

Transcript of Interview with Susan Gould by Alayna Gould

Interviewee: Susan Gould

Interviewer: Alayna Gould

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Location (Interviewee): Hudson, Ohio

Location (Interviewer): Cincinnati, Ohio

Transcriber: Alayna Gould

Abstract:

Susan Gould lives in Hudson, Ohio, with her husband, Richard Gould, and her son, Seth Gould. Hudson, Ohio, is in Summit County, close to the epicenter of Ohio's COVID-19 outbreak in Cuyahoga County. She worked for Menorah Park, a nursing home in Beachwood, Ohio, that caters to the Orthodox Jewish community in Cleveland. Susan was an administrative assistant in the volunteer department there until she was laid off due to COVID-19. She shares her experiences working on the front line of the pandemic at Menorah Park, providing a detailed description of Menorah Park's response to COVID-19. She discusses her preparations for COVID-19 and describes everyday life during a state mandated lockdown. Explaining, how she receives news about COVID-19. Susan also expresses her political aspirations for America post COVID-19 and what her experiences with past events, like 9/11, have taught her about living through a crisis.

AG: Hello, I am here with my mother, Susan Gould, who is video conferencing us from Hudson, Ohio, and I am conducting this interview in Cincinnati, Ohio. Mom, would you like to introduce yourself a little bit?

SG: Hello. Like she said, this gorgeous girl of mine is in Cincinnati, I'm in Hudson and I believe we're going to talk about life or living with COVID [COVID-19], right now.

AG: Hmmhmm, that's exactly what we're going to be talking about today. What do you know about the coronavirus?

SG: I feel like I know everything. Why don't you lead with a question?

AG: Well, you feel like you know everything, what kind of research have you been doing?

SG: Well, I've been listening to my governor [Mike DeWine] everyday at two o'clock. I have been trying really hard not to follow [air quotes] facts on social media. So, I feel pretty strongly that I know how it's transmitted, although like everyday they seem to tell us something a little bit more about what we should be doing. And I'm taking all the precautions I should be taking, but, I feel like in my own practices I'm being as safe as possible to not get this virus, but I also know that if I do get this virus because my age and my health, I'll probably be okay.

AG: What are you doing to avoid getting the virus?

SG: [Chuckles] Everything [chuckles again]. Alright, well first and foremost, handwashing, which my daughter will probably laugh at because I'm a die hard hand washer and Purell-er [gesturing as if she is washing her hands], so that was not a big change. But, the biggest change is probably the house cleaning. I disinfect all the light switches, the door knobs, the handles, all of the community touch things. Every day when we walk in the house—if we've walked in the house—and wash our hands. I mean the hands are just raw [holds hands up to the camera]. I wear a mask when I go out. It's not a surgical mask, but it, I don't know, makes me feel more secure knowing that I have it on and I think it makes other people around me more secure knowing that I have it on. It's a little weird, you get looks. I have on occasion worn gloves to the grocery store, I'm wiping down my groceries. I went yesterday and it took me, gosh, something like an hour to get everything put away properly. It's crazy. It's exhausting.

AG: It is. I spent an hour putting my groceries away today as well.

SG: Good girl.

AG: Thanks, Mom. So that's how you're preventing catching the spread, have you put any rules around the house about when you go out, how often are you going out? Where are you going?

SG: We have, I mean very...well one, don't go out. We've been making a grocery list, now I'm somebody who went to the grocery store three or four times a week. I enjoyed it. I didn't like to meal plan. I just like to go see what was what. G-d, I think I went once in two weeks now, where I've got everything stored up. We choose one person to go to the store, there's no reason for all three of us- there's three of us in the house, Alayna's father [Richard Gould] and brother [Seth Gould] are here too. That's just something that doesn't happen and it's something that actually bothers me when I'm in line and I see a whole family in line. I mean, it's not necessary. We are ordering a lot of stuff in, if we can get it delivered, but I do make a point for my own mental health—I can't stay in the house. So, weather permitting, I go out. And either I read my book in a secluded spot or I go for a bike ride or a hike and I avoid people, but it's actually nice to see people, like from a distance. But...just whatever the governor tells me I should be doing, and his beloved Dr. Amy, whose been awesome.

AG: Dr. Amy Acton, yeah.

SG: She's...[whispers] she's a rockstar.

AG: [Chuckles] Rockstar... So, with groceries you've been preparing, with protecting yourself from the virus you've been preparing, is there anything else you've done to prepare for lockdown?

SG: The hardest thing is not seeing our friends, and seeing you—you're far away. But, preparing...it's terrible to say, but I'm sort of keeping track on my friends who...our [Susan and Richard Gould's] closest friends are not the greatest social distancers. So as much as we want to see them and they keep trying to see us, we keep saying, "No, because I know you were out with so and so last week," and we sound like a jealous couple, but, just making sure we don't see other people. I'm not working, Dad [Richard Gould] works from home, your brother, Seth, he

stopped working because he was delivering pizza and that had such contact. It's hard. It's staying in, but like I said for my mental health, I try to go out. And I tell myself at least it's not polio 50, 60 years ago—before social media, TV, and electronic books to be delivered through the air [shrugs].

AG: And then, how do you think this pandemic will change society?

SG: Oh, we've talked about that a lot.

AG: Yeah...

SG: Gosh, I hope it will in positive ways. I hope that our country will be less dependent on other countries for providing our medical equipment. I think we're learning a huge lesson that we need to be providing our own medical equipment. I hope more industry will come back to the United States after this, overall. I hope that environmentally we'll still see changes, but you know, what I'm saying to you over and over again is I hope. I go back and forth, some days I wake up and I think, oh please let something change, let people be smart enough, but I think once the fear subsides, and people get back to living their lives...they'll forget. And they'll go back to what's easy and what's cheap, and not necessarily what's right. But...I...I do hope that there'll be some positive changes economically and socially. That this has opened up a lot of windows too.

AG: Can you explain some of the windows that you think have been, opportunities, that have been opened up by the crisis?

SG: First and foremost, the weakness of our health care system. You know, we are so dependent on insurance and the haves and the have nots, and everybody needs it [health care] now, and we're seeing that. And the government is trying to level the field and make it accessible and I hope that that stays because it has to happen. Other changes that I hope to see...is that what you asked me?

AG: Yeah.

SG: Environmentally, I think the environmentalists are probably having a field day right now measuring the fact that there's not a lot of emissions in the air and things are looking good. For me, I really hope that takes hold and I hope they just run with it. I don't know. I don't know if it will, but I really hope so. Another hole that we've experienced is capitalism. Capitalism comes at a price, socially. You know there's a lot of talk about communism and socialism and what our government will look like, and I don't think our government is going to change dramatically, but I think that the younger generation has been screaming for some changes politically. And...I think sadly this has driven home their message to the older generation and my generation as well, and maybe just maybe it's...you know proof that, yeah, some things have to change. But we're still finding the holes, you know?

AG: And...And you've talked about hope, that these are things that might happen, but you're aspirational that they will. What, pragmatically, do you think is going to stay the same?

SG: [laughs] People are Stupid. [Laughs] I mean...pragmatically...no, that's true! I'm sorry, I mean...

AG: What's your tagline?

SG: Can't cure stupid!

AG: [chuckles] Ya' can't cure stupid.

SG: [chuckles] Can't cure stupid. It's...so I came up with another tagline this week and I'll...I'll try to explain it, okay? Because we're getting a ton of information, right? And you're asking me, am I following what I'm being told what to do? Yeah, I am, I am, but there's a lot of people are not practicing social distancing, or handwashing, or going through all of the hoops. So, my new phrase this week, which I said to somebody was, "You can lead a horse to water only to realize it was a jackass the whole time," which meant that you can try to teach somebody a thousand times, but if they just don't want to hear it, it's on you. You have to decide if you're gonna waste your energy trying to make them hear or if you're going to make the changes yourself. I can't drag anybody to meet my opinion. So, I am going to try to be kinder to the environment, I am going to try to limit the amount of shopping that I do because that's both good for the environment and my personal economy. I am going to probably politically get involved with trying to get our health...health care system set up better because I work in a healthcare industry, hopefully, right now I'm laid off. But I'm not going to beat my head trying to cure stupid or trying to make the jackasses drink the water. I can only do my own part and maybe by example somebody will see that I've made positive changes for me and maybe they'll get on board, but I can't fix the world and I sure can't fix stupid. I just do what I can do.

AG: So, you mentioned that you worked in the healthcare industry, can you describe your job a little bit? And, maybe describe why you were laid off.

SG: Sure, I'm not actually in healthcare. I have no healthcare training at all. I am an administrative assistant; I work in a nursing home [Menorah Park] in the volunteer department. I'm not a volunteer, but I help oversee the volunteers and it's a very big nursing home. It's sort of like a microcosm of a community and our volunteers provide what I call main street services. So, we have a snack shop, and a gift shop, and an ice cream parlor, and a beauty parlor and the volunteers do things to make the residents feel at home and part of a community. Now, when COVID hit, in order to protect our elder residents, we told the volunteers they couldn't come. We stopped having people come in from the outside. Well, without volunteers there's no main street businesses to be overseeing and no work for me to do. So, also to protect the residents, anybody who wasn't necessary to be there for the health and well being of the residents was asked to take a temporary layoff and that's where I'm at.

AG: Do you have...Have you had any communication with the nursing home with your employer or have you just been left to figure it out?

SG: I'm figuring it out. I haven't had any contact; I mean we are laid off. We are considered unemployed. [Pause] I'm part of a small group of orphans [laughs] who've been laid off and you

know we hear bits and pieces of what's going on. We know that at least one resident has tested positive on the campus, but prior to that resident, I mean I'm amazed by what they did there at the nursing home. I mean, we were locked down so everyone was safe. I think they've really controlled the spread, but I do believe a couple of staff members and, [clears throat] excuse me, one or two residents maybe have it. But it's not confirmed, it's just the rest of us hearing things from the outside.

AG: Can you describe a little bit more the steps that the nursing home took to protect residents in anticipation of COVID-19? Before the lockdown [official] was ever put in place?

SG: Right, it was actually kind of crazy, but I was actually proud of our nursing home because what they did was they got wind of what might happen, what the governor might ask for, what the president [Donald Trump] might ask for, and they put it into place days, in some cases, a week before this [lockdown] happened. So, they already ordered their supplies. They had plenty of face masks, plenty of supplies. One of the things that they changed was they locked up those supplies. So, the staff had to sign out and ask for it, so they really were tightened down on that. Before anything was officially put in place, we also locked down visiting, which was a heart-breaking decision to not have friends and family come in to see their loved ones. As time went on, we always seemed to be a day or two ahead of the order, but we went from not having any visitors to having the entire staff—and we're a thousand employees on this campus, different buildings, but like, my building I don't even know how many employees there are, but let's say five hundred. Those staff all had to come through the front door, one by one, and have their temperature taken and go through these screening questions and either have their hands washed or Purel. So, there was a process to even come into work. So that was a part of the lockdown, even before we were officially told to lockdown. And then, by the time it became an official order for nursing homes, which I think were the first businesses to go into a lockdown, before the order even came we were already separating the residents and staff onto their units so there was minimal mixing and contact between the staff. And even the staff did safe distancing and handwashing, and things like that. But, if you remember, just prior to this, I was so sick and tired of sitting through trainings on hand washing and how to put on gear, and you know I was a secretary, what do I need to know wash my hands for? Why do I need to put on a gown? Well, they knew something I didn't, and they were ahead of it. I'm very, very proud of it and what they've done. I think it could've been a nightmare, but I think they've controlled it the best they possibly can.

AG: ...And just thinking, 'cause you've experienced—I'm not going to say a lot because you're very young [chuckles] [Susan Gould is 52]—but what...

SG: It's because I'm smart [winks].

AG: [okay hand sign] What other crises have you experienced and how have you handled them?

SG: In general? In life?

AG: You pick any example from your life, from historical crises that you've lived through. And, and, what have you experienced, and how did you handle those crises?

SG: Not well! [laughter] I'm getting better with age. I've had a pretty good life and I've had some extraordinary circumstances and situations which I'm not gonna publicize here [door creaks], but from near death experiences to a botched surgery to more than once complete financial devastation; what I have learned, to every fiber of my being is it always gets better. So, each situation has gotten better for me, that being said, I'm somebody who does suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome. And...yeah...when this COVID stuff started happening and getting real, I had some panic attacks and...I...I went a little bonkers sometimes...but again, that's where the walks and some of those things come into play. But I do know...I mean I totally know that this is going to end and it's going to get better. It's going to be hard. You know when I said to you that people are stupid, and I don't have a lot of faith a lot will change?

AG: Hmmhmm...

SG: Cause I'm not the only one in the fact that someday we're going to forget most of this. And it wasn't that long ago that we all lived through 9/11 and...our country didn't change that much after 9/11, our airports did, but our country didn't. So...[shrugs] I don't know, did that answer your question?

AG: ...It did...because I know the events my mom is referencing to and her comfort level, I'm not going to push her to describe them any further. But, can you think of a specific life lesson you've learned that you are applying to COVID-19, that transfers really well?

SG: A specific life lesson?

AG: Yeah, like a specific one. You kind of listed a bunch, but is there one that really applies to COVID-19?

SG: That I really know that it's going to be over. That this is just here and now, this is just something we have to deal with. And I keep my eye on the prize, it's going to be over. And honestly, honey, I mean, I don't have it that bad. My husband is still working, even if he's not we've been pretty smart. We'll make it work and [shrugs] we're okay. Other than the fact that you know I want to make sock puppets and I'm done organizing the linen closet. I mean, I go a little crazy, but I know it could be worse and that is the life lesson. It's always, could it be worse? Yes. Will it get better? Absolutely. You know, it's appreciating what you have. And that's where your focus has to be. I'm ultimately an optimist, [pause] a pragmatic optimist, but an optimist.

AG: I like that, pragmatic optimist. Alright, Mom, thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me and to share your experience with COVID-19. And how you've prepared for the crisis and responded to the crisis. This has been my mother, Susan Gould speaking with me on March 31st, 2020. And thank you and goodbye.

SG: And the worst thing about all of this, people, is that she's in Cincinnati and I'm in Hudson and I can't see her. And she's so cute [air kiss]. I love you.

AG: I love you too, bye.