

1 Interview with Ben Tufts

2 Interviewed by Nathan Gagnon

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4 **NG:** This is Columbia's capturing quarantine. I'm Nathan Gagnon It's November 25th. And I'm
5 in my dorm room in the Chicago University Center in Illinois. Ben, can you introduce yourself
6 and tell me where you are currently?
7

8 **BT:** I'm Ben Tufts. I am in my office and parent's house in Crown Point. Yeah.
9

10 **NG:** Alright, so what-- when were you born like the month and year?
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12 **BT:** I was born in June 2002.
13

14 **NG:** And then, what year are you at school? And what's your major?
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16 **BT:** I am a freshman at Columbia, and my major is audio arts and acoustics.
17

18 **NG:** Great. Where were you born?
19

20 **BT:** Well, I was born in Hazel Crest, Illinois. But that's just because there's no hospital where
21 you lived. I lived in Crete, Illinois. Alright, perfect.
22

23 **NG:** Then, how do you self identify and what are your preferred pronouns?
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25 **BT:** I am just a straight male I go by he/him.
26

27 **NG:** All right. So we'll start with our little opening question. What's your earliest memory?
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29 **BT:** Oh, God. Um, I'd say the earliest thing that I can remember clearly is this story that I told in
30 class, about, was in preschool, and there was this like parking garage playset thing. And there
31 was a school bus in it. I remember this so vividly. There's a school bus in it. And I wanted to
32 play with the school bus. But apparently this other kid whose name was Thomas, I think he
33 wanted to play with the school bus too. And so as I was reaching for the school bus, this kid
34 came up and he bit me on the shoulder. And yeah, that's probably my earliest memory. I was
35 like, four, three, something like that. Yeah.
36

37 **NG:** That's an interesting one. Um, tell me about like, your favorite hobbies and activities you
38 did when you're growing up.
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40 **BT:** Um, well, when I was growing up. I've always been musical. I've been playing guitar since I
41 was seven years old. So obviously, that was like a favorite hobby. That's always been a favorite
42 hobby. I did karate for a little bit. I did that before we moved. My dad had a friend who ran like a
43 karate place. My cousin's actually go there now. So I did that. And then we moved and we went
44 to one of the places that's local so I did karate for a really long time. I honestly don't remember
45 when I quit. Yeah, so music, and karate. I've always listened to music. Legos, I was a big fan of

46 Legos. I actually still have some of them in here and in my bedroom. But yeah, so really just it's
47 always been music, like, as long as I can remember. It's been music.

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49 **NG:** That's awesome. Um, what kind of rules did your parents have around the house? Anything
50 specific?

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52 **BT:** Oh god. I can't think of any specific rules. Um, I don't know, like once-
53 Like, now um and since I was like, 14, I only have three real rules.
54 Don't get anybody pregnant before you intend to, don't do any hard drugs, and no driving under
55 the influence. Those are the three solid rules that I've had since I was like, 14, but like when I
56 was little. I don't know. My parents really don't like lying. So that's always kind of been like a
57 big one. Yeah, god, it's really hard to remember any specific rules because my parents have
58 always been kind of like, go with the flow. Chill. I can do what I want. You know what I mean?

59
60 **NG:** Yeah, yeah. So then, when and why did you start playing music? You already told me you
61 started guitar when you were seven. But can you tell me a little more about that?

62
63 **BT:** Um, well, I started taking guitar lessons. When I was seven. I actually got my first guitar
64 when I was (coughs) three years old. It's actually on the wall over there. It's it's just, you know,
65 like a small little acoustic. But um, my dad dabbled in guitar when I was younger. He was taking
66 lessons for a while before I did. And then my uncle, he played guitar. And my grandmother
67 bought me a guitar for Christmas when I was three. And so like, I didn't really know how to play
68 I would just kind of, like, smack it and be like, "Look, I'm playing guitar." But um, yeah, I mean,
69 I've just always grown up around music and art and creativity, you know. And so I think my
70 parents just always knew that I was gonna grow up to be into music. And so the local music
71 school like, you could only start taking lessons when you were seven. And as soon as I was
72 seven, they were like, "okay, here take lessons," you know?

73
74 **NG:** Yeah, that's cool. What musicians have inspired you the most?

75
76 **BT:** Oh, Well, I always say like I know a lot of people say this about certain bands but like this
77 is honestly true. Listening to Metallica for the first time changed my life, like, Metallica changed
78 my life. I wasn't really into playing guitar. So my first guitar teacher was very much like, strict
79 "Follow theory, learn theory first," but, like, I always wanted to play things a lot faster. And like
80 he would give me a Beatles song. And I would just speed it way up. And so, he left the music
81 school and the guy that replaced him was kind of more like, "Hey, let's make this fun for you.
82 what do you want to play?" And I was always playing stuff faster. And he was like, "Well, shit,
83 I'm gonna give you something you can't play too fast." And so he gave me "Sanitarium" by
84 Metallica. And so I remember learning that and then after that learning "Fade to Black" and
85 being like, wow, I want to learn how to play this better. Like I need to play guitar more. And so
86 that's kind of what really got me into it. But just, like, in general, I'm a huge fan of Jim Morrison.
87 Like artistically, I think he's just a poet and a genius. Obviously, big fan of type O Negative and
88 Peter Steele. Um, yeah, I don't know, I'd definitely say that Metallica is the biggest influence and
89 kind of has changed my life.

91 **NG:** Alright, great to hear. So are there any significant events that happened in your youth that
92 you think you can kind of compare to the current pandemic?
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94 **BT:** Hmm, not really honestly. I don't know. This is kind of just, like, unprecedented. You know,
95 actually, I mean, a lot of people compare this to H1N1. And I actually had a very close friend in
96 second grade who got a H1N1. I mean, he survived, but like, so I kind of remember that, but that
97 was nowhere near as big as this. So not really, honestly.
98

99 **NG:** So now moving on to high school. How did you enjoy your high school experience?
100 Generally.
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102 **BT:** I didn't. (laughs) Well, I mean, like, I didn't enjoy the school portion of it. Like, the time was
103 fun. I spent a lot of time with my friends just kind of like, you know, fucking off. I didn't like
104 high school. I was, I was always in honors classes, but like, I felt like either they were useless, or
105 like, I don't know. My parents always say that, like, I'm one of those people that's like, smart but
106 doesn't care. Like, you know, like, I just felt like, it wasn't anything that mattered to me. I mean,
107 yeah. Especially since like, my school had dumb requirements. Like I had to get forty
108 community service credits before the time I graduated, like, which I mean, yeah, that makes
109 sense, but like, I don't know, I just never really felt like anything I was learning in high school
110 mattered. Like junior year, I took regular environmental science, which was, like, scary how easy
111 it was. Like, yeah, I mean, the time in high school was good, but high school itself, I didn't really
112 like, you know?
113

114 **NG:** Yeah. So you'd say you had like a lack of motivation.
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116 **BT:** Oh, God, I lost you for a second there, what?
117

118 **NG:** Oh, sorry. So would you say that it was like, your issue was maybe a lack of motivation in
119 high school?
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121 **BT:** Oh, definitely. Yeah. And I think that everyone who, all my teachers, everyone who knew
122 me would kind of agree with that. Yeah, I mean, I like I was I was good. Um, especially like
123 English. I was, I actually skipped a grade in English. I skipped sixth grade. Um, but like math,
124 like I just didn't care. So I got-- because-- so I never learned really algebra one. And so by the
125 time I got to high school, and it was geometry and algebra two and precalc like I was missing
126 this skill set that they just kind of expect you to have. So I ended up getting like straight C
127 minuses in math from sophomore year on. Well, actually, I didn't take math senior year so
128 sophomore and junior year I got straight C minuses in math, but like, I don't know, I just like I
129 didn't care enough about math to sit down and learn it. You know what I mean?
130

131 **NG:** Yeah, definitely. So were there any like clubs or extracurricular activities that you
132 were a part of in high school?
133

134 **BT:** Um, I was in the orchestra. I played stand up bass in orchestra since fourth grade all the way
135 through senior year. I was in the jazz band. I played guitar in the jazz band. Um, I mean, I wasn't
136 into sports, I'm not very athletic. The only sport I ever did was I was into fencing in middle

137 school. But our school didn't do that. That was just like a club from the area that I went to. But
138 then I got too busy in high school and stopped doing it. Um, but yeah, like through the school, it
139 was basically only jazz band and orchestra. I don't know, that was really the only music that my
140 school offered. Like, I took a couple interesting classes, like I took an electronic music class, and
141 I took a radio and TV class. But like, I didn't have enough time in my schedule to join the radio
142 and TV club and like, be a part of that. You know what I mean?

143
144 **NG:** Yeah.

145
146 **BT:** Also, I apologize if I'm always looking over there. Like, that's just me thinking,

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148 **NG:** Oh, no, I totally get that. So what were your ambitions when you graduated from high
149 school?

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151 **BT:** Um, well, I, when I graduated, like I knew that I wanted to go to college, and I wanted to,
152 well, so my main motivation is I want to be a professional musician. But like, realistically,
153 following production is the most practical way to still, like stay in the music industry. And you
154 know, even if being a professional musician didn't work out, so I, my senior year, I took half
155 days, and I was interning at the studio that I still work at now. And so I just kind of knew, like,
156 when I graduated, I wanted to, one: write more music and record more music with my band, but
157 also, like, go down the production route, you know?

158
159 **NG:** Yeah, that's great. Okay, so now on to your life, right before the pandemic. What were
160 some activities you really enjoyed before the pandemic hit?

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162 **BT:** Um, okay, so before the pandemic, my weekly routine. This was like every week, which I
163 hate, because I hate routines. But Monday, Monday night was symphony orchestra rehearsal
164 because we had orchestra class, but then the symphony was the orchestra and the band together. I
165 mean it wasn't the whole band, it was people from the band who wanted to try out. So we had
166 rehearsals Monday nights. Uh, Tuesday night, I did, I ran live sound for open mic nights for my
167 boss at a local pizza place. Wednesday, I took my guitar lesson. Thursday, I ran live sound at a
168 bar, I don't know, half an hour away, for my boss again. And then Friday, my parents and I, we
169 still always do take out and like watch TV or watch a movie or something. And then Saturdays,
170 me and the guys in my band, we go out record shopping to our regular record stores. And then
171 we rehearse and then spend the night at my house. And so that was basically every week before
172 the pandemic happened.

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174 **NG:** Wow that sounds busy.

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176 **BT:** Yeah, it was, it was quite a bit. So I was kind of relieved when the pandemic hit but also like
177 not.

178
179 **NG:** Yeah, must have really shifted.

180
181 **BT:** Yeah.

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183 **NG:** And how would you describe your mental health before the whole thing started? Before the
184 pandemic.

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186 **BT:** Oh, when things started man? It's, uh, it's hard to remember. Um, this year is kind of
187 jumbled in my brain. Right before it like, I was having a lot of fun. I was doing really good. I
188 mean, actually, going back to your last question, the thing I miss most is going to concerts. But
189 um, like, the last normal event in my life is me and the guys in my band on Valentine's Day
190 actually, who went to the Riviera in Chicago which is right by one of the L stations and we saw
191 Opeth. And so like, we just, doing stuff like that, like my mental health was awesome. Like I was
192 having a lot of fun. We had bought tickets to see Rammstein the day I was supposed to move in
193 for college, I was supposed to see In This Moment like I was there's a lot of stuff I was looking
194 forward to. I was supposed to be going to Alaska over the summer. Yeah, there's just there's a lot
195 of stuff that I was looking forward to this year.

196
197 **NG:** Yeah. Lots of great shows were canceled.

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199 **BT:** Yeah, lots.

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201 **NG:** Um, so now for like when things really got started in spring, when did you first become
202 aware of the Coronavirus?

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204 **BT:** I mean, I became aware of it like in January, you know, I mean, I think most of us became
205 aware of it through memes.

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207 **NG:** Yeah, yeah.

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209 **BT:** But like, I was seeing stuff about it like in January, but like I didn't think anything of it. I
210 actually remember the last-- so my high school ended on Friday, March 13th. When I think is,
211 which I think is when most people consider like, the start of all this. That Thursday I did live
212 sound and I went to work. And then I came home. And I always came home super late, my mom
213 had already gone to bed, but she always, like, wanted me to wake her up when I got home. And
214 so I was just sitting in her room and she was like, you know, I'm really worried about all this.
215 And like, I'm a big Stephen King fan. And so I was like, "What do you think this is, *The Stand*?
216 Like, this is Captain Trips? No. I mean, we're going to be fine. This isn't some apocalypse, you
217 know, don't worry about it." And then the next day, high school is over because of all this. So
218 like, yeah, I wasn't very worried for a while, but like, I wasn't really worried about it. I didn't
219 think anything would happen. And now here we are.

220
221 **NG:** Alright, so you already kind of gave me your initial reaction. If there's anything else kind of
222 related to that, you can tell me. Seems like-

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224 **BT:** I don't know. Um, I was kind of pissed because we were in the middle of recording
225 sessions. Actually. We recorded the Saturday after high school canceled the rest of the year, we
226 went into the studio. And I was like, yeah, we'll be off for like a month, but we'll come back.
227 And then it was like, "oh, nope, studio's closed, I can't go to work anymore. I'm never going to
228 high school again." Like it was just, I was kind of frustrated by all of it. And then like being

229 locked in my house for three weeks on end. And like, as much as I love my parents, it's just the
230 three of us. And like only seeing two people is like, the most frustrating thing in the world for
231 three weeks.

232
233 **NG:** So I'm curious, did your school like cancel the rest of the year instantly? Or did they start
234 by saying like,

235
236 **BT:** So the way it went, it was two weeks before our spring break. And so I take half days, so I
237 wasn't actually there for the announcement. I was on my way to my drummers house, him and I
238 were just going to jam out a little bit. I don't even remember where our bassist was. But we were
239 just gonna write some new riffs. And so I was driving over there. And when I got there, I had
240 gotten a snapchat from a friend of mine. And she was like, "Ben, they've canceled school for the
241 next two weeks." I was like, I mean, like, my mom works in the corporations. So I had heard talk
242 of that. And I was like, "No way." She was like, "Yeah, it's canceled for the next two weeks,
243 we're gonna have a month off." And I was like, "Oh, that's cool, you know, whatever." And then,
244 you know, as it slowly went on, I knew things kind of before everybody else does-- did. Because
245 my mom works on a corporation. So like I kind of got news a little bit earlier. And then. And
246 then, so they extended it to like May. And then the governor of Indiana just said, "Nope,
247 nobody's going back to school this year. It's over." So.

248
249 **NG:** Okay, now on to like the real quarantine. How were you able to properly adjust to life
250 during a pandemic? What things worked out for you?

251
252 **BT:** I'll tell you this online school did not work out for me. But um, I don't know. I just kind of
253 spent a lot of time sitting around watching a lot of TV. I watched all of *Twin Peaks*. Yeah, I
254 mean, it was, it was hard. But at the same time, it wasn't, like I was looking for a break. And like,
255 as stupid as it sounds like, I'm glad that I got one. Um, my state didn't actually go into a stay at
256 home order for a while. So like, I was still going out. And we were, I mean, I wasn't going out.
257 But like, I was still going to my drummers house and we would practice and then as it slowly got
258 worse, my mom was like, okay, you're gonna not see them for a little bit. And then the stay at
259 home order came out. And so then I didn't see them for like a month, maybe.

260
261 **NG:** Yeah

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263 **BT:** Yeah, that was kind of an adjustment. It was weird. I mean, it was me my mom working
264 from home because my dad's a firefighter and a paramedic. So like, he obviously can't go work
265 from home. So I don't know, just online school is really hard to adapt to. But I would say the
266 easiest is just the whole like not going home thing. You know, it was kind of not that bad.

267
268 **NG:** Can you tell me more about that transition to remote learning. And like, in what ways it was
269 really tough for you.

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271 **BT:** I am a very distracted person. Um, I mean, like, yeah, so it was just like, hard for me to
272 actually like focus and get stuff done. And so my radio TV class, had a lot of assignments and
273 like I just wouldn't read the directions all the way through and I had a couple of huge fights, like,
274 *fights* with my parents where we were like swearing at each other about how I read the

275 directions, all the way through. And I had to redo the assignment. I was like, “I fucking read the
276 directions!” “No, you fucking didn’t!” like we just go back and forth. So like, I like yeah, I mean,
277 my econ teacher just didn’t give a shit. It was a it was a dual credit class but like, all of our tests
278 just became open notes because he knew he couldn’t stop us from cheating. Like he didn’t care. I
279 mean, obviously, orchestra stopped. I mean, we had assignments, but they were all stupid. I had
280 to like submit YouTube videos and shit. I don’t know. I’m trying to think of what other classes I
281 had last year. Um, orchestra, radio and TV. Shit, I don’t even know what I-- oh, photojournalism.
282 I just had to like, take pictures and stuff around the house. Econ. That’s four. (computer
283 notification) And then I had a study hall. Obviously. That was my fifth class. So yeah, I mean, it
284 was like, I don’t know. I just didn’t turn stuff in in time. I mean, it all ended fine. But like, yeah, it
285 was just hard.

286

287 **NG:** Yeah. Um. So while you’re stuck at home did you like, find any new hobbies or start any
288 new projects?

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290 **BT:** Umm, hmm. Well, we turned-- Well, actually, this was towards the end of the summer, but
291 we turned my bedroom into an office and moved my bed downstairs. Because Yeah, this used to
292 be my bedroom. Um, new hobbies though. Oh, I don’t know. I mean, my parents started teaching
293 me how to cook a little bit.

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295 **NG:** That’s useful.

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297 **BT:** Yeah, like they had me cook sloppy Joes. I can fry an egg. I can scramble an egg. You
298 know, like, stuff like that. So I mean, that was, that was cool. I did spend a lot of time watching
299 TV. And I’ve always been a big film fan anyway, so I just kind of got more time to do that, you
300 know?

301

302 **NG:** Yeah, me too.

303

304 **BT:** Yeah.

305

306 **NG:** So how’d your mental health change over quarantine?

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308 **BT:** Um, I don’t know. I mean, (long pause) I’ve always been kind of, I wouldn’t say cynical, but
309 like, more of a realist than an optimist. You know, like this summer like, I tried to be optimistic
310 about like, you know, “oh it’ll be fine by the time I go to college, all this.” That clearly didn’t
311 happen, seeing as I’m stuck at home. And so like, I don’t know, I think it probably made me more
312 cynical. You know, like I said, the three weeks that I was stuck in the house with just my parents
313 tensions got real high. I mean, there were a couple of times where we would get into fights, and
314 it would be like, Okay, this is clearly the limit of what we can do seeing just each other. But
315 honestly my mental health didn’t really change. I just kind of, I mean, I don’t know, I’m kind of
316 frustrated by the whole thing, and I’m sick of it. I want it to be over. You know, I mean, that’s
317 really the biggest thing, but like in terms of like outlook on life, I’m still the same, you know?

318

319 **NG:** Yeah. And how did you deal with like, feelings of depression or frustration when you
320 weren’t too happy?

321

322 **BT:** Music. I mean, yeah, I listened to a lot of music. There was, so like, the three albums that I
323 listened to the most this year, like, as comfort albums, were *October Rust*, *Operation:*
324 *Mindcrime*. And then *The Queen Is Dead* by the Smiths. And there was about like, two weeks
325 where I was listening to *The Queen Is Dead* daily. So like, I would do stuff like that. I actually
326 looked at like my Apple Music replay and *The Queen Is Dead* is number two. *October Rust* is
327 number one. And *Mindcrime* is number three. Like I listened to those albums a lot this year.

328

329 **NG:** Yeah, yeah. Um, so this is pretty similar question. Were there any like different like coping
330 skills for like anxiety? Or is that something that you dealt with?

331

332 **BT:** Um, I don't know. I mean, I do have a therapist I actually haven't seen in a couple months
333 but um, I mean, I didn't actually really talk to her that much during this. I talked to her once at
334 the beginning of it. And then like, all summer, we would make appointments and then it would
335 fall through somehow. But um, I don't know the whole like, anxiety thing, I didn't really deal
336 with because like, my family is pretty good about being safe with it. But yeah, I don't know. I
337 just kind of try my best to avoid situations where I feel at risk. You know what I mean?

338

339 **NG:** Stay safe. Yeah.

340

341 **BT:** Yeah.

342

343 **NG:** Umm,

344

345 **BT:** Y-

346

347 **NG:** Is there anyone else-- Sorry, did I interrupt you?

348

349 **BT:** No, no, you're good.

350

351 **NG:** Okay. Um, is there anyone else that you talk to about your concerns other than your
352 therapist, maybe?

353

354 **BT:** Um, I don't know. I mean, I talk to my parents about it a little, but my mom is definitely
355 more worried about it than I am. Yeah, I don't know. I mean, I guess I would say, my mom,
356 mainly, but it's usually me calming her down, you know what I mean?

357

358 **NG:** Yeah, um, so how did the pandemic affect your music and your band, I mean, you've
359 already touched on this. But if you want to go deeper on that.

360

361 **BT:** We kind of like just did a complete overhaul on the songs that we had already written. We
362 had like a month where we didn't practice or anything. And so we just rewrote a bunch of stuff
363 and like, made it better and wrote totally new stuff. It was hard not being able to record for quite
364 a while. But actually, like the whole not being able to play shows is kind of a blessing, because
365 now we can just take our time and write and really hone the songs that we're writing without
366 worrying about, you know, a live show or a deadline.

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NG: Yeah. Was your studio internship able to continue like fairly normally?

BT: No, I didn't work for quite a while. I didn't start working until like, maybe July. I don't remember really, when I started working again. Ah, no, it must have been August because the first time I went to work, I had already got my tattoo, which was August 7th, so yeah, I didn't, I didn't work from April to August.

NG: Yeah. All right. Um, in what ways did you struggle to make connections with people who you normally interacted with in person?

BT: Um, I mean, like, I know, um, yeah, I mean, I kind of fell off with a lot of people, because I just, like, stopped talking to them, which I mean, is kind of a good thing, because it would have happened anyway, with graduation. I don't know. It's just really now. It's just like, I have three really close friends who I talk to super regularly. And then other friends that I talked to sometimes, and I mean, I'm okay with that. You know?

NG: Yeah. What about your parents? Did your relationship change? I mean, you mentioned arguing a few times, but overall

BT: uh, I don't know. I mean, we've been, we've always been pretty close. And I mean, we argue sometimes, but, um, I think the dynamic has kind of changed. I mean, the dynamic has been changing. Because, like, obviously, I'm 18 now. But um, and they've always kind of been like, you know, yeah, do what you want. Not and like, and I don't care way, but like, you're an adult way, do whatever the hell you want. So like, last year, with my half days and working and stuff, it was like that, I kind of did my own thing. But like now especially, it's just kind of like, okay, do what you want, you're an adult, you know, I can't stop you. You know, this might not be a good idea, but whatever. You know.

NG: Do you think you got more fights with them during quarantine?

BT: *During* quarantine? Well-

NG: Yeah. During the pandemic

BT: Ha. I mean. During quarantine, I got more fights with them than I did this year, but more fights than I did say sophomore year? No, probably not.

NG: Okay. Yeah. Um, oh, yeah. Now we're onto summer. How did your plans for the summer change? And so obviously, I'm sure you had a lot of stuff lined up and that was thrown out the window.

BT: Oh, well, I was supposed to go to Alaska on a cruise with like, my extended family, my dad's family. That obviously didn't happen. Um, from May to August, I was going to buy tickets to see Testament and Municipal Waste. Flotsam and Jetsam. Megadeth, Trivium, and Lamb of God. Rammstein. Like I was supposed to see a lot of concerts, obviously, none of those

413 happened. Um, I was gonna have a big graduation party where I invited just whoever the fuck I
414 wanted. I mean, that kind of happened. I
415 invited, I don't know, there were, I don't know how many people were there, but it wasn't as big
416 as it would have been without this. Um, yeah, I mean, it's just like everything either went away
417 or was smaller, you know?

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419 **NG:** Yeah. What did you do to keep yourself busy during the summer? Because obviously you
420 probably didn't have any schoolwork anymore.

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422 **BT:** Um, I didn't. I mean, we practiced and I don't know. Yeah, we practiced. I practiced guitar
423 on my own.

424
425 **NG:** Yeah, just music.

426
427 **BT:** Yeah. Music, really. I mean, God this summer seems like a blur. Like, there's only, there's
428 like-- I'm trying to think of the few events I can remember. I remember my graduation party and
429 the few graduation parties I went to. There was, we actually had like, kind of a prom just for
430 seniors this summer. I remember going to that. And I remember the two camping trips that I
431 went on. That's about all I remember from the summer.

432
433 **NG:** Yeah. Okay, so maybe some more like current events about a summer. How did you learn
434 about the killing of George Floyd?

435
436 **BT:** Online. Because I remember, um, I remember seeing Ahmaud Arbery first, the jogger who
437 was shot by the two guys in the-

438
439 **NG:** Oh, yeah.

440
441 **BT:** I saw that. Like a week later, I saw the thing about George Floyd. And then, like, I saw that
442 when it first came out, like I saw that headline. And you know, a week later, everybody was
443 rioting and stuff.

444
445 **NG:** Yeah. You think, you know if you saw those on like a news site, or social media, or
446 something like that?

447
448 **BT:** I saw him on Snapchat. I know I saw Ahmaud Arbery on the Snapchat news feed. And I
449 think I saw George Floyd on the same thing, but I'm not sure.

450
451 **NG:** All right. And what was your response?

452
453 **BT:** I mean, I was, I was, I was horrified. I mean, I was horrified but like, sadly, I wasn't
454 shocked. You know what I mean? Like, I, I vividly remember Ferguson. With Trayvon Martin,
455 we were, we went on our yearly camping trip in August. And we were sitting in a diner after the
456 four days getting breakfast. And this was when we did it, like real primitive, like, there was no
457 cell service. And we lived out of our canoes. And so I remember sitting in the diner and seeing
458 videos of fucking tanks in Ferguson and shit on fire, and like, so I remember that. And then, like,

459 every year, it's just kind of same story, and it never changes. So I was horrified but I wasn't
460 shocked.

461
462 **NG:** So how have you responded to the Black Lives Matter movement?
463

464 **BT:** Um, I mean, I, I wholeheartedly support the Black Lives Matter movement. Um, I'm not
465 personally involved in it. The thing is, like, I come from a very white area, I mean, I say, I'm
466 from Indiana, but it's also just like a very white town. So like, my whole thing is, and I like, I
467 don't know, this might sound bad, but like, I'm not really a person that gets to have an opinion on
468 this. Like, it's, it's not my fight. This is their fight. And I will support them wholeheartedly, and I
469 believe in what they're doing, and I support it. But it's not my fight. It's not my place to say
470 anything. You know what I mean?

471
472 **NG:** Yeah, I see where you're coming from. What do you-- What about like social media? How
473 do you think that impacted the Black Lives Matter movement?
474

475 **BT:** I think there's a lot of performative activism. I know there's a lot of people that I went to
476 high school with, they're just posting stuff just to seem like they care. And that's why I don't
477 really post anything about it on social media, because I'm not going to protests. I'm not you
478 know, making any donations. I'm not a black person fighting for their rights. Like I, I have
479 nothing to say in this fight. So why would I say anything? Like it's all performative. You know
480 what I mean?

481
482 **NG:** Exactly. Yeah. And what about like media and news sources? What, where do you usually
483 go for information?
484

485 **NG:** Um, my dad watches MSNBC a lot. I don't know. Yeah, I mean, MSNBC would probably
486 be the biggest one. And just like the internet, like what pops up on my newsfeed? Um, yeah, I
487 mean, CNN sometimes, but we don't really watch that around my house. Definitely not Fox
488 News.

489
490 **NG:** Yeah
491

492 **BT:** But yeah.
493

494 **NG:** Now moving on to college. Why did you decide to attend Columbia College?
495

496 **BT:** Uh, okay, so my dad actually graduated from Columbia, like 25 years ago. I was thinking
497 about Ball State for a long time, which is in Indiana. They have a really good media program.
498 And so that was like, where I was gonna go for a long time, but I don't know probably since like,
499 sophomore year when I decided I want to go in production rather than like musical performance.
500 But um, and then was it junior year? Probably. Yeah, the summer between junior and senior
501 year, I think my dad was like, hey, let's just take a tour at Columbia and see what's going on. And
502 so we went, and like, I was wearing my Metallica shirt and the girl that like greeted us before the
503 tour had like pentagram earrings. And she was like, "oh, I like your shirt," and I was like, "ah, I
504 like this place already." And then, like, once I learned more about like the audio arts and

505 acoustics program, like I was like, Oh, this is *actually* what I want to do. Like, this isn't just like
506 a broad media program like, this is 100% what I want to do and it's more about, like, it's not just
507 about production, I don't have to concentrate. Like I can learn everything about sound. And it's
508 not like in a sound engineering, like science degree, like it's an art degree. And it's also in the city
509 rather than fucking Muncie, Indiana, which is just like, the middle and, and I've always been like
510 a city person at heart. And I've never lived in a city myself, like, we've always lived in the
511 suburbs. And like, I've always kind of been bored by it, like, I need like a constant change of
512 surroundings, or else I get bored in the cities, like perfect for that. So.

513
514 **NG:** And as a musician, the city is probably where you want to be.

515
516 **BT:** Exactly, yeah.

517
518 **NG:** So why did you decide to start college during a pandemic?

519
520 **BT:** Um, well, I thought I was gonna be moving in. And then two weeks before my move in
521 date, I found out that all my classes were online. And so my parents and I seriously weighed,
522 well, my dad, not my mom wasn't a big fan of the idea in the first place. But we seriously
523 weighed the option of a gap year. But um, I wouldn't be able, if I'm being straight up, I wouldn't
524 be able to get back into like the groove of going to school, I wouldn't be able to get back into the
525 routine if I took a year off. And I knew that I would never go back to college if I took a gap year.
526 So it was kind of like, suck it up deal with the bullshit of the first semester, maybe the first year,
527 get through it, so that you can actually go to college, but if you take the year off, you're never
528 gonna go, you know?

529
530 **NG:** Yeah. And why did you choose your major?

531
532 **BT:** Um, like I said, you know, it's a good way to pursue music, but it's so like, rather than just
533 "oh, I'm going to become a professional musician" but-

534
535 **NG:** Yeah, that's more safe.

536
537 **BT:** Yeah. And it's also something that interests me. Like I've said before, like I'm a big fan of
538 Trent Reznor. And like his production fascinates me. Um Steven Wilson. His production is
539 beautiful. And like, every time I listen to an album, like I, I notice things about the production
540 and the mixing and like, so I've always kind of enjoyed that. You know?

541
542 **NG:** Yeah, what stuff has Steven Wilson worked on?

543
544 **BT:** Uh, he's done a lot of like the old prog remasters like all the King Crimson remasters. He's
545 done. He's the, he's the main songwriter in Porcupine Tree. He produced a couple Opeth albums.
546 So like, yeah, stuff like that.

547
548 **NG:** Okay, lots of prog.

549
550 **BT:** Yeah.

551
552 **NG:** And what made you decide to be off campus? That was mainly, you said, online classes?
553
554 **BT:** Mm hmm. Yeah, I realized like, and, you know, we had a meeting with my advisor, and we
555 were like, “so, you know, like, can they visit like, dorm, to dorm?” And she's like, “No, not
556 really.” And so like, I was supposed to be in a suite style apartment with three other people I had
557 never met. And so like, you know, do I want to be at home and locked in my house, but I can see
558 my two best friends and my parents? Or do I want to be in the city with three people I've never
559 met? Can't leave my dorm, not even for classes. Everything's closed. You know? Like, it was
560 kind of, I'm going to be miserable either way, which-- wow do I want to do it? You know?
561
562 **NG:** Yeah. It's a dilemma.
563
564 **BT:** Yeah.
565
566 **NG:** What challenges have you faced, specifically in this semester with online learning?
567
568 **BT:** Um, making connections, you know, like, I, I'm kind of a withdrawn person, but I am also
569 very sociable, and like, so. Like, I mean, I have made friends like I would consider you, and all
570 the people in my classes and like the people that I have multiple classes with as friends, but like,
571 I want to hang out, you know what I mean? Like, I want to, I want to get to the city and I want *us*
572 to hang out and like, listen to music and fuckin' watch movies and stuff.
573
574 **NG:** Jam.
575
576 **BT:** Yeah, yeah! Exactly. Like I want to do stuff like that. And so that has been the hardest part
577 of it, to me is like, the lack of a social life, like it's just It's *just* work, you know
578
579 **NG:** It's just discussions.
580
581 **BT:** Yeah. (laughs).
582
583 **NG:** Um, and how are you and your professors communicating?
584
585 **BT:** Um, by email mostly or in class. Yeah, I mean, that's really the only way I can, you know.
586
587 **NG:** Do you feel there's sort of a disconnect?
588
589 **BT:** Yeah, definitely. Um, especially like, like my professors who like English isn't their first
590 language. Like, there's even more of a disconnect. Because like you're not speaking face to face.
591 And then sometimes it's hard to understand what they're saying, you know, so. Yeah.
592
593 **NG:** Now, for fall your current living situation is just with your parents, correct?
594
595 **BT:** Yeah, um, yeah, move down to the basement and turn this in my office. Yeah.
596

597 **NG:** How did you cast your ballot for this US election? Ha (laughs), I was waiting for this
598 question. Because this is a *whole* story.

599
600 **NG:** Ooh, I'm interested.

601
602 **BT:** I actually did not get to vote. And that is not by my own choice. I very much wanted to vote.
603 I very much wanted to vote against Donald Trump. Who I, you know, been opposed to since
604 like, he was president since I was like, 14. Yeah. Um, so I read, I thought that I had registered to
605 vote back in July. I went to the Lake County, which is where I live, the Lake County elections
606 website. I registered, I registered for the draft a couple weeks later, just to make sure that
607 everything was cool. I never got a voter ID card, which I personally found weird. But everyone I
608 mentioned it to, my parents, they were like, "No, it's just gonna be your ID like your state ID,
609 you'll be fine. You don't need it. We never use it. No one uses them anymore." I'm like, "okay,
610 whatever." You know, I'm just a fucking 18 year old kid. I don't know what's going on here. And
611 um, and then my parents and I went to vote early, after class on a Friday. It was October 12. I
612 think.

613
614 **NG:** Yeah, very early.

615
616 **BT:** Yeah, I go up and I give them my state ID. And okay, so the way Indiana works. Illinois
617 does not work like this. I don't know how California does it. There's a deadline. You have to
618 register by a certain deadline.

619
620 **NG:** Okay. Yeah.

621
622 **BT:** Illinois, you can register literally up to election day. But Indiana?

623
624 **NG:** Yeah.

625
626 **BT:** Yeah.

627
628 **NG:** For California it's around like the 24th of October.

629
630 **BT:** Okay. Yeah, Indiana was like, the fucking fourth of October, like you got to do it early.
631 Like, seriously, I registered like in July. Right after I turned 18. I turned 18 in June. Um, so I
632 registered and then I went to vote on October 12. And I get up to there, and I give them my ID,
633 and she's looking for a long time. And she's like, "I can't find you." I'm like, "Well, I registered
634 back in like June." She's like, "Okay, let me go look you up." And like, in the back of my head, I
635 was like, "I knew this was gonna fucking happen." I knew something went wrong, and I wasn't
636 gonna get to vote, like I knew this shit would happen. And I'm like, well, maybe I have, maybe, I
637 thought I had a confirmation email, which dumbass me must have deleted. But also, I didn't think
638 that I would need, you know, a screenshot of a confirmation number to be able to vote.
639 So whatever, I didn't vote that day, we go home. And my dad and I went through the registration
640 process again. I mean, it was already too late for me register to vote in this election. But we just
641 want to make sure that we did everything right and make sure I was registered for next year's
642 election, even though it's not presidential, you know.

643 And we get to the end of the process. And in the fine print, it says that you have applied to
644 register to vote and your application will be reviewed by the board of elections.
645 But you know, I never got anything saying that my application was rejected, like, they just never
646 did anything with it. Like it just kind of said--

647
648 **NG:** That's weird.

649
650 **BT:** Yeah, and so I called the board of elections. And they transferred me to somebody whose
651 phone rang once and then went right to voicemail. I left the voicemail and never got a call back. I
652 sent a couple emails, but nothing ever happened with it. And so when I emailed somebody, they
653 were like, "Well, we can't find your case from July, but we can find yours from October, but that
654 was past the deadline." And I'm like, "thanks fuckin Ricky. I know that" like, "yeah, thank you. I
655 know that." So yeah, it was, it was a whole mess. I was kind of really mad about that. \

656
657 **NG:** Yeah, that sounds frustrating.

658
659 **BT:** Yeah.

660
661 **NG:** So despite all that, how did you feel about the outcome of the election?

662
663 **BT:** Um. Relieved. You know, like, I was kind of cynical. I was like, there's no way he's gonna
664 lose. I did not think that he would ever win. And now that he's won, there's no way that he's not
665 gonna win. You know what I mean? Um, my mom and I were actually-- so my dad, my dad got
666 exposed at work the-- God, like two or three days before. And so he was like self isolating the
667 bedroom because my mom and I were going to,
668 to Cincinnati to visit my mom's friend from high school and his husband and so, you know, we
669 were in the city on the Saturday when the election results came out, and so we were walking
670 around downtown, and there were people like, driving around waving Biden flags and honking
671 and like everyone was cheering and like, I don't know, it was a pretty good moment. You know,
672 what I mean?

673
674 **NG:** Yeah, a good feeling.

675
676 **BT:** Yeah.

677
678 **NG:** Um, has this election like affected relationships with family members at all?

679
680 **BT:** Um, no. Well, um, so my mom's dad is very, definitely liberal. He's a first generation Irish
681 New Yorker. So he's obviously very, very democratic. So obviously, he voted for Joe Biden and
682 isn't a big Trump fan. My dad's dad, and mom are like, were like, well, I mean they still are
683 diehard Republicans, but like, they hated Donald Trump, because they're real republicans like--

684
685 **NG:** yeah, that's interesting.

686
687 **BT:** Yeah. And so they actually voted for Joe Biden. And then, but my dad's sister.
688 We don't know how she voted, but we think she might have voted for Trump.

689 Which is funny, because she started out as like, strongly anti Trump, but then, like, slowly kind
690 of started to get more and more Republican, so

691
692 **NG:** That's surprising.

693
694 **BT:** Yeah, yeah. So we're, yeah, we just kind of don't talk politics with her.

695
696 **NG:** Yeah. Generally, is your town like more republican or liberal or,

697
698 **BT:** Oh, um, it's hard because Lake County is the only blue count-- well, one of the only blue
699 counties in Indiana, but that's really only because we have Gary, which is basically just
700 Southside Chicago, in Indiana. There's definitely a lot of Trump signs around. You know, I went
701 to high school with kids, they'll walk around wearing shirts that say God, Guns, Trump. I have a
702 Bad Religion t-shirt that has their logo with the cross X'd out that my mom didn't let me wear for
703 the longest time because she was afraid it would piss somebody off. So my town is definitely
704 more like religious republican leaning. But I mean, there are there are some people that aren't
705 you know?

706
707 **NG:** Yeah

708
709 **BT:** Actually, actually interesting story about that. Um,
710 did you ever see the video of the Black Lives Matter protesters walking and there's the people
711 standing against the white fence in full on like tactical vests with fucking assault rifles and stuff.

712
713 **NG:** Maybe, I feel like I've seen a lot of videos like that.

714
715 **BT:** It's my town. Like, it went viral. And that's, that's crownpoint actually.

716
717 **NG:** Wow, okay, that's interesting.

718
719 **BT:** And I know where it is. It's on. It's on the bike trail in town that I ride and skate on all the
720 time. Yeah.

721
722 **NG:** I'll have to look for that video.

723
724 **BT:** Yeah, I'll actually send it to you.

725
726 **NG:** All right. Yeah. Thanks. I appreciate it. And then what about like, with friends? I'm
727 guessing all your friends are pretty much like similar political views to you?

728
729 **BT:** Yeah. You know, I mean, yeah, we, we don't really talk about politics a lot. Because like,
730 it's not, it's not something that we like, majorly care about. You know, it's mostly just music and
731 stuff. But um, yeah, I mean, the few times that we do have political discussions, it's like, it's
732 definitely my one friend. Like, his parents are definitely more Republican, like, they're business
733 owners and stuff. But he was like, when it was just policy and like economics, I didn't hate
734 Trump. I didn't support him, but I didn't hate him. But now that like, all those human rights stuff

735 has come up. I'm like, okay, fuck this guy. Like, it's definitely, yeah, um, religion is the one thing
736 that we kind of agree on the most. I'm very anti religion, and most of my friends are too. So.

737

738 **NG:** Yeah, um, what values and qualities that you look for a friend or partner have changed
739 since the pandemic?

740

741 **BT:** Um, I don't know, they really haven't. It's kind of the same. I mean, you just
742 at this point, it's just, you have to be able to, to, like, maintain a relationship without seeing them
743 all the time, you know?

744

745 **NG:** Yeah. That's important, though. And like, what about your personal values? Do you think
746 those have changed?

747

748 **BT:** Umm, I don't know. Kind of but also not really. I've definitely gotten more
749 opposed to the current administration because of their response to the pandemic. And I've
750 definitely, yeah, I definitely feel more alienated from, like the current administration and people
751 who are Trump supporters since this year, because this year has just been such a fucking mess.
752 And like, it's let's be real here. It's mostly his fault. And like, so I just, yeah, I feel way more
753 alienated than I did even before and even before I was alienated from people like that. So

754

755 **NG:** Yeah, that makes sense. Um, How have your practices to avoid getting like sick, evolved
756 since the beginning?

757

758 **BT:** Um, I'm definitely very diligent about wearing a mask. The thing about me is like,
759 especially right now, I'm cold a lot. Like I'm, I'm very cold a lot. And so like, there's a lot of
760 times that I'm like, fuck, I'm cold. This means I have a fever. This means I have a fever. This
761 means I have a fever. And then like, I touch my forehead, or I go use a thermometer. And I'm
762 like, Oh, no, I'm just actually very cold. So like, it's definitely like, I don't know. I'm more aware
763 of how I'm feeling. You know what I mean?

764

765 **NG:** Yeah, you kind of paranoid about it.

766

767 **BT:** Yeah.

768

769 **NG:** And what about new-- are there any new challenges you encountered-- encountered while in
770 college during the pandemic?

771

772 **BT:** Online learning for sure. Yeah. connecting with people without, like, actually meeting them,
773 you know?

774

775 **NG:** Yeah.

776

777 **BT:** A good balance, um, focus, like I, I would hate my life sitting through a three hour class in
778 person. And so sitting through a three hour class online is not ideal for me, you know, so,
779 definitely getting used to that.

780

781 **NG:** Yeah, a lot of people are in the same boat there. Yeah. Okay. Finally, moving on reflection.
782 I'm gonna wrap things up. How has this semester lived up to your expectations? Or how is it not?
783

784 **BT:** It hasn't at all. Um, yeah, I mean, this semester, like, I was so excited for this semester, I
785 was ready to get out of small town life. I was ready to be done with high school and get in to
786 college. I was going to see Rammstein the first day I moved in, I was ready to live on my own.
787 And here I am literally living in my parents basement. Going to school online. And yeah, stuck
788 in my own house.
789

790 **NG:** Yeah, it's disappointing.
791

792 **BT:** Yeah, very much, very much.
793

794 **NG:** Um, what do you think Columbia should have done differently?
795

796 **BT:** Um, since I wasn't there when it happened, it's hard for me to say one thing that really
797 pissed me off was, um. I didn't know that all my classes were online before two weeks I was--
798 before I was supposed to move in. So like, I would have liked to have known that better.
799

800 **NG:** Yeah, I agree.
801

802 **BT:** Because like, I had already got gone out and bought stuff for my dorm. And then it was like,
803 oh, our classes are online. And I was like, "Well, fuck, I'm not moving in now." I'm not going to
804 spend \$6,000 to sit in my room.
805

806 **NG:** Yeah. How would you describe your college experience as a whole during the pandemic?
807

808 **BT:** Um. Boring. Like, I just, I, you know, I always had this conversation with my parents. I
809 always say like, I'm going to be walking across the stage on graduation day, getting my degree
810 and being like, my freshman year is a black stain on my college experience. Like it's just, it's not
811 a college experience. You know what I mean?
812

813 **NG:** Yeah, barely an experience.
814

815 **BT:** Yeah, yeah.
816

817 **NG:** In what ways do you think COVID-19 has permanently impacted just our regular way of
818 everyday life?
819

820 **BT:** Well, I think I think we're gonna be, well, the majority of people who are smarter about
821 covid are going to be smarter about flu season in general. I think a lot of people are going to start
822 getting flu vaccines every year. A lot of people are going to start wearing masks during flu
823 season. I just, I think we're gonna adapt to stuff like this better.
824

824 I think yeah. I think if maybe we had had somebody else in charge right now we would have
825 adapted to this in particular better, but I think moving forward, we're gonna learn from this.
826

827 **NG:** Um, What was the most significant change in your life due to the virus?
828

829 **BT:** Um just like, how careful I have to be, you know, because like I, I, before this, I went out all
830 the time, like I went out shopping every weekend, like I went to concerts with, you know,
831 thousands of people crammed into one standing-room-only club like, you know, it's just, it feels
832 so weird to say that, like, I went places with thousands of people and just didn't give a fuck, like I
833 just--
834

835 **NG:** Yeah
836

837 **BT:** I was like, "Hey, Mom, I'm going to a concert this weekend." "Okay!" like, it wasn't a thing.
838 You know?
839

840 **NG:** Yeah, the mindset has really changed now.
841

842 **BT:** Yeah.
843

844 **NG:** And what about like, what aspects did you like-- what aspects of your life did you take for
845 granted before the virus?
846

847 **BT:** Definitely my social life like, you know, being able to do stuff like that. Yeah, definitely.
848 Yeah.
849

850 **NG:** You didn't think twice about it.
851

852 **BT:** Nope. And now, now it's like, "Oh, I can't do that anymore."
853

854 **NG:** Yeah. What do you think will happen if the pandemic lasts all the way until next year? Do
855 you think there are gonna be any big changes or?
856

857 **BT:** Um, no. I mean I think it's just going to be the same thing it is right now, you know.
858 Hopefully by next summer we'll be okay, though.
859

860 **NG:** I hope so, too. And just generally, how do you feel about the future?
861

862 **BT:** Well, I'm hopeful, obviously, because of the election. A little hopeful. The fact that there are
863 two vaccines that are 90 plus percent effective and are in the final stages of testing right now
864 definitely makes me hopeful. Yeah, I just, like, I'm optimistic about it and optimistic that things
865 are actually going to change, you know?
866

867 **NG:** Yeah, me too. Um, when do you think things will like actually be better?
868

869 **BT:** Next summer, probably. Because, I mean, realistically, I think once Biden gets into office,
870 he's going to spend a lot of time trying to, like, reverse-- not reverse, but fix a lot of what has
871 happened over the past year. And-- but it will take a while for that to come into effect and for the
872 virus rates to actually drop down and so next summer, probably,

873

874 **NG:** Yeah, probably. What else would you like to add?

875

876 **BT:** Um, I don't know, this year just kind of sucked. And I'm ready for it to be over. But
877 I don't know. It's just it's been so weird. Like, I was thinking about it recently, like, the Opeth
878 concert that I went to in February feels more recent than prom and my grad party, which were in
879 July. Like, it's just, it's been a weird year. And it's just strange. And we just have to, I guess,
880 learn to live with it for now and see where the future takes us, you know?

881

882 **NG:** Yeah, I agree. Yeah. All right. Well, thank you, Ben. You've been great.

883

884 **BT:** Yeah.

885

886 **NG:** I've had a lot-- I really enjoyed interviewing you. And that about wraps it up.

887

888 **BT:** All right. Thanks.

889