

Transcript of Interview with Gabriel Orengo by Nicolino Orengo

Interviewee: Gabriel Orengo

Interviewer: Nicolino Orengo

Date: 04/18/2022

Location (Interviewee):

Location (Interviewer):

Abstract: Oral History about how the pandemic has affect the employment of this man.

Nicolino Orengo 0:03

Okay, just let you know that we're recording. My name is Nicolino Orengo. I am the interviewer. I am here with Gabriel Orengo. The date is April 18 2022.

Gabriel Orengo 0:07

Can you see me?

Nicolino Orengo 0:25

No, no your phone, your, I can see you now you're good. Um, the time is 5:21. And this is being done over Zoom. Gabriel, I just want to read the informed consent and deed of gift that you signed. This interview's for the COVID-19 Oral History Project, which is associated with the Journal Plague Year: a COVID-19 Archive. The COVID-19 Oral History Project is a rapid response oral history focused on archiving the lived experience of the COVID-19 epidemic. We design this project so that professional researchers and the broader public can create and upload their own histories to our open access and open source database. This study will help us collect narratives and understandings about COVID-19 as well as help us understand the impacts of the pandemic overtime. The recording and demographic information and the verbatim transcripts will be deposited in the Journal of the Plague Year: A COVID-19 archive in the Indiana University Library System for the use of researchers and the general public. Do you have any questions about the project that I can answer?

Gabriel Orengo 1:33

No.

Nicolino Orengo 1:37

Okay. By taking part, this study is voluntary so you may choose to take part or leave at any moment. And do you have any questions I can start before we get started here?

Gabriel Orengo 1:50

No.

Nicolino Orengo 1:53

Finally, I just want to ask for verbal confirmation that you agreed to do this interview. And you were okay to have it made available?

Gabriel Orengo 2:03

Yes, I agree.

Nicolino Orengo 2:06

Okay, perfect. All right. So let's get started. The way this interview is gonna work out, I'm just gonna ask you a couple of things. Just open freely, just to talk between me and you. So let's start with something easy first, when you first learned about COVID-19, what were your original thoughts about it?

Gabriel Orengo 2:30

I don't know, I thought it was going to be something like the flu, turned out to be a little worse.

Nicolino Orengo 2:38

Have your thoughts changed since then?

Gabriel Orengo 2:42

No, I think it's definitely a little worse than the flu. Having had it, having had my family had it, I do definitely still agree with my assessment from the beginning.

Nicolino Orengo 2:58

And are there any or like, are there any particular issues that have concerned you most about the whole pandemic?

Gabriel Orengo 3:08

Um, I don't know about concern. I mean, trying to learn exactly where it originally came from. Whether or not the vaccinations were going to be a valid way to prevent yourself from getting it. Other than that, that's all.

Nicolino Orengo 3:29

Alright, has COVID-19 changed your employment status at all?

Gabriel Orengo 3:33

Yes, I was let go in 2019 due to COVID in April.

Nicolino Orengo 3:41

Has anyone else that you know have felt the same like, have been affected in the same way? They've, anyone you know, specifically that you don't have to name them, but do you know people that have been laid off or have lost their jobs due to COVID?

Gabriel Orengo 3:56

...have been laid off due to COVID. Not many close people to me have had that happen.

Nicolino Orengo 4:08

Okay. Do you have any concerns about like the effects that COVID-19 will have on employment like going on? Or maybe just even the economy like you like, because it's obviously not ending anytime soon. So do you have any worries or concerns that might happen?

Gabriel Orengo 4:25

Yeah, concerns in terms of work, a lot of places of employment have gone to working remotely, doing Zoom as we are on right now and other options to remain employed and have the ability to

do it from home to avoid long, kind of large gatherings at workplaces which could help spread the virus.

Nicolino Orengo 4:53

And has the continuance of the pandemic brought upon any difficulties in trying to find a new job or?

Gabriel Orengo 5:02

Actually, I can't say it has due to, uh, in, 2020 I was diagnosed with cancer and had to fight through that, pretty much help or kept me from being able to find employment. So I can't say COVID actually has kept me from finding work, per se. But as soon as I'm able to get back to work, I will be able to know that for fact if there's going to be an issue or not.

Nicolino Orengo 5:32

Okay, so now we're going to jump into the unemployment, how that process has been for you. Have you or were you for a period of time collecting unemployment due to the pandemic?

Gabriel Orengo 5:46

Yes, I was.

Nicolino Orengo 5:49

Okay. Did you have concerns about the way the government or the unemployment system set up their new policies during the pandemic to accommodate people during this time? Was there any concern about that, or were you...

Gabriel Orengo 6:05

No, other than getting signed up for unemployment, that, during that process during that time, so many people were becoming unemployed due to COVID. It took a very long time, it was a painful process trying to get just get in and get lined up and signed up for unemployment during COVID, than that the process was seamless.

Nicolino Orengo 6:35

Okay, um, do you believe that the unemployment system has, in a way, helped enough to provide for funds in terms of help making sure that your family is living comfortably?

Gabriel Orengo 6:50

Yes, I think the way they set it up in the, in the immediate year that COVID hit, they were [audio cuts out] extra to help provide for families that were struggling through this pandemic, and, and losing their jobs and stuff like that, I've really feel that they did what they could to help out, make it a little bit easier, and everybody who was affected.

Nicolino Orengo 7:18

So let's, let's go all the way back to when it first happened in the March of 2020, 2020 right? I want to say 2020. So looking back now, would you have, what would you have done to prepare for everything that COVID has brought on, as you said that not only were you battling cancer, but you also lost your job due to COVID. Is there anything that you would, looking today, was there anything that looking back you wish you would have done in preparation for this ongoing pandemic?

Gabriel Orengo 7:57

Um, I did not. I wasn't aware that, I don't think there was anything I could have done differently. I really had no control over how that pandemic was going to overtake the country and the workforce. So I don't think there's anything I could have changed or done differently.

Nicolino Orengo 8:23

Yeah. And what do you hope that your life is like, within a year? I know, the whole pandemic seems like it's never ending, but in terms of employment, do you see COVID being an impediment? Um, in a year, where do you see yourself?

Gabriel Orengo 8:42

I see myself working. I feel-

Nicolino Orengo 8:45

I mean, would you, let's, let's elaborate a little bit. You say, obviously, you want to be working there. Would you prefer-, would you prefer to be back in that environment of being with people?

Or would you, does it or does it not matter, would you be open to the idea of working in a living in a virtual environment because of the pandemic?

Gabriel Orengo 9:13

I mean prior to pandemic I was working remotely as it was, um, so I just think that working in and out of the office, I personally worked remotely, sometimes go into the office. I don't think anything would have changed, so.

Nicolino Orengo 9:34

Okay. Okay, yeah. One last question about just employment in general. If you were to not, not having the unemployment, say like we took unemployment out of the question here. Do you think that your family would have been able to, I don't want to say survived, because that's obviously the, that's not saying, but you know what I mean? Like, would you, would you have felt that that not being in work at the time would have really put like a hamper on the way the family could live and survive in a manner of which that felt comfortable to you?

Gabriel Orengo 10:27

Are you saying in a situation where we didn't get unemployment?

Nicolino Orengo 10:31

Yeah, and let's say, let's say. Yeah, let's say that unemployment, the services, they give out unemployment, they denied you for some random reason. Would you have felt that the pandemic would have been affecting the family in a way that it would have made living uncomfortable? Because I know, living with you, that obviously that unemployment helped the entire family, do you think that not having a job because of COVID and then not receiving such a fund, that would have been like a? What would be your like, mindset if that was the way that the government went about doing so?

Gabriel Orengo 11:11

Well I just think that that would have been if they weren't able to help the masses that were affected due to COVID and cause to have to come after unemployment to compensate for the loss of wages, I just think that it would have been, yeah, it would have been very difficult for any family, for any person that, you know what I mean, they could not be assisted. I mean, when you lose your job, outside of a pandemic, unemployment is really there to help you out and get through the situation. Due to the pandemic, if they were to turn their backs and make it so difficult, I think that that would have been a horrible-

Nicolino Orengo 12:03

-I don't mean to interrupt you. Let me rephrase that in a bit that say, I understand that unemployment usually, generally there for everyone when they lose their job, but I'm talking specifically about the upgrade to the amount that you received during the pandemic, if they didn't upgrade to that, do you think that it would have been possible for the family to live as comfortably? You know what I'm trying to say?

Gabriel Orengo 12:31

Well, I honestly can say that I have been in that situation where I was laid off from a job and got unemployment, and we were able to survive.

Nicolino Orengo 12:45

Okay. All right. Just trying to get a general sense of you know, how COVID is, you know, affected not only unemployment, but jobs... [inaudible]

Gabriel Orengo 12:55

Unemployment, you're able to survive on it, what the, [audio cuts out] for, that they were giving during COVID for unemployment was because when you get laid off, usually you are able to get back into the workforce remotely [audio cuts out]

Nicolino Orengo 13:09

So yeah, that's the whole idea of the unemployment system is the fact that you're usually attached to the labor market. But now with the way the pandemic was working, it was like, can you really get back being attached to that way? [inaudible]

Gabriel Orengo 13:24

Go ahead. Sorry.

Nicolino Orengo 13:27

No, no, you go ahead. No, you're good, you're fine. What were you about to say?

Gabriel Orengo 13:30

It's, it's that, COVID made it so much more difficult to be able to find work. So many, so many employers not looking to hire people to get back to work, going down to skeleton crews and trying to survive that way. And provide, and to provide people, main people at their places to, to continue to work without, how do I say it, without detrimenting companies. You know what I mean?

Nicolino Orengo 14:00

Yeah, exactly.

Gabriel Orengo 14:01

So you, so you literally were, them, giving you that extra was giving you that a little bit of cushion because they knew many, many people are not gonna be able to just jump right back into the workforce because employers just weren't hiring during COVID.

Nicolino Orengo 14:16

Yeah, and that's exactly why I'm conducting this interview. At the moment. I'm trying to find people like yourself that were laid off during the pandemic, and the pandemic kind of put a damper on things. I want people such as yourself to get a voice. So later down the line when people are looking at history like this, it's not just you're looking at the pandemic, but you also get to see a sense of the human side of things. So people understand that, oh, yeah, we were going through a pandemic, but this affected people, not just only in terms of sickness, but it affected their lives as well. And that's why, that's the point of this interview today. I don't have any more questions for you. Is there anything you would like to ask me or just state in general, before we can conclude this interview?

Gabriel Orengo 15:04

No, not off the top of my head. No.

Nicolino Orengo 15:08

Okay. Well once again, Gabriel, thank you so much for doing this interview with me and giving consent to do so. I really appreciate it and thanks.

Gabriel Orengo 15:19

All right. You're welcome.