

## **Transcript of Interview with Robert Brunschon by Emily Brunschon**

**Interviewee:** Robert Brunschon

**Interviewer:** Emily Brunschon

**Date:** 05/08/2020

**Location (Interviewee):** Illinois

**Location (Interviewer):** Unknown

**Transcriber:** This transcript has been provided by Otter.AI with a 2nd pass for accuracy provided by Bryan Paintiff, HST580 intern, at ASU.

**Abstract:** The interviewee explains how his initial thoughts on covid was how it would not be a huge thing. Next he describes how America was not prepared for the pandemic and there were not systems in place to handle an emergency like a pandemic. Additionally, he explains how he was laid off as a local truck driver, but was able to collect unemployment. He stated how it was a challenge to file for unemployment, could not call and talk to a person, had to do it online. Next he talks about their change in economic status due to not working and how they are budgeting more and paying attention to spending, but still trying to support local restaurants. He explains how it is hard to be motivated to do things at home and easy to get distracted with the quarantine. Also related to the quarantine, how difficult it is connecting with extended family and friends. Then he talks about two people he knew that who got covid and went to the hospital. Then, he describes that he gets his news from the internet as the network news is biased. Finally he describes how he believes that his local government has done a good job responding to the pandemic and trying to help people, but how the federal government has done the opposite: not helping people and being more occupied with getting reelected.

**Emily Brunschon 00:01**

Okay, let's start off with what's your name?

**Robert Brunschon 00:03**

My name is Robert Brunschon. I live in Copper Grove, Illinois. It's about 15 miles south east of Beloit, Wisconsin. Probably about 60 miles west of Chicago.

**Emily Brunschon 00:17**

What's the date and time where you're at right now?

**Robert Brunschon 00:20**

It is Friday, May 8, and it is 6:30 Central time.

**Emily Brunschon 00:27**

So, if you feel comfortable sharing some of your demographic information, like your race, your gender age,

**Robert Brunschon 00:35**

I am considered Caucasian, and I am a male, and I am 54 years old.

**Emily Brunschon 00:42**

So what are the primary things you do on a daily basis? Like do you have a job or hobbies or extracurricular activities that you like to do?

**Robert Brunschon 00:51**

Normally, I drive a truck for a local plating company. And I did coach high school softball part time. I'm no longer doing that. But

**Emily Brunschon 01:08**

so what were your you know, when was it when you first learned about COVID? And what we're seeing are your thoughts on it?

**Robert Brunschon 01:18**

I didn't think it was a big deal. I mean, people have talked about SARS, swine flu, that, you know, this wasn't going to be a huge thing. And but as things continue to progress, I was not aware of how bad this was going to be.

**Emily Brunschon 01:40**

How was your thoughts changed since then?

**Robert Brunschon 01:46**

Well, I didn't know how ill prepared we were as a country to handle a pandemic. Countries much less wealthy than us were much more prepared, and had systems in place to handle this type of emergency. So that was scary that we were that unprepared.

**Emily Brunschon 02:16**

So you talked about that you're a truck driver, how has that affected your job status? You know, do you still continue to work? Are you unemployed?

**Robert Brunschon 02:26**

I'm currently laid off. It's been about four weeks now. I am eligible for unemployment, which I was able to sign up for and actually, I got my first disbursement a week ago, we did get a stimulus check from the government to help in this time of need, which also has helped us when I was working in a lot of the

companies that we would go to, would not allow you in the building anymore. We'd have to sit in the truck and then they would unload the stuff and then they would come out and sign the paperwork while you were in the truck.

**Emily Brunschon 03:09**

Was this you know, you talked about getting a stimulus check. You've talked about receiving unemployment, how has that affected your economic status right now?

**Robert Brunschon 03:19**

Well, we've been planning and budgeting out at least two months in advance so that we can you know, make sure that we're in a good place and really controlled our spending going out to eat you know, once in a while to help support local businesses. We had a local Mexican food place in our town here that we went to the other night course you gotta everything's to go there's no dine in available so but we ordered online and stopped and picked it up. So it was nice to have something local.

**Emily Brunschon 04:07**

And you talked about receiving unemployment and I've heard a lot of people having issues trying to contact the unemployment office or not receiving the aid that they need, what was your experience with it?

**Robert Brunschon 04:22**

Um, anything on the phone is pretty much null and void. The number that you would call it would give you two options, you know, press one or press two and either wanted to press you got a recorded message about information and if you didn't press one, it would automatically Hang Hang up on you. There was no getting to an actual person. They will tell you to call another number. And when you call that number, it was busy. Everything I did was online and Um, it took probably two weeks for to get processed so that I actually got a letter in the mail saying that my claim had been approved and my certification date was this. So it was it was an ordeal, but I've heard people have had worse. Interaction with the unemployment.

**Emily Brunschon 05:26**

So you've talked about that you worked. Does your spouse work as well?

**Robert Brunschon 05:33**

Yes, she is a district librarian supervisor. At but so she's working from home. So we still have her income coming in. Yeah, it's different to have everybody here.

**Emily Brunschon 05:48**

How so with you not working and you've been receiving unemployment and her working full time versus both of you working, how has that changed your economic status? How does that affect, you know, your budgeting and whatnot, versus what it was normally?

**Robert Brunschon** 06:08

Um, well, there's good and there's bad. I mean, obviously, unemployment is not what I normally make, you know, if I'm when I'm working full time, but we're not. Basically, we have a vehicle sitting in our driveway now. So I'm not paying for gas to go back and forth to work. Usually, when I'm working, I'm buying fast food for breakfast, and I'm buying fast food for lunch. So I no longer have them expenses I'm eating at home, which is much more efficient economically. So, yeah, it's been somewhat of a reduction. But with the budgeting that we've been doing, and with the stimulus check that we got from the government, we've been doing okay, so far.

**Emily Brunschon** 06:56

And so what are your concerns about the effects of COVID 19 on your job, and more expensively, the job of truckers?

**Robert Brunschon** 07:07

The guys who are still driving, it was I know that they've made changes now, because a lot of the states were closing the rest areas. But so the guys were having trouble finding places to stop to sleep, because, you know, the truckstops were also you know, having an issue because the restaurants would be, you know, only takeout. So I know that they had lessened the restrictions that they had on some of that stuff. You know, most of the guys just see, you know, wearing masks when they're not in the truck.

**Emily Brunschon** 07:54

And so, how does that affect your current job? If you know it's not considered essential? How's that gonna affect your employment in the future?

**Robert Brunschon** 08:03

Well, I call my boss couple days ago. Where work, it is owned by a company that has two other facilities, one in Bedford Park, Illinois one in Tinley Park, Illinois, and they're currently working at less than 100% capacity. So until that changes, and they get back up to full speed I will not be needed to drive.

**Emily Brunschon** 08:37

Um, what are your concerns on the economy more broadly?

**Robert Brunschon** 08:44

Well, since we are in pretty good shape, ourselves, I have a hard time understanding people's thoughts. You know about the economy. I know there are people hurting but I don't know how to balance that with the higher risk that we have if we open everything back up.

**Emily Brunschon** 09:21

So you've you've been at home now because of being unemployed. How has that affected you or your family's day to day activities?

**Robert Brunschon** 09:32

I'm trying to get stuff done around the house. We have some flower beds that kind of been not attended to as much as they should have been. So trying to clean that up and trying to get organized, trying to stay busy. Of course now I have my my daughter, has a project that she lives out in the country so I'm able to go out there and work on it and not be, you know, worried about social distancing at all.

**Emily Brunschon** 10:15

How are you managing the daily activities in your own household?

**Robert Brunschon** 10:19

Um, okay. I mean, there's a lot of days where it's hard to be motivated. It's easy to be real comfortable sitting in front of the TV and binge watching TV and playing on Quiz sites on the computer. Doing Sporele.

**Emily Brunschon** 10:47

how's the the outbreak affected, how you connect and communicate with friends and family?

**Robert Brunschon** 10:55

Well, it's been difficult. I haven't seen my mom in. I mean, she was in Florida, they go to Florida for the winter. So they came back in April. But I haven't seen her censuses many. So it's been over a month since I've seen my mom. It's a couple of weeks that I've seen my dad and then that was the first time I had seen him in probably a month. Just you know, making sure that we're not putting them at risk. My in laws, it's been, you know, probably three weeks or so since I've been to their place. So just trying to be as careful as we can be.

**Emily Brunschon** 11:37

What has been one of the biggest challenges you face during outbreak and faced with quarantine and social distancing?

**Robert Brunschon** 11:49

Probably being lazy. I guess it's easy to you know, get sucked into watching something or just messing around watching YouTube on the computer or facebook and on the computer. Watching NFL stuff, you

know, hoping, you know, somehow this will you know, at some point get better so they can get back to some normalcy.

**Emily Brunson** 12:18

So how, what have you and your family and friends do for recreation during this pandemic?

**Robert Brunson** 12:29

Well, early on, we went to a county park and we went for a trail walk. And we did one and thought we'd be adventurous and do another one and we kind of lost the trail. So we kind of were cutting our own trail to get back to the car. But it was nice to enjoy the weather and some sunshine. You know, after being cooped up. We've played a couple of board games. Myself, like I said, I've been binge watching a lot of Amazon, Tiger King, Hunters. Watch the starting to watch Grimm, which is also on Amazon. And then there's a show on History Channel called Skinwalker Ranch. It's about a ranch in Utah is supposed to have paranormal activity. So that's been one of the things we've been watching kinda has together. Oh, and then the curse of Oak Island on history. Also, you've been watching that.

**Emily Brunson** 13:31

So have any of you or in your household or anyone you know, have gotten sick because of the outbreak?

**Robert Brunson** 13:40

I know two people who have ended up in the hospital because of COVID. One was a 46 year old man that I coached youth baseball with that my son and his son were on the same team. And he ended up in ICU for about 14 days. approximate guess 10 days of that he was in a induced coma. So they could help fight the virus. And thankfully, he came out of it. And I believe now he's in rehabilitation right now that he was actually released from the hospital, the rehabilitation and and like I said, I coached softball at our high school and one of my former players, her dad ended up in the hospital with it. So I believe he's out now. So apparently his infection wasn't as bad as the previous gentleman. So that's the two people that I've known.

**Emily Brunson** 14:50

Is there any no concerns for your family or immediate friends? Like are they more risk than others? People like to have any health conditions that you're afraid of?

**Robert Brunson** 15:03

Well, I mean, it's a scary thought because the one gentleman, he lives in our subdivision. So I mean, he lives less in a mile from where we live my nephews every day, they're considered essential workers. So my nephew works at a grocery store. So he is, you know, exposed every day, my other nephew works in the hospital. So he's exposed every day.

**Emily Brunson** 15:28

So how have you been getting information about the pandemic? What are some of your primary sources of finding about what's going on?

**Robert Brunson** 15:43

I'm mostly using the internet to be network news. I mean, you got your left leaning CNN and MSNBC, and then you get to right Fox News and OEM. So it's like, you really don't get a solid viewpoint, it's slanted one way or the other, if you're watching those channels. So I like to, you know, go on internet and actually go to, like, non biased sources of information, like factcheck.org. So that you can actually get the the true statistics of what people are saying, and usually you'll, you'll come up with the truth, if you do enough investigation on your own.

**Emily Brunson** 16:36

So you do quite a bit of, you know, digging to make sure you're giving the most objective kind of answer?

**Robert Brunson** 16:44

Yes, because it's been very frustrating to see things posted on social media that people don't even take the time to, to fact check it. Just because it fits their political view, they they repost it or share it. And it's just, it's sharing information that's dangerous.

**Emily Brunson** 17:10

How was I mean, is this your typical news source that you kind of have gone to? Or did you listen to any other news sources before those?

**Robert Brunson** 17:21

I used to be able to, you know, like CBS or NBC or ABC to watch, you know, and think that, you know, most of what I was getting was accurate. But, like I said, that this has come out, it's like, it's this person's fault. It's that person's fault. There's the blame game being played. And it's, you know, it's too bad that we can't concentrate on how to fix this. And instead of trying to blame somebody for what has happened.

**Emily Brunson** 17:57

what are some of the important issues, you know, on social media, or these news outlets that are, are covering or not covering?

**Robert Brunson** 18:12

I don't know if there's, it depends on what's new source your head. I mean, if you're, if you're watching Fox News, or OAN, they're covering how this has been overblown, that this is, you know, overkill, what we're doing, that what is being reported by the news, outlets that are not them is inaccurate. And if you're listening to CNN, or MSNBC, it's how the President has, you know, failed terribly at every turn.

So it's like, they're covering what they want to cover. So you have to find your own information. If you want to, you know, find out what you want to know.

**Emily Brunshon** 19:10

Because you're talking about politics and whatnot, how has your local government and versus the federal government, how have they been responding to this outbreak?

**Robert Brunshon** 19:23

I think on the local level, and the state level, they've done as best as you can probably do. And with this situation. I know when you live in rural areas, it's easy to think that this is you know, overkill that it's too much to have, you know, bars closed and you know, restaurants closed and I mean, for a while they even had the golf courses closed. I mean, they are open now, but you can only have two people and you have to walk, you know, there's no carts allowed. So I know that, like I said, I think they've done well, well as you can expect, because this is something we've never faced before.

**Emily Brunshon** 20:15

And so you're in the state of Illinois, your state government, you know, has been seen a lot in the actions that they're doing to kind of curb the rising cases and whatnot. Do you agree with some of the actions that the government has been taking? Do you think they've been properly proactive and trying to handle this outbreak?

**Robert Brunshon** 20:40

I think they've done well. I mean, the we've had some people, you know, complaining about wearing masks. And to me, you know, if it's a thing that's going to help keep people safe, I've got no issue with it. I don't know why it's a big deal for some people.

**Emily Brunshon** 21:01

What are your thoughts on the federal level and how federal leaders are handling this?

**Robert Brunshon** 21:09

Well, I am not a fan of our president. I didn't vote for him. And like I said, with my opening kind of remarks that I was disappointed that we were so poorly prepared for this. Because we knew about this back in January, we knew what it was a possibility it could end up here. And we did nothing. And for the most part, we've been doing nothing until maybe a month ago. mean on March 6, six, our president stated in a news conference, anyone that can get the needs a test can get a test. That's still not happening today. And this is May 8.

**Emily Brunshon** 22:06



So, you know, the federal government has been kind of called out for they're not acting fast enough towards this pandemic. Do you think that they're going to become more proactive and trying to help and provide aid?

**Robert Brunschon 22:28**

I don't see it with this administration. They are saying, you know, it's the state's responsibility to handle this, basically, that the US government resources are the US government's resources are up the state's resources.

**Emily Brunschon 22:49**

You know, with how in federal government has handled things, how has that changed, or reaffirmed your belief and how the federal has been handling this and versus the state level?

**Robert Brunschon 23:04**

Well, it's scary, because a lot of people in administration are sharing information that's not fact worthy, that they are giving people a false sense of security, a false sense that, you know, everything is okay. And that everything's gonna be back to normal, you know, real soon. And that the fact that our government is putting people's health at risk, because they are more worried about getting elected than the health of the people of the country.

**Emily Brunschon 23:51**

And this administration has talked a lot about kind of trying to reopen the economy and stuff and reopening businesses, and whatnot. How does that? How do you feel about trying to push this? Or what are your concerns for the economy if we do or do not open up businesses and whatnot?

**Robert Brunschon 24:15**

Well, I think it's a slippery slope. I mean, like I said, there are places where, you know, maybe populations less than, you know, 1000, you know, population centers, less than 1000. You know, if you, you know, could come up with something as far as capacity, you know, limits that are really, you know, conducive to social, social distancing. To me, that would be something you could consider, but when you're in major metropolitan areas, and there's no way to, you know, really commit to social distancing without lockdowns without stay at home sheltering I don't know how you you know, I mean, hopefully at some point, there is, you know, some kind of treatment that is actually effective. Or that, you know, hopefully they come up with a vaccine. But it's like until then I don't know how you justify risk versus reward. I mean, yes, it would be lovely to get the, you know, economy and get people back to work. But how many lives? Is it worth?

**Emily Brunschon 25:39**

So how was this experience, tran, transformed how you feel about your friends and family? And in what ways?

**Robert Brunschon 25:47**

it's been disappointing to see people that I considered friends and people that I had positive opinions of share just blatant lies, because it fits your political spectrum. Too, degrade what is going on. To make our political just seems wrong.

**Emily Brunschon 26:27**

And knowing what you know, now, you know, what do you think that individuals or communities, governments should keep in mind for the future?

**Robert Brunschon 26:42**

Well, there, you know, that you can go with all the things, there's no such thing as a free lunch, there's no such thing as a free ride. People have to be willing to pay, they gotta be willing to pay taxes, so that the government can buy and have on hand, the stuff that we need to fight things like this. I mean, like I said, South Korea was able to do 55,000 tests in a week, it took us a month, and we did 242 tests. We needed to be prepared and started preparing for this a year ago.

**Emily Brunschon 27:33**

And so now this, you know, likely coming a second wave and more mass public, more social distancing, is probably going to be in effect for quite a while before we can find such a vaccine or treatment to help kind of curb the cases. What do you think the the normal that's going to come about after this?

**Robert Brunschon 28:01**

I don't know. I mean, I don't think it will be the same. I think people will have, you know, in the back of their mind, you know, worrying about it. I mean, unless they come up with a vaccine that, you know, basically can eradicate this thing. I know, there's a certain segment of our society that, you know, well, this isn't different than the flu, there was 61,000 people died of the flu in 2014, or 2016. And you know, that was a high number for flu that year. But then we've had over 65,000 people die in three months. So this is far from being over. And I don't know if anybody knows, you know, what the true toll will be.

**Emily Brunschon 28:52**

What are your feelings about the future, whether in the next couple of years or even in the next couple of months? are you what are your feelings? Are you scared? Are you nervous? Are you hoping for the new normal to come about? So we can, you know, get back to being out and about and seeing other people or seeing businesses and whatnot.

**Robert Brunschon 29:13**

I think it runs the full spectrum. I mean, I I'm hopeful that at some point. I have a son who is going to be a senior in high school who does competitive cheerleading, I would love to be able to enjoy his senior year of cheerleading. I have a huge football fan. I would love to be able to go see a game. But then, you

know, you know I'm going to the store and I'm wearing a mask and I'm you know, making sure that nobody's getting by me and we're going to the store maybe once every 10 days because that's when we have to go because we're out of you know, the essentials. So, you know, hopefully at some point, you know, we can just go to the store we want to, but who knows, I mean, that's the unknown is scary.

**Emily Brunschon** 30:14

I mean, that's all the questions that I have for you right now. Um, thank you so much for the interview and participating in this archive and providing your experience and sharing your story.

**Robert Brunschon** 30:25

Thank you for inviting me.

**Emily Brunschon** 30:28

All right.