

## Transcription

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### **John:**

Welcome to another episode of Conversations COVID-19. There's so much talk about reducing the risk of contracting the COVID-19 virus, but what happens when all those efforts fail, and you discover that you've got the virus. It must be really unnerving, because contracting the virus could mean anything from having no symptoms at all, to hospitalization and even death. Well on March 2<sup>nd</sup>, Susanne Jones became the first person in Skagit County to be diagnosed with the virus. Luckily Susanne survived the virus and she's here today to share some of her experiences and insights. And she's also joined by Doctor Howard Leibrand, Medical Officer for Skagit County. Welcome.

So Susanne thanks for joining us and I'm so pleased that you're recovered now. It must be quite a relief that you've got the all clear.

### **Susanne:**

Yes, Definitely!

### **John:**

Could you talk us through – when did you first start getting symptoms for the virus?

### **Susanne:**

Probably right around February 22<sup>nd</sup>. I'd felt kind of off a little bit the week before, but that was the day that talking it over with the health department in hindsight, that's the day that we decided I really was officially sick. And I just thought it was allergies. I was worn down, I'd seen Scotch Broom blooming, which blew me away, 'cause it was February and I didn't feel good like every year. So I had a square dance lesson that I wanted to go to, and I was always taught when you have allergies you push through or you don't get to do the things that you want to do. So I went ahead and drove down to Lynnwood to do my square dancing. And I felt awful enough that I thought, "you know, if I get there and I have a fever, I'm going to go home". And I got there and I walked up to one of my friends and I said, "do I have a fever?" and she very kindly put her hand on my forehead and she said, "nope, you don't seem to have a fever" and I said, "okay, well I guess I just have allergies" and I proceeded to dance for five hours. And I didn't feel good enough to go to the dance that night, and the next day I stayed in bed all day. Got dehydrated and hungry, but my dog bugged me enough that I got up and ate and drank and Monday I felt better, so I rested another day and Tuesday I felt great. So, I went off to my mother's to do chores. She lives down in Enumclaw, so that's how it started.

**John:**

Oh wow. So Howard, it's quite an anomaly huh. Are there any distinguishing differences between common cold, flue, allergies, and the virus itself?

**Howard:**

Well there's really – and that's part of the problem is there is no distinct difference or unique symptoms for the COVID-19. People think they have allergies, people think they have a cold. The runny nose, cough, congestion, et cetera, just are not distinguishing in themselves. I think later on in the illness, it becomes obvious that something else is going on but for most people, and most of the course of the illness, the symptoms are so non-specific that people don't really realize that something more important is going on.

**John:**

And what do you think that separates – or do they know yet – what separates one person just having mild symptoms or no symptoms and another person not making it through?

**Howard:**

Well we know some of the things, including chronic lung disease, like asthma, COPD. We also know that people with underlying heart disease tend to have more problems. Diabetes, and just the ageing process seems to make you more susceptible to the severe effects of the illness but there are some people who don't do well with the illness and we really don't – haven't been able to identify a risk factor with them that should make that make sense. So I think there's a lot we don't know about the disease and why it does what it does and there are ongoing studies that will help us to know more about that as time goes on.

**John:**

So Susanne, when did you actually get the results and find out that you were positive?

**Susanne:**

I actually had to get tested twice. So I ended up with my positive result on March 10<sup>th</sup>. My second test was March 9<sup>th</sup>. The first test from March 3<sup>rd</sup>, something happened to it, which happens sometimes. So we knew I had it, we were pretty certain, but we didn't really know until the 10<sup>th</sup>, and I felt like I was prepared to know that but there's knowing and then there's knowing and when you have that definite positive back, it's a whole different thing. There was a lot of guilt, like who did I expose and fortunately it turns out I seem to be pretty good about keeping my germs to myself, so, happy about that. But there was also a weird relief, because I have never had to go through that fear that so many people are feeling right now of 'they haven't had it'. I've had it; I presumably have antibodies, which I'll find out here one of these days soon. So, I'm not waiting to get it at this point. I've had it.

**John:**

And I guess at the point where you got the positive result, you'd actually physically gone through the worst of it, so you didn't have that dread sitting over you about the possibility that it could get really bad.

**Susanne:**

Yeah, actually when I went in to the hospital, the ER, on March 3<sup>rd</sup>, I knew I had pneumonia, I've had it before, and I've gotten over it before on my own, from my allergies. So like a lot of people, I'm not really fond of doctors, although they do a really great job and I love them for that. But I didn't want to go to the doctor. It actually turned out though that I got a message, late on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, that I had actually had a friend who had died from COVID-19, and suddenly my allergies didn't seem so innocent. And I thought, "you know what, I'd better go get tested".

**John:**

So Howard, could you talk us through the progression if you will, from first contracting it all the way through to the stage of recovery, where Susanne is now.

**Howard:**

So the incubation period of COVID-19, can range anywhere from one or two days, up to fourteen days. The incubation period is the time between when you are exposed and you first have the onset of symptoms. The majority of people – that incubation is around seven to eight days with a range of two to fourteen days. It's interesting that most of us are contagious while we're asymptomatic. So for two to three days prior to the onset of symptoms, we are able to shed the virus and give the disease to someone else. The average onset of ICU admissions in someone who is more severely ill, is about fourteen days and the time between onset of illness or exposure to death in those cases where the person has died, is around twenty to twenty one days. So, it can be an extended illness, but for most people, it's a fairly short-lived illness where they have symptoms for just a number of days.

**John:**

What were the instructions that you were given Susanne, when you came positive? Where there any medicines that you were given or instructions?

**Susanne:**

Yeah, actually since I was presumptive positive when I went into the ER on March 3<sup>rd</sup>, they tested me for fever and they were really shocked I didn't have one. As far as I know I never had a fever. They X-rayed me, I had bilateral pneumonia and I didn't have any known virus. They were pretty sure I had COVID-19 and they tested me for it, but they didn't want me to not be treated for bacterial pneumonia, in case that was it. So, they did give me antibiotics. They gave me some there in the ER and then they had me take some for seven days after, which didn't really do me any good but at least it didn't do me any harm. They gave me a box full of masks; because of course people were already making runs on masks even though I don't think we were really taking it very seriously at that point. They told me I needed to go home and self-isolate and I'm a full time RV-er so that meant go to my RV and stay with my dog. And we did that, The health department was very helpful in finding ways that I could go out and get

some fresh air and sunshine and making sure I wasn't giving it to anybody. So any time I stepped out of my RV, I was masked and freshly washed and sanitized, and I stayed far more than six feet from people. I kept at least a good twenty feet or better.

**John:**

Susanne, what was the reaction from your friends and family when they found out?

**Susanne:**

Uhh, duh. (laughs). They already were pretty sure I had it. Between the time of my first test and when I got my positive result, I had four friends come back positive and one negative. So, nobody was really shocked and my mother already was in quarantine. Fortunately, she's able to work from home so that was not a problem for her. But yeah, they weren't really surprised, at least in my one group of friends. It occurred to me that I had another group of friends that I hadn't really talked to as much. They're my older friends, and they were all surprised. When I told them, it turned out that for a lot of them I was the first person they knew that had it. So they had all kinds of questions and you know – social media, so I answered them as best I could.

**John:**

And for you, when you got that final all clear message?

**Susanne:**

Oh, when I got the all clear. That was great! Everybody was on stay-home order, this was March 24<sup>th</sup> and I had like thirty-six hours to be able to go out and do some things, and I had five-and-a-half weeks of dirty laundry, which wasn't too bad while I was sick because I did get the symptom where you can't really smell anything, but I'd recovered from that and five-and-a-half weeks of laundry is a serious stink, so I was happy to wash those. At the time they weren't recommending masks, so I could actually go out without a mask, which meant I could smile at people from a distance. I got to fill up my propane tank. It felt good – it felt really good, to get the all-clear.

**John:**

It's good to hear that your sense of smell came back. Were there any other leftover symptoms that you're still carrying that you notice or any kind of side effects?

**Susanne:**

I think I've lost some lung function. I can't be sure of that 'cause it's spring and – allergies.

**John:**

On that note, Howard, what's the thinking at the moment in terms of immunity and still being at risk of catching it again?

**Howard:**

So the feeling- well, it's obvious that people who have had this illness develop antibodies to it. Now, whether those antibodies are completely protective against recurrent infection, we don't know. There have been reported cases in the news media where it seems like somebody got sick again, but when those are looked at closely, it's probably just a resurgence of the same illness in that person that did not go away. So only time is going to tell how effective the antibody is at preventing recurrent disease.

**John:**

Susanne, how do people react to you now? I mean, if they know you've had it, are they pretty comfortable being around you, or do you still get some people that are a little hesitant?

**Susanne:**

I get some people that are hesitant. When I was first out of quarantine, the first person I met when I got out, said he thought it was a hoax and that he didn't know anybody who'd had it or died from it, and so I told him, "well, I've had a friend die from it, and I just got out of quarantine". And he looked a little shocked and he said, "that's good to know" and I was like, wow I cannot believe there are still people that don't believe this is a thing. And that's sad but it's the way it is and so I think it's really important that those of us who've experienced, do share our experiences. I've found in the last couple weeks, that people are much calmer. If they find out I have it they're more willing to ask questions like "how did it go" and things like that. So they're becoming more comfortable with the idea that there are people that have recovered and that yes, we are wandering among them.

**John:**

Well I think it's a really important message that you're sharing here. Thanks so much for joining us and good luck for the future.

**Susanne:**

Thank you for having me.