

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: otter.ai, 2nd pass by Clinton Roberts, JOTPY curatorial intern

Abstract: Susan Gould describes her preparations for COVID-19 and what everyday life is like in a state mandated lockdown. She also explains how her employer, Menorah Park, a nursing home located in the epicenter of Ohio's Covid-19 outbreak responded to the pandemic.

Alayna Gould 00:02

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?

Susan Gould 00:19

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 living with COVID right now.

AG 00:31

Mm hmm. That's exactly what we're going to be talking today. What? What do you know about the corona virus?

SG 00:39

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

AG 00:43

Um. Well, you feel like you know everything. What kind of research have you been doing?

SG 00:50

I've been listening to my governor every day at two o'clock. I have been trying really hard not to follow [uses hands to make air quotes] facts on social media. So, I feel pretty strongly that I know how it's transmitted. Although like every day, they seem to tell us something a little bit more about what we should be doing and I'm taking all the precautions that 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 the virus because my age and my health, I'll probably be okay.

AG 01:31

What are you doing to avoid getting the virus?

SG 01:34

Everything. [laughs] Um, all right, well, first and foremost, hand washing, which my daughter will probably laugh at because I am a diehard hand washer and Purell-er so that was not a big

change. But the biggest change is probably the house cleaning. I disinfect all the light switches, the doorknobs, the handles, all of the community, touch things every day when we walk in the house - if we walked in the house and wash our hands. I mean, the hands are just raw. 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 to 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, it'd be like an hour to get everything put away properly. It's crazy. It's exhausting.

AG 02:42

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

SG 02:50

Good girl.

AG 02:52

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

SG 03:01

We have-I mean, very-. Rule 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 and see what was what. God, I think I went once in two weeks now? I 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 and brother here too. That just doesn't happen. And that's something that actually bothers me when I'm in line and I see whole family in line. 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 read my book in a secluded spot or I go for a bike ride or a hike I avoid people, but it's actually nice to see people like from a distance. [Alayna laughs] But, just whatever the governor tells me I should be doing. And his beloved Dr. Amy, has been awesome.

AG 04:17

Dr. Amy Acton. Yeah.

SG 04:20

[hushed voice] Rock Star.

AG 04:23

[laughs] rock star. 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 04:32

The hardest thing is not seeing our friends and seeing you. You're far away.

But I'm preparing-it's terrible to say, but I'm sort of keeping track on my friends who are closest friends are not the greatest social distance-ers. 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. We sound like a jealous couple, but um-just making sure we don't see other people. I'm not working. Dad works from home. Your brother, Seth, he stopped working because he was delivering pizza and that had such contact. It's hard. It's, it's staying in. Like I said from my mental health, I tried to go out and I tell myself at least it's not polio 50, 60 years ago, before social media, TV, and electronic books could be delivered through the air.

AG 05:37

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

SG 05:43

We've talked about that a lot. 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 them 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. I do hope there'll be some positive changes economically and socially, that this has opened up a lot of windows too.

AG 06:55

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

SG 07:02

First and foremost, the weakness of our healthcare system. You know, we are so dependent on insurance and the haves and the have nots. And everybody needs it 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? 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. 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. As a whole, comes at a price socially. You know, there's a lot of talk about communism and socialism and what our government will look like. 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 is 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. We're still finding the holes. You know?

AG 08:46

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

SG 08:57

People are stupid. [laughs] Pragmatically-

AG 09:00

What is-

SG 09:01

I mean, no, that's true. I'm sorry. I mean-

AG 09:06

What's your tagline?

SG 09:10

You can't cure stupid. Can't cure stupid. You can't cure stupid. So, I came up with another tagline this week and I'll try to explain it. Okay? Because we're giving a ton of information, right? And you're asking me, what am I following what I'm being told what to do? Yes, I am. I am. There's a lot of people are not practicing social distancing, or hand washing 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 1000 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 here 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 good for my personal economy. I am going to probably, politically, get involved with trying to get our health healthcare system set up better because I work in the 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'll 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. Just do what I can do.

AG 11:04

So, you mentioned that you worked in healthcare industry. Can you describe your job a little bit and maybe describe why you were laid off?

SG 11:15

Sure. I'm an [unintelligible] healthcare. I have no healthcare training at all. I am an administrative assistant. I work in a nursing home. 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 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 wellbeing of the residents, was asked to take a temporary layoff and that's where I'm at.

AG 12:29

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 12:40

I'm figuring it out. I haven't had any contact. I mean, we are, we are laid off. We are considered unemployed. I'm part of a small group of orphans [laughs] who have 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 like locked down and everybody was safe. So, I think they've really controlled the spread. But I do believe that a couple of staff members, excuse me, and one or two residents maybe have it. But it's not confirmed, because it's just the rest of us hearing things from the outside.

AG 13:32

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 was even put in place?

SG 13:43

It was actually kind of crazy, but I was very proud of our nursing home because what they did was they got wind of, you know, what might happen, what the governor might ask for, what the President might ask for, and they put it into place, days, in some cases a week before this happened, so they'd already ordered all 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 actually officially put in place. We also locked down visiting, which was a heartbreaking decision to not have friends and family come in to see their loved ones. As time went on, we only seem to be a day or two ahead of the order. We went from not having any visitors to having the entire staff and we're thousand employees on this campus. different buildings, but like my building, I don't know how many employees they are, but let's say 500. Those staff all had come through the front door, one by one, have their temperature taken and go through these great screening questions and either hand washed, or Purell. So, there was a process to even come into work. So that was all part of the lockdown before we even officially were told we had to lock down. And then by the time that it became an official order for nursing homes, which I think were the first businesses to go into lockdown. Before the order even came, we were already separating the residents and staff on to their units, so that there was minimal mixing and contact between the staff. And even the staff did safe distancing and hand washing and things like that. But if you remember, just prior to this, I was so sick and tired of sitting in trainings about hand washing and how to put on gear. And you know, as a secretary of my-why do I need to know how to wash my hand 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-and what they've done. I think it could have been a nightmare. But I think they've controlled it the best they possibly can.

AG 16:31

I'm just thinking, because you've experienced-not going to say a lot, because you're very young. [laughs] But what-

SG 16:40

Because I'm smart.

AG 16:42

What other crises have you experienced and how did you handle them?

SG 16:53

In general? In life?

AG 16:55

In-you can pick any example from your life or other historical crises that you lived through and what what did you experience? And how did you handle those crises?

SG 17:06

Not well. [both laugh] 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 going to publicize here but from near death experiences to a botched surgery to more than once completely financial devastation. What I have learned, to every fiber of my being, is it always gets better. So each situations gotten easier for me. That 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 went bonkers, sometimes, but again, that's where the walks and all 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. But you know, like when I said to you, but people are stupid, so I don't have a lot of people that will change. Because I'm not alone in the fact that someday we're going to forget most of this. I mean, it wasn't that long ago that we all lived through 9/11. And the country didn't change that much after 9/11. All right airports did. Our country didn't. I don't know. Did that answer your question?

AG 19:00

That did because I know my-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 specifically applying to COVID-19 that transferred really well?

SG 19:20

A specific life lesson?

AG 19:22

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

SG 19:28

That I really know that this is going to be over. This is just here and now, something that we have to deal with.

AG 19:32

Yeah.

SG 19:35

I keep my eye on the prize. It's gonna 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 we're, we're okay. Other than fact that, you know, I want to make sock puppets and I'm done organizing the linen closet. [laughs] I mean you 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, a pragmatic optimist, but an optimist.

AG 20:33

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 31, 2020. And thank you and goodbye.

SG 20:55

And the worst thing about all of this people is she's in Cincinnati and I'm-I can't see her and she's so cute. Love you.

AG 21:04

I love you too. Bye.