

Narrator: Said Gonzalez (SG)

Interviewer: Ryan Duffy (RD)

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Place: Monmouth, Oregon

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[Transcribed by Ryan Duffy, June 2022; edited by Donna Sinclair, June 10, 2022]



[Interview begins]

RD: This is Ryan Duffy, conducting my interview on May 24th [2022]. I'm in Hammersly Library, would you please give me your full name, date of birth and place of birth.

SG: Hi, my name is Said Gonzalez. I was born in Mexico. I'm 32 years old, my date of birth is November 20, 1989

RD: Alright, and so to begin this interview I would like to you about your early experiences with Covid, particularly life before Covid as well as when Covid was just beginning. So, would you tell me about your experiences right before Covid began?

SG: Yeah. So, before Covid, I was working at a warehouse and to be more specific it was a moving company, and before that everything was running smoothly, regular job, blah-blah. It was somewhat busy, but everything once Covid hit, so once we found out about Covid, well the first time I heard about Covid it was after we came back from Mexico and we were kinda afraid 'cause we were sick at the time, so we weren't sure if we had Covid or if it was just a regular flu. But anyways, the way it changed at work, at work we were working a lot, but once Covid hit it kinda slowed down. And, uh, so we, at the time, I don't know it was because I was under pressure, or if it was just a little bit of everything, I ended up getting in an accident, and the warehouse, where I crushed my foot with the forklift, and I had to take some time off during Covid. So, it kinda put me out of the picture for a few months, but for me I was at home for the first two or three months of Covid, so I didn't really see the changes happening at the time. But once I was better and I went back to work, instead of doing my regular I was actually doing the sanitizing work, so I was in charge of PPE, anything that had to do with Covid. So, in a certain way, you could say that Covid gave me a different job title with my company.

RD: Okay. So, you talked about working in this warehouse. What were you doing specifically in the warehouse initially?

SG: So, my title was supervisor. So, what I was doing was keeping track of different customers and our customers vary from clinics, schools; I can give you some specific names. We had Kaiser Permanente, we had Mentor Graphics, it just was a variety of different customers. So, to a certain aspect, it kinda changed the workload when it came to the clinics cause the clinics kinda start freaking out, and especially hospitals and they stopped focusing on the general aspects of the hospitals and clinics and they start focusing more on Covid. So, they tried to, they sent everything out of their hospitals so they can put in beds and anything that had to be, anything Covid related. So, it gave us for sure more work. Business for the company was really high. So, I was—sorry I got kind of side-tracked, but going back to my position, I was supervisor and I was

keeping track of every single item that came into the warehouse. I had to add it to a specific program, and I was in charge of billing the customers as well.

RD: You said you were visiting Mexico when you first heard about Covid. Were you visiting family, vacationing?

SG: I was, I went to Mexico for, it was just a getaway, so vacation. We went to Cabo San Lucas for a little bit, but yeah.

RD: Because you said you were born in Mexico. Do you still have family there?

SG: Yeah, I do, actually I do. The part that I am from is a small town in the state called Michoacan, the town is called Jiquilpan and I mean I haven't been there since but it's always nice to go back to your roots.

RD: So, you talked about kind of how your role changed at your work, but like how did the atmosphere at your workplace change when Covid first started, like when you first heard about Covid?

SG: So, everything was really, to a certain extent, political at the time, especially at work, where if you were wearing a face mask it wasn't because you were taking care of yourself or you kinda like, you understood what Covid was, it was because you were either Republican or Democrat at the time. So, to a certain extent, I feel like even though we had a lot of work, and we were supposed to be working together, it kinda make a division among us, meaning that you had those who refused to wear a facemask, and those who were trying to follow rules. And to a certain extent, work was really, what would you call it? It wasn't a good atmosphere at the time, so it was just really tense. It was tense.

RD: Were you a part of that, or were you on the outside trying, like watching everyone else?

SG: I was on the outside to be honest, I didn't want to get involved with this stuff. I had a lot of work, so my main priority was to get things done and move on.

RD: And then, were you in school at the time?

SG: I was not. At the time I was fully employed by Suddath, which was the name of the moving company, and yeah I was just working from 7:00am to 5:30pm every day, Monday to Sunday, so it was really hard times for me when it comes, well, a lot of work.

RD: Right. So, then after, as you know, after a while we eventually moved into the full quarantine period and the shutdown. So, what kind of, what was your experience during that shutdown period?

SG: So I was, [pause] we never closed down the warehouse, I was always there. I was just at home whenever the accident happened to me, and it sucked man [chuckles]. I'm not used to sitting down, so it was really hard for me to just stay at home and wait for my wife, who was working at DHS at the time, just wait for her so she could help me move around and cook and, I don't know, it was just a really weird time. So, I stayed home but it wasn't because of Covid, it was more because of my accident, so I can maybe relate to that cause I wasn't able to leave my, my house, but it didn't really affect me in a way that I had to stay because of Covid.

RD: So you were staying at home a lot did, how did that affect your, I mean, even if it wasn't because the shutdown specifically, it must have had an impact, like how did that impact your personal life?

SG: Oh it did, it did man, it. I like to play soccer so I like to be active. So it, I feel to a certain extent I want to say I was under depression for a little bit. I started eating a lot, playing video games, I wasn't really seeing friends so, I can relate to how people could get depressed just by being at home. So, it affected me emotionally, physically too because I started gaining weight, I wasn't doing much. So, I can only imagine what people went through when they had to stay home because they had some sort of compromised immune system. So, it sucks, it was boring and at the same time I felt like a lot of people did it because they were trying to be responsible for their family members, so I just kinda, I can see how they, they were just trying to be responsible.

RD: And then after your injury, did you go back to work at the warehouse?

SG: Yeah, I went back to the warehouse. [chuckle] Funny thing, I wasn't allowed to drive the forklift for a month, I was put on timeout for a little bit, but like I said I was put on their, I was still a supervisor but my [pause] responsibilities changed. I became one of the Covid, in charge of making sure everyone had their proper equipment, make sure the trucks, everything was prepared. As a company, you have to follow certain protocols when it comes to Covid and sanitizing. So I was in charge of the sanitizing task for the company. So, it was, it was something different so.

RD: I mean did you enjoy that work, or did you prefer what you were doing before Covid?

SG: I, yeah I didn't enjoy that, those, the task of cleaning, I hated until this moment. I truly enjoyed driving the forklift, communicating with the customers, so it affected me where I had to eventually change jobs 'cause I wasn't doing what I liked.

RD: You said before that there was a sort of political divide in the warehouse. Did you sort of feel like, now having to be the guy enforcing the rules you sort of, like how did that feel, like how did that change anything in your lifestyle in the warehouse?

SG: Yeah, yeah so, I made it clear since the beginning that it, for me, wasn't really about politics, it was I had to follow the rules. I'm in charge of this, so you either follow the rules, you have to wear a mask. At the time we were wearing gloves as well, so, it was a little bit extra, but rules are rules. I had to send home a few [laughs] people, but at the end of the day they understand a job is about the job and you had to follow the rules. And the thing is, I always tried to act professional, I never got, I never got involved with any sort of the dispute of right side or left side, it just, it was only work.

RD: And so, you're here now, so you started at Western during the Covid shutdown?

SG: So, no actually this is my first year so I started Western in 2021, yeah.

RD: So right at the end of the shut...

SG: 2021, yeah so right at the end of the shutdown. But I still experienced Zoom classes which I thought it was kinda weird cause I'm used to going to classes and getting a regular education and now seeing everything through Zoom it's just kinda weird, it took me a while to adapt.

RD: What made you want to come back to school. Was it something about Covid?

SG: So, what made me come back to school was the different job title. So, when I was back with Suddath, which is a moving company, I applied for a DHS, but now installing cubicles, and I worked there for a year, it didn't work out. I met some wonderful people at a restaurant and we started talking and the guy that I was talking to, he ended up being one of the administrators for McNary. I told him about what my dream job would be. I told him I wanted to be an English, yeah English as a second language teacher one day cause I'm a former ELD student which is an English language development, teacher, I have learned a lot and that's what made me come to Western.

RD: And you said it was sort of, so you, I mean how was that transition from going from not going to school at all to all of a sudden having to come to school and its Covid restrictions?

SG: I mean, I don't know any difference because I, with the Covid restrictions, I wasn't going to school before Covid, so for me it was really easy to adapt to those rules, 'cause, I mean...

RD: 'Cause it was probably a lot different from when you went to school, like, originally in high school. So, like, things have changed.

SG: Oh yeah, oh yeah definitely, everything is different now and it's just. I tried to go to college when I was 19, and my first thing that I saw was I was the youngest and it was kinda weird seeing older people in the same classroom, but now that I came back 10 years later it's all the way around, it's the opposite. I'm the oldest in the classroom and my peers are the youngest so, I mean it's just one observation that I have.

RD: So you said that you wanted to be an English, figured out you want to be an English teacher and you started pursuing that sort of path. Was that something that happened to you because of Covid because you were, like, shut in all the time, or was it something that you had always thought about, like what brought about your desire, like your interest, your reasoning to come back?

SG: So, I started working as an Instructional Assistant at McNary, and I didn't know what I wanted. I, like, honestly I just want to get out of the warehouse life. It was too physical, it was just a lot going on in there so I decided to try something new. I come from a family of teachers in Mexico, so its always been in the back of my head, being a teacher, and I try to be, I try to be helpful, I try to help my community and I felt like all my teachers from high school and middle school helped me out to kind of like, overcome the language barrier and the, what's the other word? Kind of the cultural barrier and I just want to give back to my community and I saw the opportunity. The guy who I talked to at the restaurant offered me a job as an IA because I was bilingual. I took it, and after 3 months they offered me an ELD position, just, the thing that I had to do is go back to school and get my Bachelor's within two years, so. And this is, here I am now.

RD: So, to go back to Covid specifically, did you ever have any experience getting Covid?

SG: I had Covid, yeah, I had Covid actually a few months ago [chuckles]. It was during work, we decided to go to a restaurant after hours and sure enough, the person that I went to the restaurant with ended up having Covid. Three days later, I experienced the symptoms, and I had to stay at home for two weeks. Yep.

RD: What was that experience like, especially cause you talked about maybe sorta being able to feel the relation having an injury. Like, how did it compare?

SG: Oh man, this was a completely different experience 'cause I was actually sick, I was in bed for four days. It was kinda like the flu, I was tired, I was sneezing a lot, I wasn't hungry, I was lethargic, so it was completely different. I was actually sleeping most of the time.

RD: How about the rest of your, were you living with your family at the time?

SG: I currently live with my wife. It's just my wife and I, so it was just us two, so she got lucky and she didn't get Covid. She got tested a few times before she could go back to work and she just has a really strong immune system I guess, 'cause she didn't have to deal with Covid at all. I'm the one who had to isolate and just watch movies and sleep most of the time.

RD: Then, how did the two of you respond to the Covid policies? Did you travel at all during Covid, during the Covid shutdown?

SG: Uh, no we, we stayed here, we stayed local, and whenever we went out, we tried to be cautious about it because of my family. My dad has some health issues, so I had to [inaudible] I try to be cautious about it. But yeah, we tried to follow the rules, but to a certain extent, I mean, if we think it's a little bit too extreme, we do our research and then try to, try to stay healthy.

RD: What about in the day-to-day life, you know, going shopping and doing any sort of, like, car work or anything like that. How were those sorts of things?

SG: Right now or during Covid?

RD: During the Covid shutdown.

SG: Covid shutdown. So, it was, I remember actually it being kinda like, scary, and risky cause I remember actually trying to go to Costco and it was empty which is something weird to see at the Costco store, you know. Whenever you go to Costco, it's like you have to get ready to go to work, you go there you wander around, you grab a lot of things. But during Covid it was really empty. Costco was empty and it was kinda like in and out, so it was good in certain aspects cause you didn't see a lot of people in there. However, whenever they had those shortages on certain items like toilets, yeah, what's it called, sorry I'm kinda tired...

RD: Toilet paper?

SG: Toilet paper. What was the other item? Toilet paper and something else. Hand sanitizer, and all this stuff. It was just kinda crazy to believe, to see actually running out of stuff that you think you're going to have available at all times.

RD: Did the Covid shutdown create any sort of, like, stress between you and your wife?

SG: No, actually no, no I don't think so no, no I mean it was just normal things. Yeah, I don't think it did, no.

RD: And then, so when the world started opening back up, you know, the Covid vaccine had just been out, were you nervous at all about the vaccine? Were you concerned?

SG: I was not actually, I was all for it. My sister-in-law, she's a doctor so she was, I always relied on her, like, what should I do, should I wait, what is the research doing? So, anything that was coming up, she was my main source. She would kinda like scaffold it for me and explain what it meant and then, yeah. She was my main source. So, nah I wasn't scared, I got it right away.

RD: How did you go about the, oh the general opening up of the city and of the world?

SG: Oh, man. It was needed, but I don't know, I felt like it took a little bit too long. So, I think it could have been opened earlier.

RD: What do you mean?

SG: Like the time, the time, there was the, it took for the stores to get back in business. I think it should have been done earlier. But I understand how certain people weren't following rules, so I can understand why it took longer.

RD: What about opening up back where you were working? How did that sort of change the way you, your job as an assistant?

SG: So, at the time I was kinda running a project as an IA. They had something kind of like a Study Hall, and we had a limit of five people, five students every two hours. So, we were only allowed to see 15 students per day, cause I was working six hours at the time. So, it was really limited, and people were actually [pause] encouraging their kids to go back to school because I feel, they were tired of their kids. They wanted them out of the house. So, definitely Covid, the students wanted to be out of the home, too. So, me working as an IA started working with 15 students and then, as time went by, once it went back into business, working with 30 kids, it made it really hard for me cause I didn't have enough experience, so. But, it was fine, it was something that had to happen and the students seemed ready to get out of their house and they were actually willing to work and do homework. So, it was kinda funny seeing them trying to do assignments and do classwork.

RD: At the same time working with these kids, you're in school, so how was school, like Western opening back up for you?

SG: So at the time I wasn't going to Western, when it fully went back into business. But when I started coming to school, myself, going to Western, and McNary high school. It was kinda crazy seeing two different things where, at high school you implement the rules, you encourage students to wear the face masks. That was the biggest issue that we had at school, making sure the students were following the rules, making sure they had the face masks on, making sure they use hand sanitizer, versus here at Western. Here, you assume that you're with people who are adults and they follow the rules and to a certain extent, it's a private school, too. So, if they have rules, they have to follow them so it was nice to be at school where everyone is following the rules versus at work, you had to deal with little kids and you have to force them to follow the rules.

RD: Were you at all nervous, at all worried you might, someone might give you Covid again?

SG: No, no, not really I wasn't. I was at a time where, no, for me was kinda like a flu, but no, I got lucky I guess, but no I wasn't afraid of getting it again. But now it's different though, it's truly different because my wife is pregnant so I have to take care of myself and I have to take care of her. So, it's definitely now a completely different perspective towards Covid where I have to take care of me, and I have to protect my wife.

RD: So then, there's been a lot of, there's a lot of negative around Covid. Did you have any positive experiences during Covid?

SG: [inhale] I played a lot of video games. [laughs] You know, I played a lot of video games, I watched video games. I mean, going to the store and being able to go in and out fast, I think that was pretty cool. Another thing, I mean I spent a lot of time with my wife, so it was alright, it was good. I think that's a positive, I had a lot of time for myself, so I think I can, that was a positive thing, that I spent time with myself pretty much.

RD: Do you think you learned something about yourself during Covid?

SG: Yeah, that I can't, I can't stand still, that's the main thing. I learned that I have to be doing something and I like making plans and I feel like not being able to make plans at the time kind of put me into depression for a little bit. Not being able to know what's going to happen in a month or so.

RD: So, during Covid there was a lot of, like, protests and other political activity. Were you involved with anything like that?

SG: I was, I was, I went to watch one, the one at the Salem capital, I can't remember exactly the date but it was during springtime, I think. I remember wearing my face mask and I remember seeing a lot of people not wearing face masks, at the time. I think this was pre-vaccine, so it was kinda scary at the time. But yeah, I saw a few, I saw a few rallies, but nothing big. Other than, it's just, not a few sorry, just one, the one in Salem. That's the only one that I saw. It was pretty calm, not much happened, honestly. I took my little nephews and my little sister with me so it wasn't a lot, it wasn't much. Not a lot was going on.

RD: What made you want to go out to the rally then?

SG: Curious. I was curious about what's going on and I was trying to inform myself about what was really going on, and I like to see with my eyes versus people telling me what really is going on. So, I just wanted to find out for myself what was really going on Downtown.

RD: So what were some of the biggest changes you think Covid had on you, overall?

SG: Overall. Oh man. I mean, a lot of changes went during Covid for myself. I had, I changed, I went to two different jobs, I got promoted, my wife is expecting. Covid has been a lot of changes for myself. So, I can say Covid impacted me in a positive way. Not necessarily because of Covid, it's just the things that are happening around me. Yeah, it's just the things that, actually yeah, thanks to Covid I can appreciate my family more. Because of my dad's health issues I wasn't able to see him for a really long time, so once we got vaccinated, I was able to see my dad, so it made me appreciate those little moments with the family that you have, and that I missed because of Covid.

RD: So, you said you were expecting, it that something, where did the decision come from, was Covid ever a concern when you decided to have kids? Was there ever a worry about, what Covid, like birthing a child, having a child in a Covid world?

SG: It did, it did, it did. So, at the time we didn't really have plans to have a kid. This is recent, but after the vaccine and seeing the progress of the world moving forward and how it's getting better, we didn't really have any concerns. It's just about us being healthy, just with the normal stuff. I mean, if anything happens, we just have to adapt and try to see the positive way of Covid.

RD: And how about it this more, in this more current time how do you feel about Covid, like right now? Are you still concerned? Do you have any concerns?

SG: I don't have any concerns right now. I mean, I feel like to a certain extent I feel like it's kinda, it's over, and I don't realize we're still in the Covid era until I go to certain places and I

see bottles of hand sanitizer still out there, or [pause] actually whenever I go to a clinic they're always, they require face masks so, that's the only time I really see what takes me back to Covid times, whenever I go to a clinic or a hospital. But other than that I feel like we're, I don't want to say Covid free era, but it's not two years ago.

RD: So, looking back on Covid what were some of the craziest events or most memorable things you remember happening? Either for you or in the world at large?

SG: Honestly, I never thought I would go through a pandemic, man, [laughs] just seeing everyone getting sick and the news. So one thing, I wasn't really ever into news, so now after Covid and all the news and blah blah, I started watching more news about what's going on and whatnot. And actually, because we got curious, and I feel like [pause] the first thing that I saw was Covid hit New York, it kinda like made us go to New York, 'cause we saw the buildings and we saw, it was like we should go, even though it was in the negative way, it kinda wonder how New York was. So, it kinda like, made us appreciate the not being able to go and whenever we got the freedom of going out we decided to just go out to New York and explore more. So, one I said that thanks to Covid I watched the news more and thanks to Covid I go out more often. I appreciate going out to places I couldn't go before.

RD: Alright. So overall, what do you think the Covid experience meant for you?

SG: Man, Covid experience. What do you mean, like in a positive way or a negative way or?

RD: Any way. I mean how do you view the Covid experience as a whole, and what does it mean to you?

SG: I mean, for me Covid was more kinda like eye-opening for making sure you're taking care of yourself in a healthy way, making sure you're basically, you never know when you can run into a sickness. Just make sure you're prepared in a way that you're working out, you're somewhat healthy 'cause you never know when you can get sick or you never know what might be around the corner. So, to a certain extent it made me skeptical because you never know when you could get sick and even though I didn't really get sick, it might affect others, like in this instance my family, my dad. So, it kinda makes me be more healthy.

RD: Then, do you have anything else you would like to bring up or talk about, relating to Covid?

SG: Uh, relating to Covid, it's just, I made a lot of friends through video games, and I didn't even know it was in Salem. So, I met different people from Salem thanks to video games and after that we started playing more soccer and going out. So, thanks to Covid, I made new friends and I try to see things the positive, the positive aspect of things and I think that Covid made me

better, in a way that I have a better job, working on myself in school, I'm starting a new family, and it makes me appreciate those moments with my family. And I think, thanks to Covid I guess you could say, I was more aware of my surroundings and what's really important for myself and what's really unimportant.

RD: Alright, well thank you for conducting this interview with me today.

SG: No, thank you, it's a pleasure.

RD: Alright.

[Interview Ends]