

Shawn Rich interviewed by Brandon LeBron
Williamsburgh, Brooklyn
May 16, 2022

Brandon LeBron: Hi, my name is Brandon LeBron and I'm interviewing Shawn in New York City. The date is the 16th of May 2022. Can you give me permission to record and make this or history? Public?

Shawn Rich: Absolutely.

BL: Thank you. Reminder. You do not have to answer any questions you are not comfortable with. Oh. Please give me your full name.

SR: My name is Shawn rich. Age 33.

BL: Occupation.

SR: I am a live in sun if you will.

BL: Okay, neighborhood.

SR: I live in Williamsburg, New York City.

BL: Where are you and your family originally from?

SR: I'm from County Cork in Ireland?

BL: I'll say first language?

SR: We speak English.

BL: Okay, ethnic identity?

SR: White.

BL: Gender identity?

SL: Male.

BL: Sexual orientation.

SR: Straight.

BL: Okay. Are you and your family from NYC?

SL: No, we not.

BL: Okay, how did you end up in NYC?

SR: Well, my parents after they were tired, they had this whole bucket list that they wanted to deal with and places that they wanted to go things they wanted to see. And one of the last things on the list was New York City that moved here a few years ago or came over here a few years ago, should I say rather, and they enjoyed it so much that they ended up just staying. And I ended up being moved over here about 16 months ago to take care of my parents as they've gotten older things have become more difficult for them. And so just want to make sure that they're taken care of.

BL: Yes, sounds good. Sounds amazing. Again, I just want to remind you, you don't have to answer anything that makes you uncomfortable. How do you get around the city?

SR: I make a lot of use out of the public transit the subway system mostly.

BL: Okay. Can you describe your experience with the transportation system in New York?

SR: Absolutely. It's very busy. It's very crammed packed very tight. I would actually represent to reference it to a can of sardines on many occasions. But overall, it's just not a poor experience at all.

BL: Okay. Do you feel safe in New York City's public transportation system? Why? Or why not?

SR: Absolutely. Yeah, I've got to say that for the most part, I feel pretty safe. When you're crammed up in a, in a big group of people, you know, it does tend to make crime by proxy just go down a little bit, or at least in my experience, from what I've seen. I'm sure there's still plenty of petty crimes going on, you know, whether it be pickpocketing or what have you. But yeah, at the end of the day, I still have to say that I feel pretty safe.

BL: Wonderful. Okay. Do you have any wild stories from being on public transportation?

SR: Oh, nothing too wild. You know, just you know, get on down to the subways late at night sometimes. And you know, you might see someone a little bit strung out just rolling through it going through a trip and just going through life, you know, but nothing nothing too crazy now.

BL: Okay. Do you feel safe in your community?

SR: I do. I do. I feel pretty safe in my community. I've got to say

BL: What does or doesn't make your community safe?

SR: There seems to be a pretty good sense of community and by that I mean community watch without there having to be one appointed. My parents go somewhere if somebody shows up at the house, somebody's calling you know, hey, so and so's at your door or so and so, you know, peeping around through your windows what should be aware of it and you know, vice versa, same thing goes for, for

them, you know, their neighbors or stepped out or, you know, going on vacation for any amount of time. Same thing applies. My parents are in con tight with them, you know, they kind of contact each other if they're going to be gone for any amount of time in length anyway, a so and so's going to be coming to my house for such and such reasons. They're the only people that you should see there. So if you see anything kind of out of the ordinary, something's not right.

BL: Wonderful. Wish My neighborhood was like that. How do you? I'm sorry? How does law enforcement fit into your vision of safety in New York City.

So I feel like safety, in terms of law enforcement is a very subjective matter. Very much based off of one's own personal ideologies and beliefs. To me, what makes law enforcement and safety go hand in hand is seeing presence of law enforcement, you don't want to see too little, you don't want to see too much. You know, just seeing that, that amount that just feels right to you, you know, seeing that they're out there doing their jobs or not, you know, letting their badge carry a huge weight on their shoulder and take advantage of their position and their station.

BL: All right. Okay. All those concern for safety in your community shift how their community functions.

SR: Honestly, I mean, there's, there's only, it seems like there's only ever really been nothing but safety and rather a lack of concern for just because of how much how safe it tends to just feel. I mean, you know, neighborhood Riff Raff as is, you know, that's, that's gonna be everywhere. And there's nothing you can do to prevent all of that. And it's just one of those things you have to take in stride. So overall, yeah, I can't really say that there's, there's been a concern for it.

BL: What is it like, living in a city that has people from all over the world?

SR: You know, I can imagine, for most people, it might be overwhelming, to an extent, or maybe even spectacular. But Ireland is known for being a cultural melting pot. You name it, we've got it. So as far as cultural diversity is concerned, it's you know, it's no different to me than what I'm already used to.

BL: How have you benefited from New York City's diversity?

SR: So as far as how I've benefited from it, you might be surprised to find out that the world really is small after all, you know, you get to you get to walk around, you get to talk to people, you get to meet new people. And, you know, you think, Well, I've just moved to a completely different, not just a notch to town next to country. But rather I'm sorry, I misspoke. They're not just a town or a county, but rather a whole country, you know, we're fourth just miles apart. And then, you know, next thing, you know, you're walking into your local store. And there's somebody that, you know, you might have grown up with, you know, years and years ago, that's also moved over here or somebody that's from where you're from. It's interesting.

BL: Would you consider New York City generally, and your neighborhoods specifically to be racially segregated? Meaning not diverse. Why or why not?

SR: Well, it's kind of hard to say no to that question. Just due to the gentrification here. I think that the biggest diversity here is more along the lines of religion and race. And maybe that's part of what's impacting the gentrification here so much.

BL: What have been your experiences, and I mean with the New York City public education system, as a student, parent, and indoor observer.

SR: I can honestly say that I've had no experience with it personally. As I said, it's my parents that moved to here. And then I, as an adult moved here with them. So I've had no experience with the education department here.

BL: All right, so how well do you know your neighborhoods and the people in your community?

SR: Let's say that I know enough to feel like I can say that I know my neighborhood. I knew enough to say that I feel like I know my community. I mean, obviously, I don't know everything about what's going on in people's personal lives. But there's such a sense of a being around here that it just feels right. It's kind of it's hard for me to explain. I'm sorry.

BL: Sorry, please repeat that.

SR: Okay. Oh, it's kind of hard for me to answer that question. I'm having a difficult time finding the right points for it.

BL: Okay, so we can move on to the next, okay. What public support systems have you experienced in your community?

SR: I can honestly say that I haven't. I haven't had the need to utilize or even reach out to any of the public support. So I can't really give an opinion on that one.

BL: So no deliveries to the house for groceries for your parents, nothing like that.

SR: It's not been needed. Not to say that I don't believe that it would happen should the need arise. But for my parents personally. That's that's more or less one of the one of the many jobs that I have to tackle on a regular basis.

BL: All right. Moving on to the next question. If you don't mind, could you grab a pen and paper? Absolutely. All right. What does good housing mean to you? And please write these down in terms of neighborhood, space in the apartment. Public space is an area food and area. safety and transportation.

SR: That's neighborhood space and apartment food, transit and safety. Yes. All right. So I feel like all of these things have their own place for each one to exist, I feel like it's all very important. Good housing is obviously important. You don't want to have people living in a place that's not fit to be living in you know, people. You don't want to have your your roof leaking every time it rains, you don't want to have to worry about your bathroom flooding every time you flush the toilet. You don't want to have to worry about your sink, pipe busting every time you run the faucet. You don't want to fall to the floor while you're walking on the floor. So just you know that that's obviously something that I feel like probably

everyone looks for. Space and apartment is equally important, especially for me. Where I come from, I'm used to having a lot of land. It's not as stacked up as New York is for sure. So the space in my apartment is very important. Kind of helps me avoid that claustrophobic feeling sometimes. food availability, right? Availability is key. If you don't have readily accessible food and I feel like that kind of drives the locale down so that's it's important. Same thing with transit. Transit. I apologize, whether it be things such as Uber or public trains or cabs, you've got to have a place to get from point A to point B, on a day to day basis, whether it be for work, grocery shopping, or just going out and, you know, hanging out with your friends for the safety, you know, obviously, that's important too, because you need to feel safe. Whenever you're, whenever you're out and about, you don't want to feel like, at any point in time, you're going to be attacked, or you're going to be, you know, having some kind of crime committed against you.

BL: Right? Understand, okay? Have you ever been worried about not being able to afford the rent?

SR: No, that's never been a concern that has arisen or what appear to arise anytime soon.

BL: What have been the impacts of gentrification and community dislocation on your neighborhood?

SR: I mean, the biggest impacts that you see is people that have lived in a place for any amount of time, you, it hurts your heart, to see them being forced, driven away. More or less, being made to leave a place without the option, just because of, you know, whether it be financial status, or by color, or by race, not race, but religion, whether it's always a shame to see stuff like that happen. And, you know, I understand that it's important for growth to happen, it's important for development to happen. You know, you look at a place like this, if my history is correct here. This is a place that had a rough history, you know, started off with a lot of gang violence, drugs, just not necessarily the best place to be and just from what I'm to understand. And now you look at where we are now. And it's, you know, I don't like to use the term clean. Right. But it's the it's the best word that comes to mind.

BL: Right. I'm sorry, can you still hear me?

SR: I can? Absolutely. Okay.

BL: Great. All right. How do you feel about the homelessness crisis in New York City?

SR: The homeless crisis in New York City? Well, homelessness is a shame, right? It hurts your heart. If you have any degree of empathy, it hurts your heart to see, you know, someone having to live in their vehicle, someone having to live in a homeless shelter, someone having to sleep wherever they pass out for the night, you know, it's it's, it's not a good place to be, regardless of the circumstance of how it becomes a relevant. It's still it's not, it's not something that you just want to see. It hurts your heart. And that's really the best way that I can say it. And I know I'm being redundant. It's, that's my opinion, for sure.

BL: What do you see as the cause of it?

SR: It's hard to determine calls when it comes to homelessness. Because you've got to consider the initial calls the why the how, how they became homeless, why they became homeless? Were they strung out addicts that ran through all their money on drugs? Were they veterans that, you know, were discharged from the military and just couldn't find a place in the civilian world? Because they couldn't adapt? Was it because they lost their job? You know, due to one reason or another? Or even, you know, as we were previously discussing the gentrification, there's so many causes as to why so I feel like the biggest thing that we have to look at is the here that now what is continuing to keep them to be

homeless. And I feel like, you know, a lot of it has to come down to personal parents personal hygiene. You know, you take somebody that's been living on the street for 4,5,6 months to three years there, they don't have the ability to get haircuts, they don't have the ability to have their their facial hair touched. They don't have acceptable clothing. They don't have the best access to bathe themselves. How are they supposed to stand any chance in today's world of getting a job? How are they supposed to be able to pull themselves out of that hole? And I think that's something that should be focused on as well. What?

BL: Sorry, let me rephrase that. What should society in the government do to curb the crisis?

SR: I can't really say that I feel like this is something that should be waited on the shoulders of the government. That's not to say that the government can't have a place and I just don't feel like it should.

BL: I don't feel like it should have to be weighed on the government, I feel like, as a community, you should want to see people doing better for themselves. I mean, obviously, there's some people that just don't want help, and they won't accept help. And you know, that that's a whole different case, a whole different conversation for a whole different time. But as far as for people that are looking for help, that are actually trying to find a way a method to better themselves, and get themselves out of this situation that they've found themselves in, for one reason or another. I feel like, you know, anything from building more shelters, having public baths, if you will, something like that accessible for hygiene, you know, having a limited donation from, you know, things, retail stores that are, you know, accepting. Second were, hand me down clothes, barbershops, maybe giving homeless people a quick touch up, maybe once every month or two, you know, something to make it to where, you know, if I'm homeless, I can wake up tomorrow with a plan and a mission, and be able to move forward and executed I can, I can go register at a shelter. I can go to the thrift store, I can get some clothes that look at least halfway acceptable. I can go to the barber shop, I can get a touch up. And then I can walk into a place of business and not be having to worry about in my repulsive right now, is this going to affect me getting a job here? Make it to where if I'm a business person, am I going to look at this person and want to consider hiring? I feel like that's very important. Because it's it removes the the excuse at that point. I feel like to me, for so many homeless people. Because it seems like a lot of them. They either don't want to or they don't have the access to. And so whenever you give them the access, then the only thing that's left to blame for those people is the drive the desire, the wheel return we're gonna move into protests now. Specifically, the Black Lives Matter protest.

BL: Okay. How do you feel about the Black Lives Matter protests?

SR: I believe that my understanding of it is, it is a very good cause. It's something that should have never had to happen. You know, realistically, you know, equality should have the years 2022. Right. I can't find a good reason or excuse why there's not true equality. And I feel like that's what they're standing up for. And that's what they're pushing for. And that's what they won't. I feel like, as with any protest, not just in New York, not just in America, but across the globe, there's always going to be that one group, you know, that kind of stands off from the mainstream and makes it something that it's not they perverted, they prefer a good thing and turn it into something bad, something aggressive, something violent, and something that you could consider a terrorist organization and gives the organization as a whole, a bad, bad and He puts them under a bad light, because they're identifying to be part of something, that they're not truly part of greed.

BL: Okay. Explain to me why you think these anti racist protests erupted particularly strongly in New York City?

SR: I'm unfortunately not well enough versed to be able to formulate an opinion on that one, I apologize.

BL: No problem. What do you think makes protesting black Americans and their non black allies angry about the conditions in the United States?

SR: Alright, so as far as what I think makes the protesting invalid, right? What makes people angry? If you look at the statistics, right? The numbers in the jails, in the prison systems, the physical uses of force, the lethal uses of force the brutality against black Americans, I don't understand how you could be upset.

BL: Right. I agree with that. 100%. We're gonna move on to the next question. Okay. Do you have any stories you're willing to share about your encounters that you've had with racism?

SR: I can't think of too many stories. So I think I'm actually just gonna take a pass on that one.

BL: Have you had any negative encounters with the police?

SR: No, I've not.

BL: Have you learned about an experience of someone close to you that you didn't know before?

SR: No, I've not.

BL: Okay, how has your opinion of the NYPD changed over time?

SR: When it comes to my opinion Well, what I hear word of mouth what I see on the media. And then what I see in person, it clashes so often, each one of them with another so I'm not really comfortable with giving an opinion on on the NYPD.

BL: No problem. Um were you active in the protest at all and well, digitally or in person?

SR: Could you repeat the last question, please?

BL: Were you active in the protests digitally or in person over the last two years?

SR: Not really? No.

BL: Okay. All right. We're gonna move on to COVID-19. If that's okay with you? Absolutely. Again, you don't have to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable. How has your life changed financially since COVID-19?

SR: It really wasn't impacted financially. At all, fortunately, for for myself or for my parents.

BL: Okay. How were the working conditions at your workplace before COVID?

SR: I know being a stay at home caregiver, I'd really didn't have any changes in in our in in interactions.

BL: All right, so pretty, pretty smooth. Absolutely. How has your workplace shifted since March 2020.

SR: It's not really shifted at all.

BL: Oh, okay. Has your life changed personally since COVID-19?

SR: Um, I mean, I personally had COVID A handful of times, but as far as any real life changes, no, not really.

BL: Okay. And how did that affect your parents while you were taking care of them?

SR: Well, unfortunately, my father did. You know, catch COVID. Unfortunately, he was able to be he was he was able to be taken care of with the medical care that is available for it. And he came out through it strong. He did a great job.

BL: It's great to hear and I'm glad that you guys are better. Thank you. Are there any new hobbies? You've taken out?

SR: No, I, my hobbies evolves? Oh, pretty much always stayed the same.

BL: I'll have your excuse me, sorry, how have your relationships changed with your friends?

SR: Um, during the pandemic, when it first, you know, started out and throughout this midsection that we've, I feel like we've passed? No, I feel like we're finally starting to go into a state of recovery personally, but I would say that there was a lot less personal, or in person interaction, a lot more was done virtually through web calls through like Skype and through Google and, you know, a lot more telephonic communication. But other than that, you know, the communication was able to be maintained at a fairly consistent degree.

BL: Right, and relationships with your neighbors and family?

SR: Um, no, not really any change there. I mean, you know, as I was saying, the biggest change was just in method of communication.

BL: Okay, how has COVID-19 impacted your health and the health of your family?

SR: Um, general health wise, after pulling through COVID? It's, it's been pretty good. long recovery, long recovery, a lot of a lot of lingering symptoms, but at the end of the day, early well.

BL: Okay, sounds wonderful. What, if any, what were the benefits to your life from a year on quarantine?

SR: Honestly, learning how to go back to the basics of being a human being was probably the biggest benefit. And by that, I mean, we live in such a digital age now where everything is all readily available at the touch of your fingertips. You know, it's not hard to get lost in social media scrolling through your phone, it's not hard to get lost in YouTube watching videos.

But I feel like we've forgotten how to be human to an extent, you know, basic, one on one communication within the household. So the he time and quarantine was spent more or less just learning how to have a face to face conversation, you know, all over again, it's, it's, it's not a trait that you forget how to utilize. But it is something that if you're not careful, it will slip away to a degenerative

point where it's almost awkward to talk to a loved one face to face. So I feel like that year helped out a lot.

BL: And that leads into my next question, is there anything that you learned about yourself? Or your family?

SR: Absolutely, absolutely. You know, as I just mentioned, just basic human communication, basic human, human 101. No. It's definitely strengthened and reinforced it for me.

BL: All right. Very exciting to hear. We're gonna wrap this up. Now. Is there anything I should have asked or you'd like to add?

SR: Um, no, actually, I'd say overall, that is a very well put together questionnaire really.

BL: Hey, are you still comfortable making this oral history public?

SR: Absolutely.

BL: Wonderful. Well, it was nice talking to you, Sean. And hopefully, people will hear your story and be motivated to get out there.

SR: Absolutely. Well, thank you so much for your time as well. I really do appreciate it. No problem. No problem at all. You have a wonderful night.

BL: All right. And same to you.