

Transcript of Interview with George Martinez by Kathryn Jue

Interviewee: George Martinez

Interviewer: Kathryn Jue

Date: 03/31/2021

Location (Interviewee): Stanton, California

Location (Interviewer): Orange, California

Transcriber: Kathryn Jue

Abstract:

I recorded this oral history with 36 year old George Martinez, who identifies as male and American Mexican. He tested positive for COVID-19 in January 2021 and shared the physical and emotional impact of having COVID-19.

George Martinez 0:00

Yeah, just give her a phone.

Kathryn Jue 0:05

Oh, go ahead. You're good.

GM 0:06

Yep, I can see.

KJ 0:07

Okay. Um, so we're recording. Now, this is just an audio recording. So don't worry, don't worry if anyone walks in the background or anything, they won't be on the recording. It's just an audio recording.

GM 0:17

Okay.

KJ 0:18

So my name is Katy Jue, and I'm an intern with the COVID-19 archive at Arizona State University. The date is March 31, 2021. And it is 6:07pm. Pacific Standard Time. And I'm speaking with George Martinez. Um, I would like to ask you some questions about your pandemic experience. But before I do, I would like to take. Excuse me, I would like to ask for your consent to record your response for the COVID-19 Archive. The COVID-19 archive is a digital archive at Arizona State University that is collecting pandemic experiences. Do I have your consent to record your responses and add them to the archive with your name?

GM 0:53

Yes, you have my consent.

KJ 0:54

Thank you. First, just for some background. Can you tell us your name, gender, age, race and occupation, and I can repeat any of those. But basically your background info.

GM 1:07

My name is George Martinez. I am 36 years old. Uh, I'm an American. I don't know if you asked for nationality. What else? What else did you need to do?

KJ 1:19

And then do you do identify as a race or ethnicity? Or just American?

GM 1:23

Oh, yes. I am Hispanic, Mexican by origin, I suppose. Yeah.

KJ 1:29

And then (talking at same time). I'm so sorry. Go ahead.

GM 1:32

No. Yeah. So just to clear it up. I'm an American, but my parents are Mexican. So I'm an American, Mexican.

KJ 1:37

Thank you. And then what, what's your occupation?

GM 1:41

I work security. I'm a security professional, I guess.

KJ 1:44

Great, thank you. So I'm going to start by asking you some background about just kind of what your life was like, prior to the pandemic, just to give some context. So if you can tell me a little bit about your family, you know, where you live. And like, if you were to describe your average week, before the pandemic happened, like, what would that have looked like.

GM 2:06

Um, it was pretty busy, I worked full time job, my wife works a full time job. And then the kids attend school, and my eldest for, for a long period for I think, for about maybe 10 hours a day? And then we have the little one who goes to school full time also. So I mean, everyone has something to do. My wife works in the medical field, (of camera wife inaudible comment) so sorry, in the dental field, so she encounters all kinds of people from all kinds of races and locations. And, um, and I my job also at Disneyland. I mean, people from all over the world. So on any given day, I could talk to hundreds or thousands of people at once in one time, you know, so it was it was a very people oriented lifestyle, I think.

KJ 2:59

Thank you. Thank you so much. Um, how did your average week change or not change once the pandemic started?

GM 3:06

Well, specifically, for my line of duty, it's all entertainment. And uh, obviously, all that stuff just wasn't worth keeping open during the pandemic. So they closed it. And uh, they like to point out that it's the only time they've ever done it. They push that a lot on us, like, you know, this is it, you know, they don't want us to panic. But the truth is, they'll fight tooth and nail to keep it open, but they just, it was just too dangerous. So I automatically that portion of my life shut down for an entire year, I'm still not back to work, you know. Um. So it impacted me, I'd say the m-, I don't want to sound selfish but it probably the most out of everyone here because also no work. And then I have to turn into a teacher overnight, for the whole year. For both of them basically. The older one can kind of get along by herself. But the young one definitely needs attention, you know, the entire school day. Um. So it's definitely been an adjustment.

KJ 4:04

Have schools reopened for your kids yet, or?

GM 4:08

Semi, so they're on the eldest is, Jamie is on a on a go today pattern and not go to the next day, kind of, every other day. The little one only goes to school for four hours a day, maybe three hours. Um. So they're definitely not back to normal. We're still waiting for them to get the ball rolling on that.

KJ 4:30

Thank you. And then since the bulk of this interview is about, um, your COVID-19 infection, could you describe your overall health, um, prior to contracting COVID-19?

GM 4:43

Yeah, well, I mean, personally, I've been kind of like on a weight loss mission. And, uh, that really impacted it because I gained back almost 25 pounds just in that one year of having my life changed because the gym closes, work closes, so I'm stuck at home literally 20 hours a day, you know, um, so that before that I had a very active, I was well on my way to being way healthier, probably the healthiest I've been in a long time. Um. And so I definitely was impacted by that kind of set me back. all that hard work I have put in for like the last two years. Yeah.

KJ 5:25

Thank you. Thank you for sharing that. Um, so we're going to move to the actual, um, I guess, contracting of COVID-19. So, um, do you know that if you were sorry, can you pinpoint the date that you knew you had COVID-19? Like, did you get a positive test or something like that?

GM 5:43

(Sigh) So I guess, like, everyone, I have a story of where I thought I had it before. Um, and that was in late December. I could have sworn that I had some kind of sickness I never had, um but officially diagnosed with it, it wasn't until February something I believe. [Wife off camera: No, it was January 2. For you.] Okay. So early January, thanks to the wife that she has all the info. So early January when I was diagnosed with it. But, um, so that so yes, early January would be when I knew that I had it officially.

KJ 6:23

And then you were saying that you felt like you had something you've never had before in December? Could you describe what that was? What made you think like, you might have something?

GM 6:32

Um, because I don't tend to get sick that much. Um. Or at but when I do get sick, I get sick hard. Um, but that one in particular was pretty bad. I remember I had the shakes. Um cold sweats. Uh, so I don't know what, I mean. It felt almost foreign, that that type of sickness that that went earlier. But once I had the COVID then I realized like, Oh, no, this is what they're talking about. Because the the symptoms were spot on for me. A lot of the physical ones were. Yeah.

KJ 7:10

And then Could you describe what those physical symptoms you had with the COVID were?

GM 7:14

Sure. So cold sweats. body aches. Uh, um. What else? Oh, no, no loss of sense. or smell and taste. Uh, I'd sleep all day. You know, so it was pretty pretty, pretty textbook stuff for me. And then they worsened, I don't know if you want to want me to go into it already.

KJ 7:43

Um. Yeah, if you just want to go through the progression of the whole thing. That's fine.

GM 7:48

Yes. So it started, it started off. We took Well, a lot, we took care of ourselves. And we were very careful. We were very proud of that. Because we were like, washing hands disinfected, make sure we had masks on. And then someone came in the house that wasn't that careful. Then the story, we all got sick. And it started to progress with the body aches and the pain, but I would tell people, but I but I don't have any respiratory issues. So I'm good. I'm good. And it wasn't until maybe like two weeks at the end of two weeks, I think of being sick with it that the respiratory issues started. And they got really bad really fast. Um, I couldn't do normal ordinary things without running out of breath, and just going into coughing hazes and then the coughing continued through the night. And it was just consistent and you know, headaches from coughing so much, your throat hurts and so there's all this aggravated pain. Until one day it got to the point where I couldn't breathe. There was no space to breathe in between coughs so I just let my wife know that we got to go hospital. Like I knew any worse than this, I can't handle it here at home I need to I need to go so we drove there coughing in a haze just terrible couldn't breathe. And we're outside the the emergency room we were indirectly and coughing outside people around we're getting all scared like, they're like this, you need to calm down, but my body just would not stop and it was just uh, crying. Un- just like tears, tears, a lot of tears. It was pretty scary. And then they, they, in and they they went ahead and admitted me. And I spent three days in the ER in the, uh, COVID wing, under close supervision of the nurses and stuff. With a lot of oxygen, so I didn't get bad enough to where they, I had to be on a, uh, respirat-, respirator. But they did hook me up to oxygen immediately and gave me a plasma to help the blood flow and blood oxygen levels and all that stuff

KJ 9:56

And then um. Could you describe anything that you remember from your hospitalization from those three days? Like, were you conscious? Were you aware of what was happening? Or?

GM 10:09

Um. I'm a very emotional person, like, deep down, like I'm very attached to, like, I take moments and very seriously, and the one thing I thought, and I remember telling my wife is that it felt terrible. Like I was in terrible pain. And I was nowhere near as bad as the worst cases, the nurses kept telling me like, Oh, you feel bad, but look, like you're in the second chapter. Like, if you go to the third, like, trust me, you're, you're, you're, you're, you're fine, right? They keep telling you're gonna be okay. And I were feeling so sad to think like, Oh, these, this is the way that, this is, this is gonna be the last thing this person feels is this sick. This, this hurt this in pain. And that just made me really sad. So I just kind, I don't know, if it's part of the COVID thing, but like a little bit of. I definitely had depression. I think for like a week. I was just really in my head about thinking like, all these are going to be the final moments of some people, you know, and that made me really sad. That is one of the things I walked away with, with the experience thinking like, oh, death is real. And some people have a really bad time when they die. You know? So I don't know where to follow that. But that's what I walked away with.

KJ 11:29

Yeah, thank you. That's.

GM 11:30

Yeah.

KJ 11:31

Thank you. Um, and just, um, more kinda, I guess, logistical question. Um, had you ever been hospitalized or to a hospital prior to COVID? Like, have you ever visited someone in a hospital? Have you been to a hospital before?

GM 11:48

I mean, I've been there for births.

KJ 11:50

Okay.

GM 11:50

I've been here for something like that. I'm in the military, I did have a small respiratory issue. But that was just because I got a lot of dust in my lungs

KJ 12:00

Oh okay.

GM 12:00

during a training exercise. Outside of that, just for your conventional, you know, like, I cut myself or stuff like that when I was younger, but never under like care. Yeah.

KJ 12:11

Okay, um, did you notice anything? for anyone who's? Who's going to listen to this? Who didn't go to the hospital during the pandemic? Was there anything noticeably different? Like when you walked into the hospital? Did it look like? Were the people in different protective gear? Or were you more spaced out? Or were you so sick that and depressed that you were like, I didn't even pay attention to that?

GM 12:36

No, I'm also very aware of my surroundings at all times, I like to think that it's important for me to be like, okay, where am I? It kind of helps me stabilize myself. So the hospital was definitely something I noticed. Um, and you got to remember this this early January. So wild rush, just, the pandemic is just going right. And absolutely, everyone took the precautions. At least at the hospital, I went, they were hazmat suits and masks and respirators on their back. Like they were definitely, uh. They were aware what they of, what they were, how dangerous it was, what they were fighting. And that is something I absolutely did notice compared to the last time I've been there, you know, they were very, it sounds weird, but it was very medical. It was like very surgical. The way they were handling it, at least at that particular hospital. I went to.

KJ 13:31

Thank you. Um, so moving, you kind of started talking about this, but I'm gonna just ask you again, in case different things come to your mind.

GM 13:39

Okay

KJ 13:39

Um, is there anything else you want to add about how COVID-19 impacted you physically? We'll go to physically first.

GM 13:49

Physically, I'm still not 100% It's been two. [Wife off camera] I'm sorry. [Wife off camera "Almost three months"] It's been almost a month as my hospital visit. [Wife off camera "Almost three months."] I'm sorry. [Converses with wife off camera] I'm sorry. It's been almost three months since the hospital visit. Yeah, I'm still not 100% I still have a minor respiratory issues. I still catch myself catching my breath more often than I used to before. But physically, strength wise, I feel pretty good. I think I've got lucky on the recovery. Um. But physically, I'd say the respiratory issues still remain. So I'll let you know. When they go away.

KJ 14:34

Thank you. Um, do you have the some people talk about, um, not getting their sense of smell and taste back? Or?

GM 14:42

you get that back? Or I did. It took a while. It took maybe like a week. Um, I know for other people it took much longer than that to get theirs back. But I, I, would say I got it. I got it back. 100%

KJ 14:55

Thank you, um, and then moving to the emotional and mental aspect. One of the things

GM 15:00

Yeah.

KJ 15:00

that a lot of people are, or people have been reporting of kind of the mental impact, or an emotional of, of COVID. And I just didn't know if there's anything more you already kind of shared about the

GM 15:15

The emot-

KJ 15:15

Yeah.

GM 15:16

I think that's where it's gonna, where I'm going to remember it more, it's going to be through the emotional scarring. And I don't want to sound dramatic, but it's like, living a life that requires you to be around just humans to be in, stuck at home for an entire year. That that dynamic that change in my lifestyle really affected me more than I thought it was going to be honest. Because I, even when they when that when I you know, when it was just normal times, I never really enjoyed being around people. It wasn't something like, Yeah, let's go be around. But now that I was around, like zero adults, for a whole year, basically, until my wife got home from work, you know, um, it's been really challenging to like, uh, keep up certain skills, social skills, and I get nervous, honestly, around a lot of people now, when I'm, well now that I'm stepping back in, if there's like, a large crowd, I start to get anxious. Um, I people watch a lot more. I don't know why. Uh. It's I don't know where that's coming from. I think it's just from the lack of Oh, my God, I haven't seen a person, in so long. (Laughs) You know? But, so that's the kind of stuff and the alone time. Also, you know, I think a lot of time is good, but too much a long time can kind of drive you nuts. And it also you just kind of it shows you like who you are when no one's watching kind of thing. You know what I mean? And uh, uh, so there has been a daunting experience to say the least, you know? Yeah. eye opening experience, for sure.

KJ 17:02

Thank you. Um, and then you mentioned um, at the beginning of the interview that you haven't worked since, basically, since Disney closed, right?

GM 17:16

That's right.

KJ 17:16

I didn't know if there's anything you wanted to add about the impact on your your livelihood, or economic situation, basically, politely, are you getting paid?

GM 17:28

I'm getting paid. So luckily, I work for, like, literally the biggest company on the planet, right. So they have the means, and the skill in the setup already. So I am on furlough. So I still get paid, uh, unemployment benefits, plus all the other bonuses, and they continue to pay my insurance, and my schooling. So Disney has us covered, I'm lucky in that aspect. Of course, I'm not making as much as I would if I was working a regular wage, I read the position and I went to work I was making more than than I am now. Um, so on that aspect, it has been, it has been a little rough, but we may just, and honestly, all the government help has been, has been a real lifesaver for us. It's really helped us kind of stay afloat is the all the extra cash they've been giving us, you know, with the unemployment, and then the stimulus checks and stuff like that. So we've been making do, but yes, the income has not been the same since I, since I last worked. [Kid background noise].

KJ 18:36

Thank you. And then, um, describe if there's anything to add, I know you've probably answered a lot of this, but describe how your COVID-19 infection. So not just the pandemic year, but like being sick itself. Um. What kind of impact did that have on like your family or your family life?

GM 18:57

I mean, during the pandemic, I kind of sat we talked, and I told them, honestly, I can't protect you. Like, if you're going to get sick, you're going to get sick, we're basically we're playing Russian roulette out there, like any anything you touch could get it or you saw, you know, so at this point, we were just prepared to be sick. And we were really kind of doing our best to not get sick. Um, I know that I probably will consider wearing masks around crowds for a while even after they say it's okay. I know I'll definitely be more careful washing my hands. Um, I'll definitely listen to the science you know what I'm saying? Like that's also another thing that that show me like, oh, when America wants to get some done, they're going to get it done in the vaccines. At least they got it, you know what I'm saying? And so that also kind of a little bright light at the end of the tunnel kind of thing like oh yeah, my country can do some things that are beneficial for us. So you know, this doesn't look as dark. The future doesn't look as bad, you know. So I think as an adult, you kind of process things in a different light than children or teenagers. And that's also something that I was really happy about that the, the kids were basically okay. Right? Because there was very minimal the infection rate on children. So that was a big relief for me. Like, once I found that out, like, oh, it doesn't affect kids. Oh, I was like, Oh, my God, this is great. You know, um, that was, I think my number one fear was like, Oh, my God, my kid's gonna get sick. And there's nothing I can do about it. You know? So I definitely appreciate different things now, you know, it's taught me a couple of lessons, I think that that are good to kind of go forward with. Yeah.

KJ 20:49

Thank you. Um, you actually, you, you segue so well, you've naturally segued into the last part of this, which is what I call COVID reflection, so thank you. You have, you actually kind of already started to answer this, but I'll ask it anyway, if there's anything you want to add? Are there any changes that you foresee to your behavior? After having COVID-19? And after this pandemic, which I know you already just kind of talked about?

GM 21:18

Yeah, no. And it's, I think, I think there are gonna be changes that I will seriously consider, like, Hey, we're going to a baseball game, boom, you know, just bring masks like you never know, you know, that. I think that will also be something that will also a lot of Americans like are going to think that way. And I think like, the accepting of masks is going to be different in our society now. And also, a probably dining outdoors will probably happen a lot more. But the one thing that that really was an eye opener for me was that companies now are going to realize they don't need to rent office space. So it's going to change. The reason I bring that up is this is going to change the way we go to work. So that's going to affect my kids coming up, like what are they going to do? What we're going to look like to them? When they're my age, like they're going to be digitally at home? You know, right? Uh. So that was just something that I thought was very interesting. Like, all these companies don't have to waste on over space, right, like an overhead, they just do from home. So society will probably be changed by that. I think that's kind of cool.

KJ 22:29

Yeah. Oh, yeah. Thank you. Um, and then, since you did have COVID, if you were to talk to someone who never contracted COVID, what kinds of things would you you know, I don't know, want them to know? Or if you had a chance to talk to someone who never had COVID? Or, um, you know, there's a lot of, uh, there's a lot of skeptics about COVID-19. And, um, since you did have it, what what kinds of things might you say to someone who said, Oh, it wasn't that bad?

GM 23:05

Um, I would first let them know that it's absolutely true. And it's real. Like, it's, it's, it's a real thing, it's happening, right? And also, I would beg them to kind of open their mind a little bit kind of outside of their own safety in person to see that there's like thousands and thousands of people that died from this disorder, it's not a joke. And, and emphasize the importance of just wanting to be a good person. And in times like this, whether it be by wearing a mask, or just not going outside of you, just by doing a minimal things. It's so important to just be there for other human beings. In this time, when we're all going through this together, there's not one human in the world that, uh, wasn't affected by this, right? Modern society almost crumbled. So it's a reality it's been I would take them to kind of consider that, uh, in the way that they nonchalantly just walk through life, kind of like all if it's not affecting me personally, then it doesn't matter to me, you know? Um. So that's probably the biggest thing that that I would want them to consider is like, its actual true. So it's affecting human lives. People are dying. People are losing sons, moms, father, you know, it's it's, it's a real tragedy. So act accordingly.

KJ 24:36

Thank you. And then this question is a follow up question based on your identifying identification as American, Mexican or Mexican American. Um. In California throughout this whole pandemic, there have been a lot of reports of different obstacles for the Latino community for being able to access COVID testing, uh, earlier. And now even with the vaccines, there's reports that the vaccines are not going out equitably.

GM 25:07

Mmm-hmm.

KJ 25:08

Among the different demographic groups of California. Is this something you've experienced or no?

GM 25:17

So did I personally, personally no. So I went, the day I went, when I had the issue, they treated me they gave me a bed. They didn't deny my bed, they didn't ask me, are you? Are you a citizen? Nope. I mean, but I had also I had all my proper documentation. So I personally didn't experience anything, I believe to be like, special treatment, or different treatment or less treatment by being Hispanic. Um. Maybe I was lucky in that aspect, or I did not personally experience that. Uh, I can understand the panic, you know, of wanting to being sick and not knowing how to get the help you need. So, so I'm sorry, your question was, did I experience it? Right?

KJ 26:08

Yeah, it was just if that had been your experience, or no if that wasn't yours? Okay.

GM 26:12

No, yeah. Yeah. Not mine. No, that wasn't my.

KJ 26:15

Great. Thank you. And then, um, there's really just one more question. And it's. Oh, I'm sorry. You kind of answered both of these. But I'm going to ask you anyway, because I asked everyone these two questions.

GM 26:26

Okay.

KJ 26:26

But even though you clearly already answered them, um, has your opinion on mask wearing or vaccines changed because you had COVID-19?

GM 26:38

So my opinion didn't change. Because if a doctor tells me wear a mask, I'm gonna wear a mask. If a doctor tells me here's the vaccine that's for it. I mean, George, I believe doctors, like I just I don't know, I'm crazy like that. I just happen to believe what medical professional stuff, right? So it hasn't changed that what has changed is my aspect of knowing that if the government wanted to, we could be banging out these, the-. Oh, for all types of diseases, right? And in record setting time, so why not? Like, that's the thing that that's one thing that my eyes were open to like, Oh, you have the capabilities, the red tapes just there for you to make money. Like that is one thing I did walk away with, like, oh, not realizing that the government can very well do these things if they wanted to. If there's an incentive, they can get stuff done really fast. You know? Yeah.

KJ 27:32

Thank you. And then finally, the conclusion kind of catch all question. Is there anything else at all about having COVID-19 that you wish people knew?

GM 27:49

Wish people knew?

KJ 27:51

Or anything else you want to share that I didn't ask about?

GM 27:53

I would just emphasize, if. Yeah, I would just emphasize how contagious it really is. And how easy it is to, the entire house got sick with it, the minute one of us, it spread like wildfire in this in this house. So I can't imagine a stadium full of people. Right? That's, that's insane to me. So that is what I would emphasize is how truly contagious and dangerous of a virus it was. For all the people in the future that are watching or listening to this, you know, like it was it was bad. You know, we're we're used to a certain lifestyle and it just tore us apart. It just how genuine of a disease it is, you know? Of a virus it is. That's what I would stress.

KJ 28:41

Thank you. Um, if, if there's nothing else you want to share, I'll stop the recording. But if there's anything else that popped into your head, let me give you a moment just in case.

GM 28:50

No, no, no, I think we did thoroughly and got through it (laughter).

KJ 28:54

Okay, I'll go ahead and stop the recording then.

GM 28:56

Okay.

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