



1 Nicholas Borelli: Uh, I don't have recording permissions.
2
3 Nolan Flavin: Oh. Is it going now?
4
5 Nicholas Borelli: Cool.
6
7 Nolan Flavin: Okay, so this is capturing quarantine with Columbia College Chicago. It is April
8 4th at seven p.m. Uh, I am Nolan Flavin, the interviewer, and I am in St. Louis, Missouri. Could
9 you state your name?
10
11 Nicholas Borelli: Nick Borelli
12
13 Nolan Flavin: And where are you?
14
15 Nicholas Borelli: Belmont, Massachusetts.
16
17 Nolan Flavin: And what is your year of birth?
18
19 Nicholas Borelli: 2000.
20
21 Nolan Flavin: All right. And your year at Columbia?
22
23 Nicholas Borelli: Sophomore.
24
25 Nolan Flavin: Major?
26
27 Nicholas Borelli: Film.
28
29 Nolan Flavin: You had-
30
31 Nicholas Borelli: Acting minor.
32
33 Nolan Flavin: Um, and then what is your housing on campus?
34
35 Nicholas Borelli: Currently, on campus housing in 30 East. Next semester, off campus
36 apartment.
37
38 Nolan Flavin: Okay, sweet. So, that's, that's all the basic information. So, starting off—with the
39 background information. Where were you born?
40
41 Nicholas Borelli: Uh, I was born in Boston, um, because there aren't any hospitals in Belmont.
42 But I have never moved from this house.

43

44 Nolan Flavin: Okay. And where were your parents born and raised?

45

46 Nicholas Borelli: They were both, uh, born and raised in Massachusetts.

47

48 Nolan Flavin: What is your earliest memory?

49

50 Nicholas Borelli: I have very vague, probably fake memories of being changed at a very, very
51 young age. Um, my first actual memory would probably be playing video games at, like, four
52 or five years old with my brothers.

53

54 Nolan Flavin: Hm. Come—what kind of games did you guys play?

55

56 Nicholas Borelli: We used to play, like, uh, on the N64. We'd play like Mario Party or some of
57 the old Zeldas—stuff like that.

58

59 Nolan Flavin: And what are your brothers' names?

60

61 Nicholas Borelli: My closest in age brother to me is John. He's turn—he's 24. He just turned 24.
62 Brother older than that is Vincent. He's 27. And then I have a sister named Tina who's 30.

63

64 Nolan Flavin: Cool. What was your neighborhood like?

65

66 Nicholas Borelli: My hometown neighborhood?

67

68 Nolan Flavin: Mm-hm. Where you grew up.

69

70 Nicholas Borelli: It's very small. Um, it's very, very small. There's like—I could be wrong
71 about this. I think there's only, like, two or three thousand people that live here. Um, but it's
72 pretty small, and it's—my parents have often said the reason they live here is because
73 everything is walkable. You can walk pretty much anywhere, in any direction. If you walk ten
74 minutes, you are going to hit a store or a gym or a tennis court or a school. Um, and it's—that's
75 really all it is. It's just a pretty tightly knit small town with everything you could need.

76

77 Nolan Flavin: Did you enjoy growing up there?

78

79 Nicholas Borelli: Yeah, um, I think—I think everybody kind of dislikes the place they grow up
80 for at least part of their life. But I think being in college now—being in Chicago—I have
81 mostly only good memories of growing up. I like all the people here that I know. I like the
82 schools that I went to, for the most part, and the things I did. So, yeah, I'd say so.

83

84 Nolan Flavin: What did your parents do for work?

Nicholas Borelli: Um, my mom is retired. She used to own an advertising company called Tweedy-Borelli. And my dad owns an insurance company called Borelli Insurance.

Nolan Flavin: Where did you attend High School?

Nicholas Borelli: Belmont High school, about fifteen minutes away from where I live.

Nolan Flavin: Was it a big high school?

Nicholas Borelli: Uh, yeah, it's, it's a sizable high school, but they're actually—they're currently knocking it down and building one double the size because the grades—the years keep getting bigger and bigger, and they could barely fit all of us when I was there.

Nolan Flavin: Who were your closest friends in high school?

Nicholas Borelli: Um, I had a few. Uh, my friend—Rafi, was a co-improv captain with me, and so, we were close friends, doing a lot of extracurricular stuff, all the time. My friend, Sammy, who was always a grade below me—but I met him in middle school—he and I did a lot of theater stuff together, and any time I would make a movie he would, he would usually act in it. Um, my friend, Owen Pickett, who I've known since I was very little, he didn't go to my high school. He went to a private school up the street, but we still hung out all the time and still do. Um, and then, you know, I had a few other friends, here and there, from, from theater groups and other things, like my friends, like, James and Dylan and, and Miriam and Liz and people like that.

Nolan Flavin: What kind of a student were you in high school?

Nicholas Borelli: Not the best. Um, I did a lot of extracurricular stuff, like, a ton of it. Um, and I seemed to do very well at that, but I would often ignore a lot of academic responsibilities. I think because, and I'm not sure if this is me just making an excuse or actually the reason, um—but I've wanted to be a filmmaker for very long time. And I think there was part of me in high school that was like, "Some of this stuff just isn't ever going to come back in what I want to do. And my extracurriculars will or might."

Nolan Flavin: So, what were your expectations when you graduated high school?

Nicholas Borelli: To go to college, study film, and either get some kind of job and leave college early or graduate college and head to L.A.

125 Nolan Flavin: And you said that you had been doing high—uh, theater in high school, but you
 126 had always known you want to be a filmmaker? When was it that you clearly knew that you
 127 wanted to start focusing more on film?

128

129 Nicholas Borelli: I mean, I, I remember wanting to be a filmmaker since I was, like, six or
 130 seven. I kind of discovered theatre in eighth grade when some friends of mine were doing the
 131 school musical, and they wanted me to join so we could all hang out. And then I did—I just did
 132 every theater thing in high school because it's really fun, and it's, it's incredibly adjacent to
 133 filmmaking. It's—I've kind of operated under the assumption that anyone who wants to be a
 134 director should know a little bit about acting and what acting is. Uh, and that's really all it
 135 was—something I enjoyed. And I felt like it was, in some way, furthering me towards that kind
 136 of world (indistinguishable) –wasn't any film program at the school.

137

138 Nolan Flavin: Why did you decide to attend Columbia?

139

140 Nicholas Borelli: I liked the idea that most of the professors were working professionals. I liked
 141 the campus. Um, and everything I, I read about programs and things seem interesting. I also—I
 142 didn't get into that many school—I didn't get into that many schools, as I said, with my
 143 academics not being great—not like I had a ton of options. But I did okay in the college
 144 admissions process, and Columbia seemed like the best bet to me at the time.

145

146 Nolan Flavin: How have your classes been since you've been here?

147

148 Nicholas Borelli: Good. Uh, first semester, freshman year, felt like, uh, kind of a waste of a
 149 semester in terms of education. Uh, and maybe it's just me, but I kind of think that there's some
 150 classes I took second semester, even third semester, that felt like better introductory film
 151 courses than the actual introductory film courses. Um, but everything after first semester, I've
 152 taken out least one or two classes that have been genuinely insightful and interesting in some
 153 way, especially the screenwriting and directing programs. The teachers and those are really—
 154 they really know their stuff.

155

156 Nolan Flavin: How have you been able to engage in the film program here?

157

158 Nicholas Borelli: Pretty well. Uh, I like some of the people I meet. Um, the ones I don't, it's not
 159 that hard to tune out. Um, yeah, I feel like I've done well. I am a person who kind of—I'm a
 160 little too mean to myself sometimes, when it comes to not doing enough, probably from the
 161 amount of stuff I was doing in high school. But honestly, it's been—it's been pretty good so far.

162

163 Nolan Flavin: That's good to hear. What have been your favorite parts so far?

164

165 Nicholas Borelli: I just like all, all the people I've met, more than anything—um, a lot of really
 166 interesting people that I would never—I would never hear some of the perspectives that have

167 been brought up. I would never hear those here or an area in New England. I've met some really
 168 interesting, nice, and intelligent people.

169

170 Nolan Flavin: And you mentioned wanting to come here for the faculty and the work
 171 experience they had. How has your interaction with the faculty been so far?

172

173 Nicholas Borelli: Um, pretty good. I mean, I think it's, it's like—it's like most schools right
 174 there's professors who everybody seems to like, and they, they know what they're doing. They
 175 know what they're talking about. And I have gotten along with all of those people. There have
 176 been the kind of middle of the road professors that did their job. I might have learned some
 177 things, but they won't have any kind of lasting impact on me. And then there's been one or two
 178 professors where I'm like, "I'm going to be quoting this professor for years because of how
 179 much I disagree with them. And they're teaching people." For the most part, pretty good.

180

181 Nolan Flavin: How have you participated in the school outside of the classroom?

182

183 Nicholas Borelli: (sighs) I did—I tried a little improv. Um, my freshman year I tried doing the,
 184 the improv club at Columbia, because I, I came from such a big improv background. But it
 185 wasn't really for me. It wasn't, um, it wasn't nearly as, as structured as I'd like it to be. Uh, I just
 186 wasn't really into it. But I've done plenty of extracurricular film work. Um, I've made two music
 187 videos for my friend's band. I've written plenty of stuff just in my spare time, uh, and I like—I
 188 like traveling the city a lot. I've gone on—with friends—I've gone on a lot of, like, day or night
 189 expeditions around Chicago.

190

191 Nolan Flavin: Well, so, that actually leads me to my next question I was going to ask. What is
 192 your life like in Chicago outside of Columbia? What sort of things do you like to do around the
 193 city?

194

195 Nicholas Borelli: I like to explore. I like mainly, um—my friend, uh, Charlie, is a huge foodie.
 196 He, he loves talking about and exploring new kinds of food. So, he'll drag me along and all
 197 kinds of trips to try new things, like, "Oh, there's a—oo, I heard there's a weird burger place
 198 four miles from here." Um, so I do, I do that a lot of fun, but I also really just love walking
 199 around Chicago and listening to music. And that's usually where I get my most—as cheesy as it
 200 sounds, a lot of my general ideas for writing something or making something, I'll be—I'll be
 201 just walking around Chicago, listening to music and letting my mind drift, and it'll be like, "Oh,
 202 that might be something."

203

204 Nolan Flavin: How did you become involved in Table Write at Columbia?

205

206 Nicholas Borelli: Uh, I really enjoyed the screenwriting classes, uh, but I want to be—I want to
 207 specialize and directing and there's just, there's some issues, understandably, with the amount of
 208 courses you can take in both if you're trying to specialize and in, in just one. Um, but I love

209 screenwriting, and I have a few friends who love screenwriting. And my friend Brady and I
 210 were kicking some stuff around off and on, and then one day he, he basically said to me—he
 211 was like, “What if we just started a club where people write stuff or we talk about stuff, or a
 212 club related to screenwriting so that we have extra time to this stuff?” And we talked about it a
 213 little bit and we landed on, “Oh, it's, like, we could do club where people could bring in either
 214 school work or personal work and read it, and people talk about it and do that like an extension
 215 of any class period.” And we grabbed two of our other friends who were, who were into
 216 screenwriting, Blair and Lauren, and we just kind of started it. And it's been going pretty well
 217 so far, um, quarantine notwithstanding.

218

219 Nolan Flavin: You guys have been doing anything over quarantine at all, or has it ended for the
 220 semester?

221

222 Nicholas Borelli: It's ending for the semester, I think. It's, it's just hard, dude. I think people
 223 aren't nearly as motivated to attend or write. I know that a lot of people been saying, “Oh, it's
 224 the perfect time, um, to work on things.” But I think—I don't know. I think the perfect time to
 225 write something is when it's easy to talk to other people, it's easy to—be connected with
 226 someone and, and get inspired and have inspiration. I don't think being trapped in your house is
 227 great inspiration. You're writing out of boredom, more than anything.

228

229 Nolan Flavin: How do you think the, the quarantine and the coronavirus is going to affect Table
 230 Write?

231

232 Nicholas Borelli: Ah, well, I'm just gonna have to wait and see what Columbia says about clubs
 233 and when we come back. I—everything that's going on right now is, is scary. Like, the
 234 government seems to not be listening, people seem to not be listening, everyone's getting
 235 conflicting information. I have no idea if this is still going to be a thing in the fall or not. My bet
 236 is probably. And, if it is, I don't know what Columbia is going to do about gatherings.

237

238 Nolan Flavin: When did you first become aware of the coronavirus?

239

240 Nicholas Borelli: I remember—I, I think—and this is just because I, I got so sick of hearing
 241 Trump's voice that at some point I just stopped watching the news. And I think it was mid-
 242 February, or something, there was that quote where Trump said, “This thing is a hoax. One day
 243 it's going to disappear.” And I was like, “If I know anything about Trump, he's wrong about
 244 that. Uh, and I think that was genuinely the first time I heard about it.”

245

246 Nolan Flavin: How did you feel about it at the time?

247

248 Nicholas Borelli: I think I made a mental note in my head. I was like, “That's going to come
 249 back. This is not the last I've heard of this.” Uh, but I'm going to keep trucking, you know? I
 250 don't think people—it takes—I think it takes a certain kind of anxious person to hear about

something like that and immediately jump into emergency mode. I think people prefer to assume things will be okay. Um, and obviously, ever since the lockdown, I've been taking the recommended precautions and trying to, you know, social distance and stay inside. But at the time I was just kind of waiting and seeing what was going to happen.

Nolan Flavin: When did you hear that COVID-19 was in Chicago?

Nicholas Borelli: There was like a week—was like a week to a week and a half before Columbia canceled classes, because people were talking about it, and several people were—I know were saying, “Is Columbia going to cancel classes. What are they going to do?” And then, you know, I heard—was I—I think—I could be wrong on this timeline—I'm pretty sure it was like a week and a half before we cancel classes, Harvard cancel classes just in Boston. So, near where I grew up, Harvard cancel classes, and people in Columbia were talking about it. And, then, I have friends who go to Loyola and DePaul and Northwestern, and all of those schools closed before us. And I was just sitting there thinking, “So we're, so we're going to close, right? And Columbia didn't say anything. And then eventually they did.”

Nolan Flavin: Hm. What were you—what were your thoughts at the time when you were thinking that we might close?

Nicholas Borelli: I didn't want us to close. Uh, I was just kind of—I was just kind of worried because—not in the, like—obviously, I want them to close if it's safe. But there is a personal sadness about, “I am paying money to, to be here, and I'm excited about this stuff, to physically be doing these things and working in this environment away from home. And I really don't want that environment to change, where I have to go home and look at a computer screen and hear someone tell me something, that the lesson is then dumbed down to essentially a YouTube video because of this virus that is no one's control.”

Nolan Flavin: Mm-hm. When did you start to realize the seriousness of the whole thing?

Nicholas Borelli: Um, it was weird because of how many conflicting and nonsense reports there were. Out in, out in the world, before we were canceling classes, people were so concerned. My dad was saying—he was like, “I don't know why, but they're telling me to come home. That seems crazy to me.” I think he—he basically was very convinced everything was going to be fine. But, I think, as soon as they told us classes were cancelled for the rest of the semester, and within days of that more and more reports were coming out about the symptoms, and that they didn't really understand this thing; I was, I was well aware of the seriousness of the situation.

Nolan Flavin: Mm-hm.

291 Nicholas Borelli: Besides, I always think it's—you—I think in a situation like this, you want to
 292 overreact, because the worst case scenario of under-reacting is you die. The worst case scenario
 293 of overreacting is you don't see your friends for a few weeks.

294
 295 Nolan Flavin: And when did you start self-quarantining?

296
 297 Nicholas Borelli: As soon as I got home from school. I just was waiting on information. Um,
 298 and I haven't really, I haven't really seen anyone. I've gone on a few walks, you know, around,
 299 around the town. But I haven't, I haven't broke social distancing or quarantine at all since I got
 300 back.

301
 302 Nolan Flavin: So then how did the announcement that college is closing impact your living
 303 situation?

304
 305 Nicholas Borelli: I mean, I just had to get out quick. Um, I, I guess I was still—when they told
 306 us to come back initially, I was still under the impression that there would be a chance to come
 307 back, which was dumb on my part. Um, so, I left a bunch of stuff there, and, actually, today I
 308 had to have movers go and store all my stuff that's left there, um, because, for whatever reason,
 309 I was like, “Oh, they're gonna, they're gonna figure out some precautions and then—they're
 310 going to figure out some precautions because they're initiating spring break early. And then
 311 they're going to have us come back with new rules and guidelines and things.” But that didn't
 312 happen.

313
 314 Nolan Flavin: Hm. Well, then, what could Columbia have done, you think, that would have
 315 made the moving out process a little bit better for you?

316
 317 Nicholas Borelli: I, I think they should have—I, I think they did a good job, all things
 318 considered, because this is a hard situation. But it would have been—I know that there's a lot of
 319 factors that go into this, but it would have been nice if they acted a little sooner and gave us
 320 more days' notice because they basically gave us—they were like, You can stay, but you can't
 321 have guests here after this day. And you're probably going to want to move out before we say
 322 you have to move out, which might happen. And so much of it was just kind of up in the air and
 323 unclear. And it felt like an, an administration with that many people should be able to deliver a
 324 clear plan of where everyone is going.

325
 326 Nolan Flavin: Mm-hm. How did you get back home?

327
 328 Nicholas Borelli: I flew. Um, I waited a few days for O'Hare to clear up because, when
 329 Columbia was—the day Columbia classes were canceled, there were reports that there was
 330 hundreds of people in line at O'Hare. Um, I waited a few days, it cleared up, and I took a flight
 331 home.

332

333 Nolan Flavin: What was it like at the airport?
334

335 Nicholas Borelli: Um, surprisingly scarce in the areas I was. There was basically no one on my
336 flight.
337

338 Nolan Flavin: Hm. What sort of precautions are they facing—were they taking at the airport
339 when you were there?
340

341 Nicholas Borelli: None that I saw.
342

343 Nolan Flavin: Mm. So then, back at home, how, how are the local restrictions and
344 recommendations different from in Chicago?
345

346 Nicholas Borelli: Uh, if you're outside you have to wear a mask. Um, I don't know if Chicago is
347 implemented that yet. Probably. I haven't really been keeping up with it. But, in Massachusetts,
348 the government declared, "You have to wear a mask if you're outside," uh, "You have to be six
349 feet away from anyone or you will be fined."
350

351 Nolan Flavin: Mm. And how seriously do the people in your area—if you talk to them—seem
352 to be taking it?
353

354 Nicholas Borelli: Like, my friends from my hometown?
355

356 Nolan Flavin: Yeah, or people in your neighborhood.
357

358 Nicholas Borelli: I think everyone's taking it pretty seriously. Um, it's a very—not that, not that
359 I want to label a virus as conservative or liberal or anything—it's a very, it's a very liberal town,
360 inside a liberal state. And I—and it, it, at least to me, appears that liberals are—seem to be
361 listening more than conservatives are, um, to a lot of the rules that have been in place. So, I
362 think everyone in my, in my town's been following it pretty strictly.
363

364 Nolan Flavin: That's a really interesting observation. So, what's it like at home now?
365

366 Nicholas Borelli: Well, my dad still goes to work because he can do basically all business over
367 the phone. Um, my brother works for my dad. So, he goes with him. And most days it's just my
368 mom and me at home, doing whatever. Sometimes we'll—watch a movie or something.
369 Sometimes we'll both just be in separate rooms, doing whatever. Um, I recently introduced
370 her—a few weeks ago, I introduced her to the good place. And she watched the whole thing
371 during quarantine. So, that happened. Um, I tried to show our BoJack Horseman, and she went,
372 "It's not a good place." And I went, "You're not wrong." Uh—
373

374 Nolan Flavin: (laughs)

375
376 Nicholas Borelli: But BoJack Horseman's also very good. Um, but yeah—I mean, I haven't
377 really been doing— (sighs) I was telling someone the other day that it feels like spring of senior
378 year of high school all over again. I have work. I'm not super motivated to do it. There's not
379 much of a point to doing a lot of it, other than the stuff I need to pass. And it just feels like I
380 don't leave my house—or do much of anything—on days that I don't have something pre-plan.

381
382 Nolan Flavin: Hmm. So—

383
384 Nicholas Borelli: So, that same headspace.

385
386 Nolan Flavin: It, it's feeling more like high school?

387
388 Nicholas Borelli: Yeah, not a great way.

389
390 Nolan Flavin: Not in a great way?

391
392 Nicholas Borelli: Not in a great way.

393
394 Nolan Flavin: What do you mean by that?

395
396 Nicholas Borelli: I don't know. I—I don't like feeling lazy, and I definitely feel—I, I feel like if
397 I was at Columbia, with the exact same workload I have right now—if I was in Chicago right
398 now, all of my work for next week would already be done.

399
400 Nolan Flavin: Mm.

401
402 Nicholas Borelli: But, because I'm home, it probably will not be done for at least four more
403 days.

404
405 Nolan Flavin: (laughs) Why do you think being home puts you in that space?

406
407 Nicholas Borelli: I don't know. Maybe it just—maybe it just doesn't feel real when I'm not
408 actually there.

409
410 Nolan Flavin: Mm.

411
412 Nicholas Borelli: Something about online classes feels so distant and disconnected that I think
413 part of my brain is just like, “Eh, you'll deal with it tomorrow.”

414
415 Nolan Flavin: Yeah, yeah. So, then what does your average day in quarantine look like?

416

417 Nicholas Borelli: Um, shockingly, I am a person in high school—in high school, I would go to
 418 bed super late and wake up just in time to get to school—often not in time to get to school and
 419 would be late. And there were plenty of jokes and people my grade about how I'm the person
 420 who sleeps at very weird hours. And, if you need something at three a.m., text Nick. Um, I've
 421 been going to bed in quarantine, on average, at, like, ten p.m. every night and waking up at
 422 seven or eight. And my day consists of eating, watching movies, playing video games, or doing
 423 homework. And that's all I do, every day.

424
 425 Nolan Flavin: And how do you feel about that?

426
 427 Nicholas Borelli: It's really boring. It feels—it feels like—a summer vacation where you can't
 428 see anyone.

429
 430 Nolan Flavin: (laughs)

431
 432 Nicholas Borelli: And, also, you're taking, like, a class at a community college

433
 434 Nolan Flavin: Mm. How have you been dealing with any feelings of depression?

435
 436 Nicholas Borelli: Just kind of, um—no, I've developed, in recent years, this mentality that if
 437 something sucks in the moment, you have to treat it like you know when it will be over. I know
 438 we don't know when quarantine will be over, but—have you been at work and you—and it's,
 439 like, a really tiring shift, and you look at the clock, and you're there for four more hours, and
 440 you can just think to yourself, “Okay, in five hours, I'll be home on the couch”—

441
 442 Nolan Flavin: Oh, for sure.

443
 444 Nicholas Borelli: —and that makes it a little better? That'ss basically what I've been doing. I'll
 445 be, like, “Well, if I'm feeling this way now, I might not be feeling this way tomorrow,” you
 446 know?

447
 448 Nolan Flavin: Mm-hm.

449
 450 Nicholas Borelli: I don't know what else I can do—uh, call my friends, I guess—which I've
 451 done a little bit of.

452
 453 Nolan Flavin: Who have you been talking to you during this time?

454
 455 Nicholas Borelli: A lot of friends from high school. Um, obviously—the usual: I'm talking to
 456 Owen and Sammy and Rafi, but I've also been talking to—some other theater or non-theatre
 457 friends. Uh, some of them I've already mentioned in this interview. Just—I think people are
 458 just looking for connection to this point. So, I've been talking to some people that I didn't

expect to talk to ever again after school (laughs). Only—only in like brief conversations that don't mean much of anything, but, you know: it's something.

Nolan Flavin: Mm-hm. And what's kind of the mindset behind that? Why do you think you're—you're reconnecting with all these people?

Nicholas Borelli: Um—this quarantine is kind of—if you've been on Twitter at all, every day, it's just this acceptance that everyone is in this same space. And, for once, we're all likely doing the same thing. Like, almost everyone in the country is doing the same activities as everyone else, every day. Um—and, I think, people from your hometown—you're just kind of looking for—yeah, like, they're also quarantined in this place, with nothing to do. I know that if someone texted me right now, I would have no reason not to respond, because I'm not doing anything.

Nolan Flavin: How have you and your friends or your family been able to help each other out during the quarantine?

Nicholas Borelli: Um, I mean, company's always nice. Uh, I mean, as I've said, I've hung out and watched stuff with my mom just because it's nice to have someone else in the room. But it, it sucks to just kind of sit on your—on your own all the time, nothing to do. I've also done some movie nights where some friends and I will get on a call, and we'll just watch the same movie, um, at the same time. And those are—those are always nice. I think it's j—it's just nice to have company when you're locked up.

Nolan Flavin: So— (door opens)

John Borelli [Nick's Brother]: Did someone say company?

Nicholas Borelli: That was my brother.

Nolan Flavin: (laugh) All good. As a student of film, how has your creative work been impacted or inspired?

Nicholas Borelli: Um, well, I have this—I had—last summer, I shot this, um, like, three part—this three miniseries with my two friends, Owen and Ben. We each we each wrote and directed a different episode, and that wrapped up last summer. And so it's been in editing to this point. Um, and we wanted to do—we wanted to do minor reshoots on a few scenes in, like, mid-March. And that's been pushed back because of this whole situation. Um, so that project that I was putting all my focus on has been interrupted in that way. And I've been trying to write a little bit, but it's hard to find the motivation or inspiration to, uh, when there's nothing really to inspire you or get your brain moving.

501 Nolan Flavin: Has the coronavirus itself inspired anything in your writing? Has that made you
502 think about any stories or anything like that?

503

504 Nicholas Borelli: I—I don't—(sighs) I know that artist is supposed to imitate life in a way, and
505 it—it could help us—get through this kind of thing. I don't find the coronavirus particularly—
506 enjoyable. And I also don't find it very—tense or stress-inducing, because I'm very, very lucky
507 to be in the situation I'm currently in, unlike some people—um, who are very unfortunate. So, I
508 don't really want to make anything about the coronavirus, because I don't think people need to
509 immediately be reminded of it after its owner—over or while they're living it. Um, and I don't
510 really have any interest in the stories, because I don't really fully relate to them.

511

512 Nolan Flavin: Mm. So—

513

514 Nicholas Borelli: Someone will make something cool, though. I'm sure.

515

516 Nolan Flavin: (laughs)

517

518 Nicholas Borelli: It's just not going to be me.

519

520 Nolan Flavin: Mm. Where were you when you learned that Columbia was transitioning to
521 remote learning?

522

523 Nicholas Borelli: I was on my couch, in my living room, watching Grosse Pointe blank with my
524 mom. And my roommate texted me, "Columbia just canceled all classes."

525

526 Nolan Flavin: And how did the news of the transition make you feel?

527

528 Nicholas Borelli: I was—I was disappointed. I think my parents were more disappointed—um,
529 whether that's because they wanted me to get what they're paying for or because they just
530 wanted me out of the house. Maybe a mixture of the two. Um, but I understood. I knew that it
531 was going to be a weird situation, no matter what.

532

533 Nolan Flavin: Ever since you moved back home, has school seemed different?

534

535 Nicholas Borelli: Yeah, I mean, I think—everything I've been saying to you on this call, I think
536 the teachers are all feeling too. I think all the teachers are feeling a little unmotivated, a little—a
537 little depressed, a little stressed out. Um, so, school is just a little less energetic, enthusiastic.
538 Film school has this interesting quality where it feels like everyone who's teaching and
539 participating class is genuinely interested in what's happening, even, like, the dumbest, smallest
540 thing. Um, and I think the teachers are, are being hit just as hard as we are. I don't think they
541 enjoy this at all, and—I think they're a little scared that this is going to go on for way too long.

542

543 Nolan Flavin: How have your projects been affected by transitioning to online learning?

544

545 Nicholas Borelli: Class projects or personal projects?

546

547 Nolan Flavin: Class projects.

548

549 Nicholas Borelli: Um, well, my lighting class got, basically, reshaped entirely because we
550 couldn't do—it was a class based entirely on—you show up once a week, for four hours, and
551 you do a bunch of lighting work on this set. That was the whole class, and you can't do that in
552 quarantine. So, it's mostly been trying to make mini sets in our homes and take pictures and,
553 and compare them during class time.

554

555 Nicholas Borelli: Obviously, there's this project, which has changed—its topic, but has stayed
556 mostly the same otherwise. Um, and everything else has mostly just become a paper. Like,
557 every teacher's just told me to write a paper at this point.

558

559 Nolan Flavin: What challenges have you faced as your classes have moved online, with getting
560 used to it or practical, practical problems?

561

562 Nicholas Borelli: Every time I have class, I have to convince myself to join the call. Every
563 single time I have class period now, I'm like, "Can I just—can I skip it?" (indistinguishable) "Is
564 it really going to affect my grade that much?" Like, I have to genuinely convince myself to, to
565 go to class now.

566

567 Nolan Flavin: Mm. What grading system you prefer for the semester?

568

569 Nicholas Borelli: I didn't, um, do any pass/fail. I'm still on letter grades, um, mostly because I
570 think I was—I was in a pretty solid place before the quarantine, and it's not that hard to—from
571 where—from the position I was in, it's not that hard to keep it up. I think the, the grading thing
572 as a super complicated issue. It kind of—I, I think Columbia did, did a bad thing in giving the
573 option. I think they should have just either said all classes are now pass/fail or all classes are
574 grade-related, and then said a pass is equivalent to this kind of grade, because the option creates
575 such a weird, uneven playing field with everyone. Um, like, it's—if pass/fail doesn't mean
576 anything, which is essentially what they said, then, like, this semester doesn't—help people who
577 are already struggling or being badly affected by the virus. They're basically getting a semester
578 where they're doing all the work and learning all this stuff, and it's not reflected in their GPA,
579 because of an extraordinary circumstance.

580

581 Nolan Flavin: What resources do you feel like you needed that Columbia did not provide?

582

583 Nicholas Borelli: In relation to Corona or just in general?

584

585 Nolan Flavin: In general.

586

587 Nicholas Borelli: I feel like—I feel like Columbia gave me everything I needed. I just wish it
 588 was easier to—I wish there wasn't a huge process to allow film majors—the biggest major in
 589 their college—to shoot a movie somewhere. You try shooting a scene in a stairwell, and the
 590 security guards are like, You can't be here; or, you try shooting somewhere, and you can get in
 591 trouble if the—if you catch the wrong person on the wrong day. And it just feels weird that you
 592 have to go through a whole, obnoxiously long vetting process to do the thing that you're
 593 supposed to be there to do.

594

595 Nolan Flavin: And what about for quarantine?

596

597 Nicholas Borelli: I think—I think they did—close to the best that they could have. I mean, I
 598 already mentioned earlier—I think they could have acted sooner—think that was a genuine
 599 mistake on their part. But, as far as their actual implementation afterwards, it was fine. It was—
 600 it's a crazy time, it's hard to keep up with any of these things, but they tried.

601

602 Nolan Flavin: How has the pandemic changed your relationship with your parents?

603

604 Nicholas Borelli: I think getting real sick of me. Tell you what, um, it feels—it feels just like
 605 high, high school again of—Um, you know, I'll hang out in, in the basement, doing whatever,
 606 for most of the day. And they'll hang out in the living room. And then, when I come upstairs
 607 from the basement at some point, it feels like coming home from school. Um, it, it feels the
 608 same—another, like, “Been here before, never thought I'd be here again,” kind of way.

609

610 Nolan Flavin: What financial challenges have you or your family faced because of this?

611

612 Nicholas Borelli: Can you repeat the question?

613

614 Nolan Flavin: Yeah. What financial challenges have you or your family faced because of this?

615

616 Nicholas Borelli: Um, luckily, I don't think any, because my dad is still been working, and my
 617 mom was already retired. I think my mom is worried about her retirement account because she
 618 has a lot of it in the stock market, which is not doing great right now. Um, I think it came up
 619 again today, but it's so fickle at this point because of quarantine. Um, so, she's worried about
 620 that. But I think other than other than that, we're fine. I'm very lucky.

621

622 Nolan Flavin: Oh, uh, and if you don't mind backtracking a second, I meant to ask you: how do
 623 you feel about the possibility that the fall might be online as well?

624

625 Nicholas Borelli: Um, I've, I've thought about it, I talked it over with my parents. If, if the fall
 626 is online, I wouldn't blame them if they did that. As it is right now, it's probably going to

627 happen, and it's probably the safest bet. I'm just going to take a break semester because—I'm
628 fine with a couple weeks at the end of the semester. You know, it's annoying, but it's a unique
629 situation. It's what it is. But I, I'm not going to take a whole semester online.

630

631 Nolan Flavin: Mm-hm.

632

633 Nicholas Borelli: You know?

634

635 Nolan Flavin: Yeah. So, how do you feel about the future?

636

637 Nicholas Borelli: Just in general?

638

639 Nolan Flavin: Yeah, for you.

640

641 Nicholas Borelli: Um—excited and terrified. You know, every, every piece of advice about
642 being a filmmaker starts with, “If you can do anything else, do that thing instead,” um, because
643 it's so hard. But I, I have hope that we're entering a new age where there's way more jobs in film
644 for anyone, with how much new technology that exists—

645

646 Nolan Flavin: Mm-hm.

647

648 Nicholas Borelli: —that there's just so much more space that's going to be made available for
649 jobs and people of all levels and degrees. And I'm gonna—you know, I'm gonna try my best
650 and give everything my best shot. And if it doesn't work out, it doesn't work out, but at least I
651 tried.

652

653 Nolan Flavin: And in what ways do you think that the coronavirus has affected this?

654

655 Nicholas Borelli: Well, I'm worried about—there's been a lot of articles recently about
656 production companies talking about changing the way—the ways we make movies because of
657 the coronavirus, and a way to prevent it. But, um—and, also, there's a lot of companies losing
658 money, and movie theaters are going bankrupt. It's a very scary time to be in something
659 filmmaking-related, but I have hope that it'll turn out okay.

660

661 Nolan Flavin: What do you think has been the most significant change in your life due to the
662 virus.

663

664 Nicholas Borelli: Um—not being able to see my roommates—or my girlfriend on a regular
665 basis. I haven't seen either my roommates or my girlfriend since I left Chicago, and they've
666 been replaced by my parents and my brother, um—in terms of who I see, not in terms of who's
667 my girlfriend. Um, I just—like, it's just crazy that a few weeks ago, my, my daily social circle
668 was completely different.

669

670 Nolan Flavin: How have you and your girlfriend been doing, long distance?

671

672 Nicholas Borelli: Okay. I mean, I don't know. It, it is what it is. No one expected this or wanted
673 this.

674

675 Nolan Flavin: Mm-hm.

676

677 Nicholas Borelli: I don't know really how it's going to go or what it's going to happen, but it's—
678 whatever happens, it's not really going to be anybody's fault.

679

680 Nolan Flavin: So then, if you have one, giant sort of take away—something that's the most
681 significant thing that you've gotten from the situation—what would it be?

682

683 Nicholas Borelli: (long pause) I, I always considered myself—I'm a very extroverted person. I
684 mean, I did—I did, you know, theater all through high school, and I want to be a filmmaker.
685 And I've been giving plenty long answers to your questions. I'm a very extroverted,
686 communication-type person, but I did always feel, in high school—I was like, “I do like getting
687 a break from people.” It was nice to have nights in high school, where I would just—hang by
688 myself and do whatever I wanted, because it can be exhausting. But I think quarantine's made
689 me realize that it's—it's more about—those nights are more about mental check in, and I really
690 do thrive off of and appreciate communication with the people I know, because I really miss
691 everybody. Like, talking over the phone or texting—it's not the same.

692

693 Nolan Flavin: Cool. Well, that'll be—that'll be it. Thank you.

694

695 Nicholas Borelli: Thank you.

696

697 Nolan Flavin: Go ahead and stop the recording.