

# COMMUNITY ARCHIVE: COVID-19 EXPERIENCES ORAL HISTORIES

## Richard Livingston Interview

November 21, 2020

Virtual Meeting

Reuther Library Oral History ID: WSR002947\_OH\_019

This oral history interview was recorded as part of the Southeast Michigan COVID-19 Oral Histories Project on November 21, 2020, via a virtual meeting, as part of a student practicum project for the Wayne State University School of Information Sciences archival administration graduate certificate program. The interview has been deposited at the Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs and University Archives at Wayne State University. The interview may be used for research and educational purposes only.

Copyright 2020 Walter P. Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University

## Richard Livingston Interview

**ROBYN PIERCE:** Okay. My name is Robyn Pierce working in conjunction with the Reuther Library at Wayne State University. Today's date is November 21, 2020. This interview is of Richard Livingston about the effects of COVID on his ability to work. The interview will go into detail about his job as a senior software developer, both before and after the shelter-in-place order was issued. Richard lives in Bay City, Michigan. This interview is being recorded remotely and will be housed at the Reuther Library which is part of the Wayne State University.

The Reuther Library will keep administrative information about this oral history project such as interview releases and deeds of gift, in its case files. Case files are in a locked nonpublic area of the building accessible only to the Reuther Library staff. In the event of a criminal investigation or legal discovery proceedings, the Reuther Library could be compelled to turn over holdings in case files that are otherwise closed to the public, including the case files for this oral history project.

So, first thank you so much for joining me. And then, I always ask, um, do you have an affiliation with Wayne State University? [00:01:00]

**RICHARD LIVINGSTON:** I do not.

**ROBYN PIERCE:** Okay, so, could you give us a good baseline of what senior software developer is before COVID hit.

**RICHARD LIVINGSTON:** It, basically the only difference between senior software developer and, like, a junior level software developer is that you can oversee your own projects. When an application gets assigned to be written, they just expect that you can handle all aspects of it, and

## Richard Livingston Interview

sometimes you'll work with junior level developers and you'll, you know, you'll give them portions of the application to work on. But you are ultimately responsible for everything.

**ROBYN PIERCE:** So you're building applications that are used on all of the different platforms?

**RICHARD LIVINGSTON:** Well, I mean we, my team, mostly does like a web-based applications, but I, we do have some desktop applications, and we had one mobile app. [00:02:00] But, primarily we stick with the web apps and like, we have a mobile app team and a desktop app team, and they handle the other stuff.

**ROBYN PIERCE:** Okay, and then in the beginning I didn't mention that you are working in the medical industry. That's where your web apps are being created for, correct?

**RICHARD LIVINGSTON:** That's correct.

**ROBYN PIERCE:** Ok. So, can you walk me through a day of work prior to COVID?

**RICHARD LIVINGSTON:** Well, we use, like, the agile principles to that. We have a—they call it a scrum master. It's somebody who every two weeks lays out, like, this is the amount of work I want you to finish in the next two weeks, and whether that's actual coding, or break fix, or just like certain documentation that we have to do constantly about the apps. And so on a day-to-day basis, I pretty much just kind of go through my list of, these are the things that have to be done in the next two weeks. [00:03:07] And just kind of pick away at it, just in whatever order makes the most sense to me.

**ROBYN PIERCE:** So, then were you going into an office or were you able to do that from home?

## Richard Livingston Interview

**RICHARD LIVINGSTON:** Well so, prior to COVID I worked remotely about three or four days a week, and then I would go into the office the rest of the week. So, I was in the office very rarely as it was.

**ROBYN PIERCE:** So you were all set up to work from home, 100% of the time when we got sent home?

**RICHARD LIVINGSTON:** Absolutely.

**ROBYN PIERCE:** Okay, what was the biggest change when, for work, when the stay-at-home order came out?

**RICHARD LIVINGSTON:** When it comes to work, nothing. I mean, there was really no difference for me at all because the closest person that I actually work with lives in Wisconsin, so I wasn't working face-to-face with him anyways. [00:04:04] And the rest of my team is in Illinois, Indiana, Texas, and one person in Guam. Oh, I'm getting a weird glare [looking at computer screen].

**ROBYN PIERCE:** It's okay. So then, can we talk about the apps that you guys were making, like we talked before we recorded?

**RICHARD LIVINGSTON:** The apps like regarding COVID?

**ROBYN PIERCE:** Yes, please.

**RICHARD LIVINGSTON:** Okay. Yup. So yeah, after COVID happened we, a lot of our, I guess our responsibilities changed based on—. Before we had, like, these are the set apps that need to be

## Richard Livingston Interview

written for whatever purposes, nationalizing applications or rewriting old applications that were out of date, things like that. [00:05:00]

But, then once COVID happened, then everything became COVID-based. That was really the only thing that was important for a while there. Which is begun again because of the spike in COVID cases now. So right now there's just a difference in the way we do things now. So like, before you would get an application, you would have it tested out properly, and then you would, you'd put in a ticket for it to move into production, and it would get approved and it would move into production. Now we can't even make any changes in production until—I think right now the date is the end of January sometime. Just because, I mean there's always a little bit of risk when you're moving something onto the production environment, and if they just want to have no chances of disrupting our production environment just because of how important it is right for the people on the front lines, the doctors and the nurses, and technicians and all those people. [00:06:09]

**ROBYN PIERCE:** Yeah. That's crazy. So when, back in March, I think March 10 was the first confirmed case in Michigan and then the thirteenth, fourteenth of March is when schools closed. So, your son's in school.

**RICHARD LIVINGSTON:** Mmmm hmmm.

**ROBYN PIERCE:** He came home last year, and what did last year, the end of last school year look like for him?

**RICHARD LIVINGSTON:** Well, um it was certainly very chaotic, just because they didn't have anything in place. So his school just kind of scrambled and said, you know, We're signing up for

## Richard Livingston Interview

this, and we're signing up for that. And like, they would have [web] applications, like learning applications online that I have a feeling school didn't really understand them at that point.

[00:07:02] But they would just say, Okay, you've got these assignments on this site, and these assignments on that site. And that was the end of his school year last year, was pretty much just scrambling to get kids doing something.

**ROBYN PIERCE:** Yeah. Did you have to help him with learning, or organizing, or keeping track of any of that stuff?

**RICHARD LIVINGSTON:** For the most part, he's pretty self-sufficient, so for the most part he did. But there was a couple of times where he was like, Hey I don't understand where they want me to go for this assignment, or what I'm supposed to be doing. And so then yeah, I would step in and pretty much just contact the administration, the teachers, the principal and just say, We're not sure on what we're supposed to be [doing].

**ROBYN PIERCE:** Yeah. Did he have any contact with his teachers ever through Zoom [videoconferencing software] or anything like that after they shut down last March? [00:08:00]

**RICHARD LIVINGSTON:** Oh definitely. At first, they did Zoom calls and then they switched over to Google Meets [videoconferencing software]. But yeah, they would have daily daily calls. And they still do now. I think he has three or four a day, so.

**ROBYN PIERCE:** That's nice. So then, this year is compared to last year, better?

**RICHARD LIVINGSTON:** Yeah, they had the summer to kind of get a little more organized, which is nice. And they kind of eliminated some of the jumping around, because before I think it was

## Richard Livingston Interview

three or four different sites that you had had your assignments on, and now it's down to just a couple, which is nice. And I mean, up 'til now, though it's still is there, allowing kids to choose, so you can go into the classroom if you want, or you can be remote. [00:08:58] And so, the teacher just has a camera in the front of the classroom and she's teaching the kids who are there, and then you're just watching along. But I [recording interruption] about to end.

**ROBYN PIERCE:** So, those kids—oh, it is.

**RICHARD LIVINGSTON:** I don't think that they're going to allow—all of the public schools have moved to virtual only. He goes to a Charter school, and I think that's how they get around it. But I think I don't think it's going to continue much longer.

**ROBYN PIERCE:** So, all those kids that are opted to go to school, are they there full day every day of the week?

**RICHARD LIVINGSTON:** Yes.

**ROBYN PIERCE:** Oh. And then what did you guys choose to do?

**RICHARD LIVINGSTON:** We chose to do virtual, and he's done virtual this entire school year. And I don't know, he's probably going to stick with it until we see a drastic drop in the cases. I'm just not comfortable with it at this point. [00:10:02]

**ROBYN PIERCE:** No, I don't. We had the choice too. Our district is doing what they're calling hybrid. So half the school goes for two [days], half the school goes for two opposite days, and then one day is completely virtual for the whole district. And we opted not to do that, because we're not just comfortable with the protocols that they put in place.

## Richard Livingston Interview

**RICHARD LIVINGSTON:** Mmm hmm.

**ROBYN PIERCE:** So. I don't know. So, having him at home and having you working from home all the time now, how does that work?

**RICHARD LIVINGSTON:** It actually works out really good. He just kind of, he sits his—he's got his laptop right next to me, and I just work away and he works away and we try to, a lot of times we'll have meetings going at the same time. So we'll just make sure that we're staying on mute, but it actually works out really good.

**ROBYN PIERCE:** That's awesome. [00:10:59] Have you guys done anything over the course of the quarantine that you didn't have an opportunity to do before? Like, maybe read books together or puzzles or whatever?

**RICHARD LIVINGSTON:** We have gotten a lot more board games, which I like. Because we're trying to limit the amount of time—just because now he has to be on his computer for eight hours a day, and so I don't like to, you know, Okay, we're done with school now so let's go watch TV for the next five hours. We try and find something else to do. So yeah, we've been playing more board games, and yeah we've been doing reading as well.

**ROBYN PIERCE:** That's awesome. So, when we go back to something more closer to normal are you going to try to stay remote all the time for work, or are you going to go back to maybe once or twice a week going in?

**RICHARD LIVINGSTON:** I would imagine that it's going to stay 100% remote. [00:11:59] Just because the company I work for has actually seen the benefit of having their employees who



## Richard Livingston Interview

are able to be remote, be remote. Just by saving office space and things like that. So I'd imagine—I mean I haven't asked, but I would imagine I wouldn't even have the option to go into the—. I don't even know if my office is still there. I have no idea.

**ROBYN PIERCE:** Yeah, but you're able to do everything that you need to do at home. You don't have to go into an office.

**RICHARD LIVINGSTON:** Absolutely. Yup.

**ROBYN PIERCE:** Well, that's nice. So then are there any other big changes that have happened because of this stay-at-home stuff for you?

**RICHARD LIVINGSTON:** No.

**ROBYN PIERCE:** No. When it's over, when it's all over and we get to something more closer to normal, what are you guys excited to do?

**RICHARD LIVINGSTON:** Well, the one thing—and I've mentioned this too quite a few times around here, that I do miss—because, I don't go out very much. You know, I'm not a going-out type of person. But I do miss going to the movie theater. I've not been to the movie theater this year. Even when they opened it, I still was a little skeptical and so I stayed away. But I would love to go see a couple movies on the big screen.

**ROBYN PIERCE:** Yeah. That'd be really cool. Are you hoping to see a specific movie or just whatever's available?

**RICHARD LIVINGSTON:** Well, the last movie I saw in the theater was the last *Halloween* movie. Because you know they had Jamie Lee Curtis back in it, and I thought that was awesome. And

## Richard Livingston Interview

they have another one that it's in the works ,or maybe it's already done, and it has her again.

And so if I could see that on the big screen, I would love it.

**ROBYN PIERCE:** That's really cool. Well, unless you have anything else that you would like to talk about, I think we covered everything. [00:14:02]

**RICHARD LIVINGSTON:** I can't think of anything.

**ROBYN PIERCE:** Ok. I'm going to end the recording and then, if you could just stick around for just a minute.

**RICHARD LIVINGSTON:** Okay.

**ROBYN PIERCE:** Thank you.

*End of interview*