

PGTPL COVID-19 Pandemic Oral History Transcript

Interviewee: Ernestine Spurgin

Interviewer: Jeannine Spurgin

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Location: Plainfield, Indiana

Abstract: Ernestine Spurgin is a senior Plainfield resident. She talks about her experiences as a senior weathering the pandemic. Besides the issues surrounding being a senior, she also talks about the effects of the pandemic on her employment and her church community.

JS: Today is July 13, 2020. This is Jeannine Spurgin, and I am here with Joy Spurgin, a citizen of Plainfield, Indiana, and we're going to talk about her experience during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. Your name and address?

ES: My name is Joy Spurgin and I live here in Plainfield, Indiana. And my age is 74.

JS: What do you do for a living?

ES: Well, I'm retired, but I also work part-time at an Italian restaurant, here in Plainfield.

JS: First of all, what were your thoughts about the pandemic when you first heard about it?

ES: Well, I had never been around in a major pandemic or anything, so it was quite new to me. A little scary, at first. When it first came about, it seemed like it was in the Asian country when it first came out, so I wasn't too concerned. But then, as time has gone on, it has obviously come to our country as well. So, a little concerned about that.

JS: What concerned you most?

ES: My age and being exposed to it.

JS: Did it affect your job?

ES: It did. When I first started working for this company, I was hired as a hostess, and then I was there a short time and promoted to a front-end manager. But because of the COVID virus, they had to close down for a couple of months, and then they changed the whole venue. Now, I'm only working three days and week, and we don't have servers or hostesses, we just have cashiers.

JS: I think something that would be good to talk about is your unemployment benefits experience. How did that work for you?

ES: Well, because I worked just part-time, I wasn't sure I was even eligible for unemployment. But I called and they said, "Yes, you need to apply." So, I did apply, and I received not a great

deal every week, but you know, a small amount. And then, after two weeks, the supplemental from the government of \$600 came in. So, that made a big difference. By not having a paycheck anymore, that was certainly a welcome factor.

JS: Do you have concerns about the effects of COVID-19 on your employment, and the economy, more broadly?

ES: Well, it affected, not my employment so much, like I said, I did go down to three days a week. Many people at my place of employment, because it's food service, are no longer working there. So, yes, that affected not just me, but the other people who work there as well.

JS: How has the pandemic affected your day-to-day activities? Have there been many effects?

ES: Yes. When it first came out, I was very aware of the fact that I don't need to be going out much anymore. It affected my work, cut down on my work. I did not want to go out as much. Then when it came to the fact that if I wanted to go out, I had to wear a mask. All of this was so foreign to me, it was just difficult for me to understand that. But then, when you think of it, I did not want to be out and about, be exposed, have a chance of getting the virus because of my age.

JS: How is the wearing a mask experience for you?

ES: It's okay. I wear glasses, and I wear very large glasses, because I have trifocals. And when I put the mask on, it rubs right under my glasses and rubs the sides of my face. But, again, I have to have it.

JS: So, what's been the biggest challenge so far about facing this pandemic for you?

ES: The biggest challenge was when it first started and I stayed in all of the time. I think that was a big issue for a lot of people. Even though I'm older, I did go out and work three days a week, it's only five hours a day, but I did go out. I made sure that I needed a lot of things in my house before I went to the store, I wasn't just running like I used to, "Oh, I need this, or I need that." So, just sort of being in the house and for me, I live in a small place, and it doesn't take long to clean house. I can only do that once a week, and it was a little boring; I felt like I was sort of tucked away from everybody.

JS: Did you feel isolated?

ES: Yes, very much so.

JS: I think that was a problem for a lot of people.

ES: Yes.

JS: How has COVID affected your community?

ES: Well, the community here, and I'm talking about community as far as Plainfield, unemployment is everywhere, running rampant. Locally, here in the community I live in, again,

people have a tendency to stay in, and if you do congregate with some people, it's just five, or six, or seven that you know, and you see them periodically. This spring and summer, we haven't had the barbecues and all of this like we used to, just because everybody is so concerned about the pandemic, and where have they been and who they have been in contact with.

JS: It just doesn't feel like summer.

ES: No, not at all.

JS: So, how are people around you responding?

ES: I think the people here in my, and when I say my community, I mean my neighborhood, they've all pretty well been staying in, other than going to work when they have to. They're very aware of who is around them. I'm very aware of who is around me. And in the past, I've been very cavalier about meeting people, shaking hands, even the neighbors, and all. We no longer do that. It's "hi, how are you," and that's enough.

JS: How about your church community, has that been affected?

ES: Oh, by all means. Our last day of church was in March, and our church opened up finally three weeks ago. But when we went into the church, there was a nurse taking our temperature. You were required to wear a mask. And the church that I go to, about 75% of the people that are there are at least 55-60 and older. So, a great deal of our congregation stayed home. Now, the one thing that we did have, we did do the service over the internet, so they could stay home and see it. But, the last two or three times I've gone to church, now, it's not the same. There's no music, because we're not singing. They do not pass the offering plate, they just have a container for you to drop it in. You know, and everybody is sort of stretched out in the pews, every other pew. And again, a great many of the people are not coming, so I'm glad to be able to go to church, it's just that it's just not the same as when we would have music every Sunday.

JS: You have a time in the morning when you all congregate, right?

ES: We do. We had coffee every Sunday morning from between 9 and 9:30 until 10. We're not doing that now. They just thought it better. Again, people are still sort of squeamish, you know. So, we're not doing that. And again, we miss that. Because there were some ladies of the church who got there early on Sundays, and we had a little brunch or breakfast every morning and people would bring things. And it was just time to sit and share a meal, and you know, and we don't do that now, and I miss that, as well as everybody else.

JS: Have you seen the people around you change their opinions, day-to-day activities or relationships in response to the pandemic?

ES: No, I don't think so. I mean, again, I think we're not all out as much. I, for one, no matter when I go out, I put on a mask. Except when I'm in my little community and I go out walking, I don't. People just don't seem to be out and about as much. Like we used to see them walking, and getting out in the neighborhood, and I don't see that now. And I know it's very hot out, but also, people are still just concerned. They're just concerned.

JS: "Self-isolation" and "flattening the curve" have been two key ideas emerging from this pandemic. How have you, your friends, family and community responded to these requests to self-isolate, flatten the curve, wear a mask, etc.?

ES: Well, I wear a mask no matter where I go. You know, if I step out of the house to run to the store for anything, I put a mask on. If I go to the bank, if I go to the doctor, I put a mask on.

JS: Do you feel like the community is responding?

ES: See, I don't see them all that much on a daily basis. I know some of the people in the neighborhood wear a mask, some don't. But again, our neighborhood is small. And I think everybody knows everybody, we pretty much know what everybody is doing, so I think we're okay. I think we're okay in our neighborhood.

JS: Well, you know there is the big debate, wear a mask or not wear a mask.

ES: Well, I'm going to wear a mask for a good, long while yet. Only because, like I said, I'm almost 75 years old. I'm healthy overall and I want to stay that way. So, I'm going to wear a mask, I'm going to social distance, and now when our neighborhood little group gets together, there's no hugging or shaking hands or anything, it's just "hi, how are you?" And I think it's going to be that way for a while.

JS: Have you or anybody you know gotten sick during the outbreak?

ES: Yes, no one locally, but I have a granddaughter who lives in Pensacola, Florida, who did get the COVID-19 virus. She was a student at college, plus she was working. And when she found out she had it, of course, she was quarantined for 14 days. She shares a condo with three other friends, and all four of them had to be quarantined for 14 days, which definitely, again, puts an economic difficulty on them, but they got through it. She said that there were only four or five days that she was really very ill. Short of that, she did okay.

JS: She's fine, now, right?

ES: She's perfectly fine. Graduated college and she's back to work.

JS: Do you think the pandemic is affecting people's mental or physical health?

ES: Of course it is! I think, mentally, by all means, because again, people were going to work, they had a routine, the children were going to school. That's not happening now, and that's got to be putting a mental and emotional conflict in your whole family's lives! It's difficult, it's difficult. Trying to take care of the children, take care of yourselves, you're not able to go to work, you're concerned about paying bills. Yes, it's difficult.

JS: What have been your primary sources of news during the pandemic?

ES: Mostly the TV. And I watch news on the phone, you know. But mostly the TV. I like to watch the evening news; I'll go between two or three different stations, just trying to get their views on it. I watch some morning shows that are basically news shows.

JS: What do you think are some important issues that the media is or is not covering?

ES: Well, see, I don't know. There are so many things going on with this virus that are affecting everybody in so many different ways. And the one thing you hear on TV is how many new cases, how many deaths have occurred. But, you know, there's just got to be more to it, that you don't always hear all of those stories, or all of that information that I think would be good to hear.

JS: How do you think the government here in Hendricks County has responded? Do you think it's been a good response?

ES: Well, I'm assuming so. I mean, I listened to the governor of the state on the TV, because there for a while, he was doing interviews every afternoon, and giving an update. My opinion, I think the federal government should have taken a very bold stand, and that should have trickled down to the states. I think we have too much "this one's going to do this, this one is not going to do this," "this governor is going to do this, this city manager is going to do this." I think that is incorrect. And I think it's evidenced currently by the pandemic is coming up again; I mean the COVID-19 is spreading up again because so many places have allowed people to congregate, and now all of the sudden, they're realizing this was an error. So I think there should have been more stern rules and regulations concerning everybody U.S. wide.

JS: Has your experience transformed how you think about your family, friends and community, and in what way?

ES: I appreciate my family more. Because I think, when you are faced with this, and you think "Oh my, I could get this and die in a few days." Or, what if my granddaughter contracted it at school? Oh my gosh! You know, that has affected me. I live in such a close community here, I don't want to lose anybody. I don't want to hear that people are getting sick, you know. And that's sort of negative, but this has brought out the negative in me.

JS: What do you think individuals, communities and governments need to keep in mind in the future?

ES: When you hear something like this coming on, immediate action on a federal level, on a state level, on a city level. There just needs to be more of a cohesive understanding on this and action on it right now. Don't have this person saying, "Well, it's not all that bad! We're going to see." This one is saying, "Oh, it's horrible!" We need to have a cohesive stance on this so that we all deal with this on the same level.

JS: Ok, well, is there anything else you wanted to impart?

ES: No, I just appreciate the time that you've given me to express my opinions, and I thank you much!