

Transcript of oral history with Michele Gable by Robin Keagle

Interviewee: Michele Gable
Interviewer: Robin Keagle
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Location of Interviewee: Anthem, Arizona
Location of Interviewer: Puerto Penasco, Mexico
Transcriber: Robin Keagle. This transcript was provided by Otter.AI with a 2nd pass for accuracy.

Abstract: Michele Gable is a wife and mother living in a small suburb of Phoenix, Arizona. In her oral history, Michele reflects upon life before COVID-19 and shares how the pandemic has affected both her home and work life. She highlights her experience contracting a severe case of COVID-19 and how she navigated being around her family throughout her sickness. As an insurance underwriter, Michele describes the advantages of working from home while being ill and how her company handled her sick leave after the virus evolved into COVID-19 pneumonia. She shares the ongoing medical issues she still suffers from months after initially recovering as well as her thoughts on the COVID-19 vaccine as well as wearing masks.

Automated 0:09
This call is being recorded.

MG 0:12 Hello.

RK 0:12 Hi
Michelle.

MG 0:13 Hi,
Robin.

RK 0:15
Hi. Alright, let's get started. Hi, my name is Robin Keagle and I'm a graduate student intern with the Journal of the Plague Year COVID-19 Archive at Arizona State University. Today's date is March 20, 2021 and the time is 10:08am, Pacific Standard Time. I'm sitting in my condo in Puerto Penasco, Mexico, and speaking with Michelle Gable in Anthem, Arizona, to record her experience with contracting the Covid-19 virus for the Journal of the Plague Year Archive. Michelle, do I have your consent to record your responses and add them to the archive with your name?

MG 0:56
Yes, you do.

RK 0:58

Thank you. Alright, well, thanks again for taking the time out of your day to share some of your experiences with me, I really, really appreciate it. So, let's start by telling us your name, your age, where you live, and a little bit about your family.

MG 1:15

My name is Michelle Gable, I'm 40 years old. I live in Anthem, Arizona with my husband and five children.

RK 1:22

Wonderful. Okay. So, let's go ahead and get started. First, we're going to start with some background. So, tell me a little bit about your family and your living situation when the pandemic began.

MG 1:37

So, we have just purchased our home about a year ago, so - we were - in December 2020 that I contracted it though I was living in my new home. [laughs]

RK 1:54

Okay, gotcha. So prior to the pandemic, describe an average week for your family, so what you where you went, what you did, family, children, school commitments, anything you'd like to share.

MG 2:07

So prior to the pandemic, I was working in an office. I was working from home previously, but then recently changed jobs and had to begin working in an office. So I was traveling 40 miles - 80 miles - round trip to the office and back. My kids were home for a few hours by themselves until I got there so I got home. And you know, we'd regularly go out to restaurants, bars hanging out with friends, stuff like that.

RK 2:39

Okay. So describe how your average week changed after the pandemic began.

MG 2:47

So we changed because by, we were both working from home, my husband and I, he was traveling back and forth from Arizona to San Diego [California]. He was working from home full time, I began working from home full time. And now all of a sudden, our kids are home from school doing online learning, once they got that all situated. We couldn't go out to restaurants about as much anymore so we would order takeout food and then obviously, there's

really no more outdoor activities, or, we pretty much just kind of stayed home and laid low for a while.

RK 2:54

Okay, how did the initial experience go with the kids going online?

MG 3:07

It was very stressful, because I had worked from home before and they would go to school and I had a lot of you know, I really didn't have a lot of interruptions, I could do my work as needed and fairly simple and the kids would come home from school after, you know, long, quiet day by myself. But now that they were home, I felt like I could not get any work done and I was really struggling with that because I'm like I work from home before why am I having such a hard time? And then I realized it was because I had five kids, almost every you know, 5,10 minutes going, Hey, Mom, I need help. Hey, Mom, Hey, Mom, Hey, Mom, Hey, Mom and I'm helping kids with technical issues. I'm helping them get logged on to classes and my two middle children are special needs and so their special education has had a different schedule than the regular kids', the regular kids can pretty much follow their schedule on their own. But my two middle ones really need a lot of assistance help getting logged on and changing classes and you know, making sure that they're following along and doing something for schoolwork. So it was very stressful. I felt like I wasn't meeting my job requirements at that point because the kids needed so much help.

RK 4:41

Okay, yeah, that is quite a bit. So with that, prior prior to the pandemic starting, how was the overall health of your household?

MG 4:56

Pretty, pretty healthy. Actually. I hadn't gotten sick and even with something basic, I hadn't gotten sick with anything in years, because I had been working from home prior. The kids would come home, you know, every now and then with sniffles and my stepdaughter, she got strep throat very easily fairly often so that was kind of a thing but the rest of us are healthy. My husband never got sick either. And it was overall pretty healthy. No issues at all.

RK 5:25

Okay. So let's move into contracting COVID-19. Describe some of the activities you were doing in, let's say the week before you contracted the virus.

MG 5:38

So, since our gyms are open here in Arizona, I was going to the gym, we were still working from home. So I was not going to an office or anything like that and it was the Christmas season so there had been some shopping. I had gone to the mall earlier in a week. And then it was a small, very small 10-person friendly party that we went to.

RK 5:41 Ok.

MG 5:41
or I went to.

RK 6:07
And were you aware of anyone at that party who possibly could have contracted the virus?

MG 6:15
I was I was not at the time aware of anybody who was sick or feeling ill or contracted or had any contact with someone who had.

RK 6:23
Okay. And then were there any symptoms that led you to believe that you had COVID-19 before you officially got tested?

MG 6:31
Yeah, so the party that I was at was on a Friday night. And I went to a second party on the Saturday night, which was a little bit bigger. Sunday night, I was fine. But Monday night after I was done working it hit it hit me like a brick. I all of a sudden got fevers and chills and body aches.

RK 6:52
So that so it hit within like two days, two to three days?

MG 6:56 Yeah.

RK 6:57
Yeah. Okay. Okay. And then, did you actually get tested?

MG 7:05
I did get tested, but only later about a week, maybe not even a week. I believe so that was January 21, excuse me December 21, the day I had first had some symptoms. And it's funny, I just never forget that day because it was awful. So December 21 was when I first had symptoms, and I think I got finally tested on January 5, because my symptoms were not getting any better.

RK 7:31
Okay, January 5, okay. So, describe your feelings as you waited for your test results.

MG 7:32

I, it was going to be no surprise because a few of the people at the party were coming up with positive tests. They were also feeling ill and had fevers or they kind of have varying symptoms. So it wasn't a surprise. I had been dealing with the symptoms pretty badly on New Year's Eve. I was so dehydrated, I had a friend, a nurse friend come and give me some IV fluids. I was I was really pretty miserable. So it wasn't a surprise when I was waiting for my test results.

RK 7:33

Okay. So you actually had a nurse friend come to your house and give give you an IV?

MG 8:23 Yes.

RK 8:24

And how did that make you feel like after the IV was working?

MG 8:30

So prior to that I was really severely dehydrated. I hadn't eaten between like 12/21 and 12/31 and I had lost about almost 20 pounds during that time, which is you know, obviously very not normal. And I had miserable headaches and I had a lot of diarrhea until I was just overall, I was losing a lot more than I was taking in. So on December 31 and I got the IV fluid I was pretty weak and I couldn't even joke or talk around really that much with my friend who came in but she came in and she made sure you know she gave me two or three bags of fluid and after that my headaches went away finally, which was a big thing because it was just killing me for days. So my headache went away. I felt a little bit, I felt a little bit more replenished but I was definitely still very fatigued.

RK 9:31

Okay, how so you said that you had the headache for how many days approximately?

MG 9:38

Out of that 10 days between getting sick and getting the fluids I would say I pretty much had it every day.

RK 9:47

Wow. Okay. Was it would you equate it similar to a different another type of headache like a migraine? Or was it completely new?

MG 9:57

No, it was definitely felt like a migraine, nothing I had taken would alleviate it at all. So, because of the warnings I had read online, I stayed away from ibuprofen, which normally is the best painkiller for me that works great - but I don't - because of the warnings about the inflammatory, you know, the inflammatory nature of COVID and then taking ibuprofen in it, I guess that later turned out to not be true. [laughs] Not knowing that at the time, I didn't take ibuprofen I tried taking Tylenol and usually Tylenol doesn't work all that great for me. And it still didn't work

very good when I had that headache either so there was really nothing I could do about the headache. It didn't it didn't go away at all.

RK 10:48

Okay. Let's see, looking at my questions. So after you contracted the virus, how did that affect your living arrangements at home with your family?

MG 11:01

So, I stayed in my bedroom its downstairs and my kids' rooms are upstairs with the exception of my eldest son, he has a bedroom downstairs as well. So, it did make it fairly easy to kind of quarantine myself away from them. However, it was extremely difficult because it was over the holiday season. So, I had my sister in town from San Diego and I pretty much stayed in my room asleep and I came out Christmas Day, watched the kids unwrapped presents, I didn't even help cook anything like I normally would and I just went back to my room. So, my husband actually stayed in my room with me. He despite the warnings not to, he slept with me every night, he was right next to me, and he helped me out take care of me but the amazing thing is that he didn't get sick. So it was so our living arrangements really didn't change. I stayed in the room. I just really tried to stay away from the kitchen area and the kids, but he stayed with me.

RK 12:02

Okay. So how, how did the virus impact you physically? I mean, you talked about headaches. But was there anything else? Like what other types of effects did you feel?

MG 12:16

So, the body aches were really really bad. Like I felt it, it hurt in my joints, my arms or my elbows. I was getting like shocking pains through my legs. It was really, really painful and it it I would imagine for people who have any kind of like chronic pain disease, but that's why I started, you know, to think that must feel like if you look that up, it feels like probably a chronic pain disease. And again, there was nothing that alleviated that pain. That was pretty awful so, and then the fevers I would wake into fevers, usually while I was sleeping. So I wake up just completely drenched in sweat. And then I got the intestinal issues with it as well and I was pretty much in the bathroom every five to 10 minutes. And then, once I progressed to COVID pneumonia towards the end of it, which is what drove me to go to the doctor finally. That's where it was really bad and I couldn't breathe, I couldn't roll over in my bed without gasping for air. I couldn't walk to the bathroom without running out of breath. It was I felt like I was drowning laying down.

RK 13:40

Wow. Okay. So just listening to you, that leads to my next question. What was your mental health like during this time?

MG 13:51

At first I was too tired. I slept so much. I really didn't think at all. So once I kind of came out of the fatigue, I was now in pneumonia. And that was I was starting to get very panicked at that

point. I you know, from reading the stories and seeing people be put on ventilators, I was definitely very paranoid. I was scared to go to the hospital at that point because I didn't want to have a situation where I found out so that I need to get put on a ventilator that that was that was actually very scary thinking that if I left my house then I might not see my family and that was actually on my mind. Pretty scary. Sorry.

RK 14:40

Understand, understandable. Not at all.

MG 14:42

So, but it came you know, it was that was definitely on my mind is I was the only one in a house who was sick and I'm definitely the head of the household here. I take care of everything, I take care of all the kids so being down like that I was still very worried about how the kids are doing but they, they knew that I was very sick and they, they didn't give anybody any grief, they took care of themselves and help themselves out and gave us a break. They didn't come needing mom every five minutes but but yeah, it was actually very scary. It was it was, it was a scary experience at that point.

RK 15:20

I can only imagine, I, that is a lot. So, we talked about how it impacted you physically and emotionally. So did, excuse me, pardon me, describe how COVID-19 impacted either your livelihood or your family life. I know you kind of talked about your family life a little bit. But any other thoughts about how it impacted your livelihood?

MG 15:50

Luckily, it didn't, I had just started a new company that year actually I started a new company three days before the country shut down, so and the company was very amazing. I had been working until I got to the COVID pneumonia part where I couldn't even sit at my desk, I couldn't breathe, I let them know that I had COVID and I had progressed in ammonia and I really needed a week off of work to I there was just no way I was going to be able to function at this point anymore. And they were very understanding I had, I talked to my lead and he was like, that's absolutely fine, took me off the schedule for the week, I talked to my manager above that, and they'll call just out of concern and making sure I was okay. And then further, our HR department reached out to me to make sure I was okay and if I needed anything and so while I was very fortunate I had a you know, I had a job right before it started and the job allowed us work from home and my husband's job, you know, he's construction in San Diego, and it didn't effect - it it - his work slowed down a little bit but neither one of us fortunately went without a paycheck at any point.

RK 15:51

Okay, that's great. So how long did it take you to recover?

MG 16:01

So we're still out here, today is March 19, right?

RK 16:52 20th.

MG 17:15

20th? And I'm still not fully recovered. I'm having heart issues that developed after the other COVID symptoms. The other COVID stopped and my heart issues started and I went through a couple of weeks of insomnia. I had like a attention deficit, I could not sit down, I was overactive and definitely I was dropping things a lot, which was weird. I was getting really pissed off at myself, because I'd be somewhere and I just keep dropping things and I don't know why that was happening. What else was there? So definitely, you know, they said they call it the brain fog. That is lessening but the brain fog was pretty bad after I recovered. I was having - I was struggling - with work. I was struggling getting through my you know, simple transactions, because I'd get confused or what was I doing or you know something - and even at home too - because I walk into a room and not know why I was there, probably common anyway but it definitely seemed a lot worse. So one thing that really, aside from heart issues, was dropping things that was really weird.

RK 18:43

I can imagine. So with that, do you feel like you've changed behaviors at all, after contracting the virus considering we're still in the pandemic.

MG 18:58

So, what's weird about that is that now that I've already had it, I feel like I kind of have a freedom that I'm not going to catch it. I mean, you can definitely catch it again but I have some kind of antibodies for the time being so it kind of felt a little bit more freeing. That is part of what prompted me to go take a weekend vacation in Cabo. Knowing that I wouldn't be able to contract it again at this point. So and then kind of being free or without wearing my mask now than I was before but I'm also fearful of catching, catching it again, catching a different strain because of how badly I got it. So, I - when I'm not - I do still wear my mask when we go out unless we're outdoors somewhere that I tend not to but indoors I wear it. You know the washing of the hands and the antibacterial - what you call it - hand sanitizers, I'm still pretty vigilant with that. I really don't like being out in indoor public spaces with a lot of people. So I, my habits are still kind of the same as you know, before I got sick and you know being safe during the pandemic, with that exception of I have already had it so. [laughs]

RK 20:25 Right.

MG 20:26

So I don't - you know I - I should be okay for a little while at least.

RK 20:31

Okay. So, you talked a little bit about masks. So has your opinion, how has your opinion changed about masks before you contracted versus after you contracted the virus?

MG 20:46

It really hasn't, or like, I'm fine with wearing one wherever it's required. If it you know, I, I don't know what their efficacy is, really, it's hard to say that the party that I caught it at wouldn't have mattered if we had all worn masks the whole night? Probably not. Because we were sharing, you know, food trays, and, you know, in a confined house, you know, so I don't think, honestly, that masks would have kept me from getting sick when I did get sick. And which was surprising, because it was just 10 people and 10 people that we trusted, and we knew their routines, and we knew that they weren't really exposing themselves. But so, no, it really hasn't changed my opinion of masks, I still think just wear it and it's fine or - and you know - you'll it's not a huge hindrance to me at least.

RK 21:44

Okay. So let's, let's talk a little bit about the vaccine. What is your opinion about receiving a vaccine or not?

MG 21:58

I have heard about the symptoms that people get when they receive the second vaccine, especially if they've been priorly diagnosis COVID – er - had it, it makes me a little nervous, because most people that I've talked to - personal experiences - they say when they get the second vaccine, they get sick like all over again from anywhere from - two to - one to three days. And, again, I don't think it's possible to come down with pneumonia in three days at least I hope not but it does make me a little nervous because I don't want to go through that and end up with worse symptoms or end up in the hospital because of it. I do kind of wish that see, I definitely want to wait a little while and see how people are reacting to it before I get my own, but I do want to get one like I said, because I do not want to catch this again.

RK 23:01

Understandable. Now that said, do you have any advice for people who have not contracted the virus?

MG 23:11

Well, you know, - I - from how it happened with me and how I heard you know, other people talk about it. – It - I don't know what you can or can't do like you can take all the precautions and people still catch it. With _____, he traveled it back and forth pretty frequently and we think he might have had it in early summer and he only had a few days of symptoms and that was it – and - but he was actually very careful. He's one who wore gloves, he wore his masks, he did sanitizer all the time and maybe, you know, I was a little bit freer with that and I still contracted it and so did he. Its its best just to take the precautions because you don't know how your body in particular is going to react to it. I am fairly healthy. I have no underlying conditions at all other than being overweight. I don't have any kind of autoimmune disease. I don't take any medications on a regular basis and it hit me very, very hard and that was surprising. So I mean

the best advice I would say is just take the precautions because it's not worth finding out the hard way. You know how badly you might get it.

RK 24:32

Definitely. All right, Michelle. Well, I really appreciate you taking your time or taking time out of your day today to do this and sharing your experience with me. So, thank you very much and I hope you have a wonderful day.

MG 24:48

You too, Robin. Thank you.

RK 24:49

Alright, take care.

MG 24:51

You too.

RK 24:51 Bye.

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