

Transcript of Interview with KW by JG

Interviewee: KW

Interviewer: JG

Date: 11/19/2020

Location (Interviewee): Apple Valley, Minnesota

Location (Interviewer):

Abstract: [KW] is a New Zealand immigrant currently living in Apple Valley, Minnesota with her husband and their three children, ages eight, six, and three. [KW] shares her experiences with COVID 19 from an immigrant's point-of-view as well as a mother's point-of-view. [KW] reflects upon the difference between the handling of the pandemic in New Zealand and the handling of the pandemic in America. Additionally, [KW] discusses how the pandemic has affected her children, their schooling, and her own role in their lives. She breaks down their routines before the pandemic and compares it to their routines now. She talks about how the pandemic has changed her daily life and the daily lives of children, especially her two school aged sons and their activities in and out of school. Finally, she reflects upon how different her families' lives would be if they were still living in New Zealand instead of Minnesota.

JG 0:05

Today is Thursday, November 19th 2020. And I am [JG], a senior at Arizona State University. And I'm conducting an interview with [KW] of Apple Valley, Minnesota regarding COVID-19 in quarantine, most specifically how the pandemic has affected her three children, their education and their mental health. Thanks for being with me, [KW].

KW 0:27

No worries.

JG 0:28

So how long have you been living in Minnesota?

KW 0:31

We've been living in Minnesota for three, almost four years. Four years.

JG 0:40

And where did you live before Minnesota?

KW 0:42

Before Minnesota, we lived in Corpus Christi, Texas for two years and before that New Zealand.

JG 0:49

So what has it been like to experience the pandemic as an immigrant?

KW 0:54

It has been really interesting watching two countries and very different ways that they have handled it. It has been really confusing sometimes because we have received different health care advice from two different governments. And so we've had to make a choice as to which government and which set of health ministers or health, um, what do you call them here, health officers that we're actually going to follow. And because the countries have had such different approaches, it's been frustrating to be in a country that we feel like missed the opportunity to handle it better.

JG 1:36

So which country's health ministers do you find yourself following?

KW 1:40

So we tend to follow the ones in New Zealand who have closely following what the World Health Organization has been recommending. They've been very clear in their communication. And they've been very clear when they've been changes to advise why or how that changes come about as if they're very science and data driven. The health ministers here, we have found various messages, depending on what, what government organization ever changing, but not understanding the reasons for change the political influence on the advice and the lack of transparency around where they're getting this advice, or what data they're actually using.

JG 2:27

So early in the year earlier in the year, it was not possible for you to travel back to New Zealand, correct?

KW 2:38

Yes.

JG 2:38

So what was it like knowing that you could not leave the country during the pandemic, leave America?

KW 2:44

It was when we. So we're registered with the New Zealand government as citizens of their country in case there's ever an emergency or there's a natural disaster and New Zealand needs to take stock of where their citizens are. So when we get email, it's because we're all signed up, I'd actually get five email alerts that we have a certain amount of time to get home to the country or email alerts that the borders were now closing. So every time we've had those, it has been, it has increased anxiety, and made the whole thing feel more isolated. We feel, you feel cut off from, you always have an escape plan or an exit plan. And we've feel it for the first time we've been cut off from being able to get out of the country within 24 hours if we ever needed to.

JG 3:41

So were you able to prepare for quarantine at all, you and your family?

KW 3:47

As in like get food supplies and stocks?

JG 3:52

Yeah, yes. Was there anything you did? Or were you just...[inaudible]

KW 3:56

Oh, yes. So I, no. So I read a lot of international news. So in January, I started seeing the first stories of COVID end of November, December last year from a British newspaper. And it was just down the very bottom of the newspaper page about a virus in China. So I wasn't really you know, I'd read the headlines and not really click on it. About January when it traveled across to Europe, I started paying a lot more attention. Two weeks before that week of March 10th, I did a stock up of food because I was sure that a lockdown was coming. But didn't say much to anyone because you know, you feel like a bit of a crazy person. And then when it all happened that Wednesday night that Trump shut the borders that Thursday. And who was it Tom Hanks? Was it Tom Hanks who got COVID? All of those announcements came on that Wednesday night I was feeling pretty prepared. I kind of knew where we were going. So I yeah, we, we had stocked up on toys and supplies and food. So we weren't, weren't that surprised, but only because of the fact that we'd paid attention to overseas as opposed to understanding what was happening here.

JG 5:12

So, before COVID, what was a typical school day like for your kids?

KW 5:17

So before COVID, they'd be up at seven, we'd be out the door at eight, they would walk to school, I would meet them at the end of school, at 2:20 would come home for whatever, you know, afternoon activities. They were in school five days a week with their teachers, minimal homework, if any done at home, maybe a spelling list. Kind of, I kept a bit of an eye on particularly our oldest son's education, but you know, wasn't super involved. And this year, our youngest, who is three, was supposed to start preschool for two days a week nine till 2:30, which obviously hasn't come to fruition.

JG 6:05

What after school activities were they involved in?

KW 6:08

We had swimming, karate, and then our oldest had speech therapy, our youngest had speech therapy. That's it, I think.

JG 6:20

And have they been able to continue any of those?

KW 6:23

So we stopped karate and swimming from March through till September. And then we started again in karate and swimming. And we stopped them in that two weeks ago, when we can see that the case numbers were starting to rise again. The swimming lessons, we'd only had them semi private with just our two boys. So we felt that was relatively safe. karate is all masked up. And they were socially distanced in smaller classes. And our daughter did gymnastics September to October, November as well.

JG 6:56

So now, with COVID, how is your, what is your typical school day now?

KW 7:04

So now we are up at seven. At 7:40, our kids sit down in front of the tablets where they start their morning meetings and go into Zooms. We have Zooms and activities until one, till two o'clock. Our boys are on different schedules. So lunch kind of lasts from 11 to about two. And the boys have got different Zooms at different times. And then we have a break for about an hour and a half. And then we now have therapy, various therapies every afternoon, except for Thursdays.

JG 7:42

And are those therapies via Zoom as well?

KW 7:45

No occupational therapy is done in person. Vision therapy is done in person. speech therapy is done online via Zoom. And cognitive behavioral therapy is done on Zoom.

JG 8:02

So can you explain to me what it's like to transition from in school learning to distance learning?

KW 8:09

So I never planned to be a homeschooler I, we family planned to never have three children home at the same time. Our children are two to three years apart for that very reason. So it has just become a lot more, I feel like a personal assistant. At breakfast time, I brief my children on what's happening that day, who's got what Zooms and at what times. My oldest son also does speech Zooms and gifted and talented Zooms through the school district as well. And I am there in the background from, listening to what tasks they need to do. I am also trying to homeschool our three year old so to keep her occupied as well as keeping our house going. And then there is the social physical emotional burden of sometimes they need to spend time together, sometimes they really need to spend time apart. Have I exercised them, have they had enough water, have they-, you know, it's things that were passive concerns before now are major concerns. One of the perks of it has been getting a front row seat to our oldest son's schoolwork, he is neuro diverse. And because he was home and I was able to watch his schooling within the first two weeks of emergency schooling in March, I started to suspect that he was dyslexic. And that

access I wouldn't have had in the classroom. Looking back on his school reports, there's no indication that the school was concerned about it at all. And that hadn't come through. It was new information to us but because of distance schooling I had access, you know, had that front row seat. So now I know exactly where my kids are on every single part of their education because that's what I do now; that's what my life has become.

JG 10:11

Do you think it will be hard to distance yourself from that once they go back to in school? Do you plan on putting them back in school?

KW 10:19

Yes, they will be going back to school. I think there is definitely some perks to have, you know, having had them at home. And it will be, it'll be really interesting to watch them go back because you know, in conferences, I feel a lot more like empowered to know exactly where they are with their schooling, at least now I'm probably for the next year or so. And then that distance will come naturally anyway. It's definitely put me in a better place for negotiating IEP conditions. It'll be interesting for the kids too, my kids have become very independent learners at the beginning in March. They were spoon fed, they wanted to know exactly how to write the title exactly, do they underline it. do they write the date, but here the teachers wrote in the date on this side. Everything was what do I do now? What do I do now? What do I do now? And now, eight months later, it's like, I couldn't find this so I just did it this way. And they've adapted too. So I think it's going to be interesting for the kids going back to school, how is a teacher going to take a whole bunch of independent learners, when our school system encourages spoon feeding? For various reasons, including valid ones, like behavior management, it's going to be a really interesting transition for everyone, including the kids, who I think will find it frustrating when they solve a problem, and are told off for not following direct instructions.

JG 11:46

So it sounds like the kids are busy at home.

KW 11:49

Yes.

JG 11:50

Do they, do you think that they, you mentioned they're better independent learners, are they better at occupying themselves now than they were before?

KW 12:02

No. So [laughter] I couldn't answer that fast enough. So we were a screen free household before COVID. So our kids were very good at independent play because we did have some outside, out-, out of school activities when they were home. They're in separate grade levels, they're excited to see each other, when they want to play, they'd go outside and play for a couple of hours. Now, it's what can we do on the tablet? You know, what can we do here? Can I do this or that's on the

tablet? Or can I do this, oh, that's on the tablet, I don't know what to do, I'm bored. There's a lot more wanting to have their time filled like I'm a cruise director. There's also like some days they are sick of the sight of each other and other days they're not and managing that, we haven't really had that problem before. So definitely, we've utilized the use of audiobooks on the weekends, because the kids can turn on audiobooks, put on the headphones and go and play in their rooms. And it gives them a chance to feel like they're getting space, even though they aren't. And that has definitely helped. And we try to get outside as much as we can, for the same reasons. Try to create the illusion of space in their physical world. And hopefully, it'll help them feel like they're getting a bit of space personally.

JG 13:25

Um, how has your role as a mother changed during the pandemic? Know you've mentioned cruiser director and personal assistant.

KW 13:35

Yeah, it's, it's become a lot more than just the like social emotional stuff. At the end of the day. It's from 7am until 7:20 bedtime, sun up, S-O-N to sundown, S-O-N. My days of constantly managing where everyone is in all of the different situations, a lot more crisis management, than what I, we're getting into the stage with kids that were eight, six and three, where we were hitting into passive, more passive parenting, we didn't have to be there all the time, they weren't going to climb the drawers anymore, they weren't going to help themselves to a knife to cut an apple. They have all those skills. But instead of going into passive parenting, we've had to really up our game again as though we have toddlers to manage and maintain crises before they break out. So we've had to become a lot more active again, after kind of moving out of the under five years.

JG 14:44

Um switching gears, how has it or what was it like watching New Zealand recover quicker than the United States or kind of live differently than the United States?

KW 14:57

It was reassuring to know that our family and our friends are safe; we don't carry the same mental burden that our friends here do, because we don't have to worry about our parents, they're safe. And you know, I was Facetiming, my dad yesterday, and he had a friend over visiting. And I didn't have to worry about the fact that my dad had a friend visiting, even though my dad has a heart condition. We don't have to worry about my father in law going and hanging out with his buddies or anything like that. So there is the relief that that portion of our life is contained and safe and happy and healthy. And they're getting on with it. This frustration, that how different things could have been here had they had a regular leader, a regular leadership, and if the, if truth hadn't been attacked and distorted so much that there would be people who don't even, you know, willing to follow along with political figures and that political figures have been changing recommendations because of political pressure. But mainly, mainly just relief, actually, that there is a safe place that it can be done that we do, we could still go home if we absolutely had to. It

would be more expensive, and it would be harder to get there, but we still have a place in this world that doesn't have that. But mainly relief that our, our people are safe.

JG 16:23

What would school be like for your kids, if you were back in New Zealand right now?

KW 16:28

Absolutely normal. There, they have only in the last week introduced masks on public transport. And that's the only place you have to wear a mask. They don't have any community transmission. But they decided to bring masks into public transport because it's the hardest place to track people. If they're you know, you don't remember exactly which bus you caught three weeks ago, if there was a case on the 277 bus or whatever, you won't remember if you caught the 718 or the 723 or whatever. So they introduced that there. So the kids would be at school, they'd be doing their extracurricular activities. Life would be completely normal for, as a New Zealand kid. It's something that, that COVID happened there. COVID isn't happening, like it is here. Like it's something that they had something hey, remember when we had COVID. And my, when I talked to my family and friends over there, they'll say back when we had COVID. And it's just a crazy far out because, you know, we are just entering COVID really. I spoke to my mom yesterday, my parents are church leaders and they said, you know, there's still impacts they only had a six week lockdown and then a two week lockdown. But my mum said the other day, she hasn't shaken hands with anyone since it started, that she hasn't hugged anyone and our culture, hugging and a kiss on the cheek is quite common, particularly with the Pacifica people. And there's not a vet in that church anymore. So and she said she still will watch a movie and kind of think oh, they're all really close together even though there is no social distancing there. She said that she still feels that there's an impact. So I'm interested to see for our kids having, who are going to live it for at least a year. It's going to take a while for that impact to diminish.

JG 18:23

Mhm. One last question. If you could go back to you, like one year ago, what, what advice would you give yourself to handle the pandemic?

KW 18:36

To handle the pandemic? In the beginning, have a lot of craft supplies and creativity, that get into podcasts earlier because they're great distractions. Um, you know, I, I feel like we've done okay. And that's, you don't say that to many people, because there are lots of people here who are not doing okay. I think it helped that I've found some things that outlets for me. I think it helped that my husband was already worked from home. So we didn't have a relationship adjustment that some of my other friends had to make. It wasn't like all of a sudden, I had to deal with being around my husband 24 hours a day, I was already used to that. We also don't have the stress of family and friends like well, some friends here, but like our loved ones are safe. Our loved ones aren't pressuring us to do things outside of our COVID comfort zone. So we, we've also for seven, six years now, we have, there are things that America does that we don't do in our family. So we are used to just ignoring what the world does and doing our own thing. And so that we

haven't had the same kind of social pressure. Like if we don't want to do something here, we just don't do it. And so my, you know, we haven't had the same kind of pressure. But what advice would I give to myself? I guess, I don't really know. That's a very hard question. I think we've done the best that we could. And we've made some good decisions along the way. I guess just prepare for the long haul like that it was, you know, it's gonna last as long as you suspect it's going to last at the beginning. And that actually living history is quite tiring. And all those people that kept journals and diaries through their history did the historical world a great service because I'm not doing it for the next generation of historians because it's too tiring. So those women that did those things, were pretty incredible for doing that. And I mean, I guess it's a different era where people don't take, you know, because we have photographs to take those memories, then maybe I would have, but they did history a great service by keeping those records because it's, I can't imagine doing this and keeping historical records.

JG 21:08

Well, thank you very much.

KW 21:10

You're welcome.

JG 21:11

I'm going to stop, one second. [recording stops]