

COVID-19 Oral History Transcript

Alexa: My name is Alexa Leal, today's date is March 12th 2020. Today we will discuss the experiences of people during the COVID- 19 pandemic. Today we are in San Antonio, Texas and I am interviewing...

Abigail: Abigail Montanez-Rodriguez

Alexa: When were you born?

Abigail: I was born on April 4th, 1990.

Alexa: Where are you from?

Abigail: I'm originally from California.

Alexa: And what made you guys move here to San Antonio, Mrs. Abigail Abigail: My father changed jobs, every 3, 4 to 5 years. So, finally we came to Texas because he was the president to a Bible institute and now he's just a pastor here in San Antonio. But that's what brought us here to Texas.

Alexa: Interesting. What is or was your occupation?

Abigail: My current occupation is I'm the manager of event services here in the Office of the President at A&M-San Antonio. I've been here going on two years in May.

Alexa: When and how did you first hear about the virus, and can you explain your experience during that?

Abigail: I first heard about the virus, probably late January, early February of 2020 in the news but didn't think much of it until I started receiving messages about you know starting to get ready, of people starting to get ready to go to HEB. You know stock your fridges, stock your pantries, stock toilet paper, because it's about to get bad in like the next two weeks. So, that's how I heard about it, I don't watch the news normally, so I wasn't really following up but if anything, it was more news online and you know what people sent you right. But um during that time we didn't really prepare just listening to what was to come.

Alexa: Yes, I understand. Can you explain how has the coronavirus affected you and your family or friends and what has changed over the last year?

Abigail: So, the coronavirus I'd say affected my family in a sense to where we'd typically talk to a lot of people and we'd visit a lot of people especially due to my father's occupation of being a pastor, so it's very forward facing, very interactive with members, church members, or just the community. So that really changed to where everything went virtual for us, so instead of seeing people in person. But in the house, there was one point where we ran out of eggs in March of 2020. Because they were scares just around the whole city. We didn't have eggs or bread. But luckily there were some at the Lackland Air Force base and luckily, we knew somebody but there was a point where we ran out of certain necessity items like that. I know it affected that way; our birthdays looked so much different too. My birthday was in April right when the whole city was called into quarantine, and then our office was in quarantine too. We didn't come into the office, well at least you know myself and a few other coworkers there. We

didn't come into the office so, back to my birthday like I didn't get to go to Puerto Rico, like I wanted to. I had too- that got cancelled and I had to spend it at home but different ways on how that changed with my family and myself.

Alexa: And can you explain how COVID-19 affected your daily or weekly routine, like shopping for groceries and spending time with family?

Abigail: Yeah, so for sure the new rule of having to go to the store and having to wear a mask was definitely an accommodation you know something you had to accommodate too and get used to and see that too. Because you see that and you're just like 'oh my god' –

Alexa: Its real –

Abigail: What times are we living in you know! So that was an adjustment itself, and obviously like I said earlier dealing with the different scarcities that were going on in the city when there was nothing of something, but more of something else. Having to go through curbside being the new normal you know at least for me. Some people still went into the grocery store everyday but for us we had to accommodate to a curbside type of service in order to not get the virus or get exposed more to the virus. So for sure that's just going to the store that affected – It was just very different. And then you know with the gas stations too I mean they didn't do much I don't think. If anything, just seeing more hand sanitizers at all them.

Alexa: Yeah –

Abigail: And all that was different.

Alexa: And you mentioned that a lot of your office was quarantined for a while due to the pandemic were you able to work from home?

Abigail: In April of 2020, actually it was March 26th of 2020, I think it was a Monday. Where they officially told me to stay home, to work from home, and I think I worked from home up until May 1st. So, all of April I was a home trying to work, plan for events that were being cancelled or that were being uh you know repurposed, you know. Or they just looked different. So, I worked from home probably for six weeks, and that was different.

Alexa: And do you know anyone that's been affected with the virus?

Abigail: My father was. My father was affected right before Christmas, like two weeks before Christmas. So that also changed how Christmas pretty much looked for us, this past year. We weren't able to be with him. We weren't able to open gifts with him, so we had to do it like this via Zoom.

Alexa: Aw.

Abigail: And put him in. I stayed with my fiancé at the time, my brother came in from Boston and like – no one could really stay home. Because my mom was taking care of him and didn't want us to get exposed. Especially because they were traveling, my other family. So, we all stayed in my new house, and did Christmas there. We even did our gender reveal party of my now niece that's coming, we had to do that. So, my father did get coronavirus, he's the only one in the immediate family that got it. He got better three weeks or so.

Alexa: How has adapting to the virus affected your work or school responsibilities?

Abigail: So, the coronavirus really affected events here on campus to where we could not for sure meet in a group anymore. Because of how you would probably spread the virus. So, if anything we had to place capacities in classrooms. We had to pretty much minimize how many events we were doing that first semester; I think starting March to May. I think – a lot of events got cancelled and then the big events that we had, like a commencement, you know, and we had festival. That either got rescheduled or just looked different. So no one really experienced a traditional commencement ceremony in 2020. They – you know we did our best to make sure they were still celebrated, appreciated and that you know it still mattered to us that they accomplished this. So, I think we did it during - we did in May, we did a curbside where they drove up, took a picture with the president in front of the backdrop of the whole school. Um, and in December we did something similar, but they actually went into the campus more, and took photos and all that with their families. So, nothings been normal, it hasn't gone to super normal yet. It's just been very different. Now you see people here in the university, we've hired people – their sole job is to clean. Like, literally to sanitize doors – sanitize door handles. To sanitize the bathrooms every 30 minutes to an hour. Um, and obviously we have those that take our – not the vaccine, the uh test for us. And now you know a big part of planning and event is making sure you talk to public health and safety assistance and make sure at your event you have social distancing, and you have hand sanitizer, and you have someone specifically making sure people are distanced. So, that's pretty much how the coronavirus has changed our events, campus, also you know we don't have as many students on campus as before. A lot of it went virtual, which if that's another topic for some but it's really affected our community.

Alexa: Yeah, now moving a little bit away from COVID, we did have a winter storm recently, so were you hit by the February winter storm and did you think about the virus during that time? Why or why not?

Abigail: I was hit by the storm, Sunday night that was February 14th. And it was beautiful at first, you know looking at it and you're like 'oh my gosh it hasn't snowed in Texas since 1985', but then with that comes – we learned that our state wasn't prepared for that. So, we ran – we didn't have electricity, on Monday the 15th it was on and off. On and off. And then Monday night to Tuesday we didn't have any power, at all. So, we were cold, we had to get a bunch of covers and cover up. Then I remember seeing the fast-food lines just pass on the street it was insane. So, we were affected in that way. Then it snowed again Wednesday night which was like the 17th – 16th. And then it snowed all day Thursday, so luckily, we had power that time for sure and we were like always wondering is it going to turn off again or not. I wasn't thinking about the virus because I mean there's no risk because you're at home. You know, you were stuck at home there was nowhere to go out at all. Because the roads were slippery or because you just don't know how to drive in the snow, so you just stay home. So, I personally didn't think much about the virus at that point.

Alexa: Mmh.

Abigail: That was all just about the snow and making sure it passed.

Alexa: Yes, and what would you like to tell future generations about the pandemic?

Abigail: What I would tell future generations about this pandemic is that it was not fun. Although it's easy to look at the negative parts of it, how it wasn't fun, people have died

especially you now I mean not in my circle but in others and friends you know there was a lot negative parts to it. But I think it also helped society as whole you know step back a little bit. Reevaluate what we've been doing wrong. What we need to continue to do or do better to be better for the future generation to come. I think for me personally It was a good opportunity for me to back up a little bit just calm down because we were doing a lot of events back-to-back. It was stressful, and I didn't feel well. I remember right before COVID hit, we were doing three events in one day, on a weekend. Form me, I was like that's a lot. You know but then COVID, and you know I would tell future generation that COVID helped you to just back up a little bit and to focus on probably what's important. Your family that's there, other things you maybe didn't get to touch on. Although there were some bad things that came with it there were some good things that came with it too.

Alexa: Well, thank you so much for doing this interview today. This concludes our oral history. Mrs. Abigail Montanez, you're more than welcome to say goodbye now.

Abigail: Alright bye thank you!

