

Jeremy Jacobs
2020 Margolis Reflection

If I had ever walked from my DC apartment to Margolis, I would've taken 12th Street. 13th is a bit faster, Maps says, but I like the number twelve. It's a fifteen-minute walk—a right off L street, then a left onto East—but if I walked briskly, with purpose and without a backpack, I think I could've made it under ten.

Pennsylvania Avenue. Capitol Hill. *That's* where I imagined my summer. I'd leave Memphis, and the South, and the heavy, sticky heat. And in an instant, DC would expand to include me; in time, I'd expand myself, to include it. Then summer would pass. And I'd leave the city, a little District in my bag, a little Columbia in my step.

But then everything changed. I stayed at home. And suddenly, the city spilled into my living room. It felt violent, at first, the way work invaded my home. I watched webinars in my garage. I listed to Mark McClellan, in my kitchen. Where I once drew Crayola spirals on a bedroom wall—mini masterpieces of cerulean and goldenrod—I studied COVID's impact on maternity care. On my bed, in pajamas, I edited briefs at dawn's break, my sleep schedule in shambles.

We at Margolis know what it means to reimagine health care. Transformation is in the Center's DNA. But how do you reimagine a summer? Reimagine “work”? Reimagine yourself? I've been a policy intern before. This summer, though, “work” felt distinctly different. Examining the effects of plastic bag bans last year felt important, it did, but with COVID—it's more personal. I'm not a pregnant woman. I never will be. But I share the fear of getting that call. That your brother-in-law can't taste, or smell. That you've been exposed. That you yourself exposed your mother, or your father.

This was a summer of blurred lines, yes. But it was a summer of surprising connection, too, in those the quiet off-moments, discussing Yolande's linguistic agility or Rebecca's newly polished floors.

And it was a summer of empathy. When we interviewed stakeholders about changes to maternity care policy, they spoke of a myriad of changes: restricted in-person visits, doula bans, at-home monitors, shortened hospital stays, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. And they spoke of the *uncertainty* that their pregnant women faced, the *uncertainty* of those uninsured women, the *uncertainty* of being a Black or Latina mother at higher risk of COVID-related complications.

And—as much as I could as young, healthy male—I knew that uncertainty too, because who's situation isn't uncertain right now? And I held that uncertainty close, with every interview we captured, with every word I wrote.

I think that's what I'll take away most from my dozen weeks at Margolis. I want to bring an empathy-driven mindset to whatever I do, be it journalism, or health policy.