah, Marshals. So they're armed guards—U.S. Marshal guards. Twenty-four hours a day outside of our room. [00:26:27] I asked one, one day, asked one of the nurses, Are they here to keep us from running? Or are they here to protect us?

BROWNING: Right.

FRANK: They kind of laughed, like, Both.

BROWNING: So how long were you guys there?

FRANK: Three or four days. So in a tiny little room. It was nice enough, but being jet lagged and stuck in a room where they wouldn't let you do anything. So at that point, I started—what was I doing? Keeping in contact with [name redacted], of course. Um, you know, the hospital was really nice. It was a kid's hospital. They brought a lot of toys for Annabel, so she had plenty of stuff to play with.

BROWNING: Nice.

FRANK: But it was, yeah—

BROWNING: So it was pretty easy for her to keep busy.

FRANK: Yeah, she didn't mind it so much. [00:27:34]

BROWNING: All right. So, let's see, so do you remember when you arrived in America?

FRANK: Yeah.

BROWNING: What was the date there?

FRANK: It was the fourth.

BROWNING: Fourth. Yeah. Okay. And so you spent three or four days in the base hospital—

Frank Interview

FRANK: Yeah.

BROWNING: And then you went home, right?

FRANK: No, then we went to back to the Fort Miramar.

BROWNING: Okay.

FRANK: We had to quarantine there for two weeks—

BROWNING: —Oh okay, okay—

FRANK: —before they would let us leave. So we went back to the fort or went back to the base. Again, um, yeah, everybody was really nice. Annabel became kind of famous.

BROWNING: Um-hm, I'm sure.

FRANK: What's that?

BROWNING: I'm sure.

FRANK: Yeah, all the staff loved her and brought her toys and stuff again, so she was having a ball. But then probably two or three days later, she coughed in front of the nurse and that was it. They took us back to the isolation for another three or four days.

BROWNING: Okay.

FRANK: So we were there and then they released us and we finished the time at the fort.

[00:28:56]

BROWNING: I assume that when the coughing incident happened and you had to go back to isolation and then return to the base, did you have to start the quarantine over?

FRANK: No, that's just 14 days altogether.

Frank Interview

BROWNING: Okay, okay. So you were kind of in quarantine under military control, we can say, I guess and during that time your father-in-law passed away.

FRANK: Yeah, so he died on the tenth.

BROWNING: Okay.

FRANK: And I wasn't at the base that day.

BROWNING: And can you tell me about that?

FRANK: Yeah, that was at night, my time. Uh, so I remember, for some reason, the internet wasn't working in my room. So I had to go to the common area where we ate, but it was late, so there was nobody there. [00:29:57] Annabel and I am talking to her mom. So she told us he just passed. So that was hard seeing her so upset and not being able to do anything because we were so far away.

BROWNING: Right.

FRANK: Um, yeah. So it was a hard day.

BROWNING: I can only imagine. And I know, [name redacted] was ill as well, right?

FRANK: Yeah, so she was sick as well, so I was concerned about that. She was sending me X-rays and stuff that they had done. Both for him and for her and I was showing them to the doctors here. [00:31:00] Just to see if they can tell us anything. I spent a lot of time feeling helpless there. So anything that I could have done, or even though it was not very useful, I would just try to do it. But, so I would go to the doctors, the military doctors, and show them the X-rays and stuff. And they would just kind of tell me what they saw. But, basically, it was whatever what the doctor said in China.

BROWNING: I mean, so she had COVID or—?

FRANK: Yeah, she got diagnosed with COVID.

Frank Interview

BROWNING: Okay, and how long was she sick for?

FRANK: It was a while for her. I mean, I don't know how long she was infectious for, but her cough lasted a long time.

BROWNING: Right.

FRANK: Um, she'll probably tell you more about this part, but so she was alone in the apartment by then, after he passed and the police came at that point. I'm sure you saw the news that the government had built these massive kind of camps. Hospital camps.

BROWNING: Yeah, temporary hospitals. Yeah.

FRANK: Yeah, so they come and they want her to go after he died, because it was in the house. And she wouldn't. She refused. So I was like on the phone with her and they were at the door trying to get in. Trying to take her to the to the camp. Uh, so that was concerning. Ended up they talked her into putting her into a hotel instead one of those camps. [00:32:53]

BROWNING: So how long was she at the hotel? I mean, maybe she could tell me, but—

FRANK: Yeah, she'll probably know better.

BROWNING: Okay.

FRANK: I think three or four days, or something.

BROWNING: Okay. So, basically, let's see, how long were you separated from her? [00:33:11]

FRANK: So she got back on July fourth.

BROWNING: Okay.

FRANK: So six months, or so.

BROWNING: Right. Five, six months.

Frank Interview

FRANK: Yeah, because we kept trying to buy tickets. We'd buy them and then they cancel them. I buy them, they cancel them. Well, first, she had to take care of the funeral for her dad anyway. I mean there wasn't much of a funeral. The government just took and cremated the body—

BROWNING: And gave her the ashes?

FRANK: Yeah, so but she still had to take care of some paperwork and stuff like that. [00:33:51] That took probably a couple of weeks. A month, maybe. Uh, putting everything in order because, you know, flying. We had an apartment in Wuhan and we owned it. We had to take care of that. There were accounts and his will. All that stuff she had to take care of and then, at that point, it was just impossible to get a flight.

BROWNING: Was it because of COVID?

FRANK: Yeah. I think, by that point, Trump had signed the exclusion or whatever.

BROWNING: Right, basically, closing kind of travel, borders between the two countries.

FRANK: Yeah, and China closed it as well. You know, cutting Wuhan off from the rest of the country and wouldn't let flights leave anyway. Uh, so it was a good five months before we finally got a ticket. But, yeah, so the airports or the air companies, they would still sell the tickets though. And they would cancel them and we finally got one that stuck and she was able to fly back.

BROWNING: Right, I assume that she had to do some sort of quarantine period, too, huh?
[00:35:19]

FRANK: Once she got here?

BROWNING: Yeah.

Frank Interview

FRANK: No, they didn't do a quarantine. Not an official one like an order. They told her to quarantine in the house, but it wasn't at a base or anything.

BROWNING: Right. Yeah, that was in July, so I don't know—

FRANK: She had to get a test COVID test before she got here.

BROWNING: Okay, okay. All right. I mean, America has been kind of lax about the whole situation and I'm sure—

FRANK: Yeah.

BROWNING: So you're basically back together by July fourth.

FRANK: Right.

BROWNING: How did that feel? [00:36:07]

FRANK: It was great. It was, um, a huge relief. Just Annabel had been started showing some of the strain of being separated. She had developed tics, like vocal tics, things like that, so I was concerned about her. I was concerned about [name redacted]. You know, things that were happening there, so to finally be reunited was a huge relief.

BROWNING: What did you first do together?

FRANK: She got in it pretty late at night. So she flew into DC. That's where my brother lives, so we just went back to his place and went to sleep. [laughs] The next day, [we] probably ordered some dinner. Oh, and then we drove back to Pennsylvania. I was staying with my mom. I think we had a huge barbecue. Uh, yeah, so my mom was there, my sisters, my brother. They all came down. Everybody came down and had a big dinner and stuff. [00:37:35]

BROWNING: I should probably ask—I should have asked this earlier, but how long have you and [name redacted] been together?

Frank Interview

FRANK: Together? Seven—Twenty-thirteen I think we started dating. Seven, eight years.

BROWNING: Ok, all right. Yeah, I just wanted to ask that. And so, I want to ask you about your experiences of like being in the media.

FRANK: Sure.

BROWNING: Because I'm aware that you were in the media. [laughs] I saw you on the national news. I was like, Hey, I know that guy. So could you— [00:38:27]

FRANK: Yeah, I guess it started when I was in isolation. I think the second time. So somebody told me about that—what is that app for raising money?

BROWNING: Uh, GoFundMe?

FRANK: GoFundMe, or something. Somebody told me about that, like, Oh, you should sign up for this. And, prior to that, I was just emailing everybody, like Bill Gates and whoever. I just needed to get my wife out of China, you know? I knew it wasn't going to work, obviously. But I was jet lagged. I was not sleeping at night. I was super anxious. Stuck in a room with a three year old for six, seven days. Yeah, so I was just trying just trying to keep busy. I was bored. I was anxious. So when they told me that I can sign up for that, it kind of took off a little bit. And then people started—

Can you excuse I'm going to get some water?

BROWNING: Yeah.

FRANK: I'll be back.

BROWNING: Okay.

FRANK: Five minutes I'll be back. [00:39:45]

BROWNING: Okay.

Frank Interview

Pause in recording

FRANK: All right, I'm back. [00:41:56]

BROWNING: Okay. No worries.

FRANK: Yeah, so I guess you should also know, at that point I had flown into America with maybe \$1,000 cash. That was it. So, as you know, in China, when you have a bank account, they don't give separate cards for husband and wife. There's just one card.

BROWNING: Okay.

FRANK: So I left the bank card with her to pay for whatever she needed. I couldn't get any money out of the bank because all the ATMs were closed and stuff. All the banks were closed. So we just took whatever money we had in the house and took that with me and left the bank card with her. So I get to America, I'm bored and I'm broke. Didn't have any money. They told me we had to pay for the flights, of course. They were 1,200 dollars each one way. Nobody told me about the hospital bills because I didn't know I was going to go in the hospital and for six days, six, seven days in the hospital. [00:43:05] Uh, I didn't know how much that was going to be. But I'm pretty sure it was expensive. I kept asking, Are we going to pay for this? And they said, We don't know. And then another person that was also in isolation, she told me that they told her that she has to pay for it. So I'm just looking at this huge bill, so when my friend told me about GoFundMe, I'm like, Okay, because who knows? I thought it was going to be another long shot. Nobody's going to pay attention to it. Then, it kind of got a bit big and then I guess some of the news media saw it. So they reached out and asked me if I want to do some interviews. Again, I was sitting in the hospital, bored—

BROWNING: —right—

FRANK: —jetlagged. So I'm, like, Yeah, I can do some interviews. You know, so yeah, that's how that started. [00:44:08]

Frank Interview

BROWNING: How did you feel about being in the media?

FRANK: Uh, at first, it was when I was just in the hospital. Annabel, I guess in that area of California, she got real famous, you know, quote unquote.

BROWNING: Right.

FRANK: So the commander of the airbase—the marine base—came down to say goodbye to her, specifically. Brought her presents and things like that. So it was like, Oh, this is nice.

Then the trolling started, so that was pretty terrible. You know, reading the comments and stuff that people were—uh, the last one I went on Fox News, or I forget which, maybe it was Fox and I coughed, had a coughing fit like I just did now. Just a scratchy throat or whatever and it was blown way out. I got death threats and things like that. Like people telling me that they hope my baby died and shit like that. So at that point I was just—I was pretty much done with it.

BROWNING: Wow. Yeah, I know the media had some issues.

FRANK: [Laughs] Yeah. So it was not pleasant. So, I mean, the media people themselves, I guess we're—I don't know—there's no gotcha moments or anything like that. It's just what people wrote on Twitter and—

BROWNING: Right, the commenters and stuff. Did you respond in any way to them?

FRANK: No, not to Twitter or anything like that.

BROWNING: Right. Okay. All right. And I just want to clarify about the medical bills, who ended up paying? [00:46:24]

FRANK: So they did send me bills. But then the New York Times came up to me. A reporter from the New York Times and I sent them scans of the bill. And said, why am I paying for this? This is not my choice to go in the hospital. You basically forced me to do it with armed guards, nonetheless.

Frank Interview

[crosstalk]

What's that?

BROWNING: And you're an American citizen.

FRANK: Yeah. So, eventually, they said I didn't have to pay. I still had to pay for the flights and everything like that. And once we got to America, I had health insurance and stuff in China, which covered me and Annabel all throughout China, but we didn't have anything—any coverage here anything. [00:47:16] So we used that money to pay for insurance. We did eventually have to go to the hospital. Uh, so one of the things—so when we were in Guangzhou, we actually lived through a couple of vaccine scams, or whatever. It turns out a lot of the vaccines were not real. I don't know if you saw that in the news. This was years before COVID.

BROWNING: No.

FRANK: So I had to take Annabel, when she got to America, I wasn't sure how vaccinated she was. We don't know how many of the vaccines she got were actually real. We had to do antibody tests and stuff like that with her once we got to America. We had no clothes. We had just what we could fit in one bag. They paid for all that sort of stuff, so the money was helpful. But, if looking back on it, if maybe it was a million, I would do it again. But for what it was, I don't think it was really worth it, but—

BROWNING: I see. Okay, so how does it feel to be in America now? [00:48:51]

FRANK: Yeah, I mean, there's certainly not that level of stress. Uncertainty I think was the big thing. We didn't know what was going to happen. We didn't know. So a mix of it being in America and also that we now have an understanding of what the virus is, so that's completely different. Still, stressful because I'm looking for work. You know, with the jobs market the way it was for a long time, it's been hard. So just working, kind of in a holding pattern just waiting to

Frank Interview

get a job that's in my field, so that we can move out. I'm staying, like I said, we're staying with my mother in the house. Just waiting for that to end so we can get out. [00:49:54]

BROWNING: Yeah, get a little more freedom.

FRANK: Yeah. It's not even about freedom. It's just about starting our lives, you know. I don't know where we're going to live, but just wanting it to happen.

BROWNING: Right. So I really only have a few more questions, I think. And I guess, since all of this has happened, is there anything you think that is important now that wasn't before?

FRANK: Oh, what do you mean?

BROWNING: Is there something that you may be appreciate more than you didn't in the past? [00:50:47]

FRANK: Um, I guess, I mean, I think the thing that I thought we always had would be truth, you know. I think it was seen how politicians played with the truth on both sides. And you kind of expected that maybe from China. But, I never really expected that from the American government. Just this kind of war on truth. And so that seems, in some ways, we're beyond that now. But, certainly, I think the damage that kind of started with the lies that were told about COVID and stuff like that kind of spread beyond that. So that's kind of something I appreciated. _____ (??) or whatever. And just a general feeling of stability, I guess. You never know when things are just going to go—

BROWNING: Haywire?

FRANK: Just go bad. Yeah. [00:52:06]

BROWNING: Right. Again, this is maybe a somewhat obvious question, and I think you've already answered some of it, but what are you and your family's kind of plans for the future?

Frank Interview

FRANK: Um, stay in America. [name redacted] has applied for or has her application in for a green card, so she wants to live here and work. Annabel is getting ready for school. So she'll start school, kindergarten. So the plan is just to stay and live in the United States. Try to get back to normal.

BROWNING: Right. Get settled in.

FRANK: Yeah. [00:53:01]

BROWNING: How do you feel about the future?

FRANK: Yeah, I'm just kind of focused now on just getting a job. It's been pretty uncertain. I think once that happens, I will have a bit more certainty, but—

BROWNING: Okay. Is there anything else that you wish to share?

FRANK: I can't think of anything. I don't know, it just feels like a long time ago. A lot of its kind of faded, I think, but I can't really think of anything that sticks out.

BROWNING: Okay. I guess we'll call it a wrap if that's all right.

FRANK: Yep, sounds good.

BROWNING: Ok.

End of interview