

Transcript of Interview with Wyatt J. Weisensel by Weston L. Weisensel

Interviewee: Wyatt J. Weisensel

Interviewer: Weston L. Weisensel

Date: November 10th, 2020

Location (Interviewee): Eau Claire, Wisconsin

Location (Interviewer): Eau Claire, Wisconsin

Transcriber: Weston Weisensel

Abstract:

Wyatt J. Weisensel was born and raised in Sun Prairie Wisconsin and now works as a software developer for the Orbis Corporation. In the interview, Wyatt discusses how COVID-19 has affected his life, especially his work. At the time the pandemic started in March, he was teaching English in Japan. He shares his views on how, after getting back to the U.S., he needed to find a job, which turned out to be quite a difficult process. He also touches on how politics has affected the U.S. response to the virus.

Weston L. Weisensel 0:03

Okay should be recording. Right, it is November 10th, 2020, currently 8:57pm. All right. So, what is your name and share some of the demographic information.

Wyatt J. Weisensel 0:18

8:57pm Central Time Zone.

Weston L. Weisensel 0:21

Oh yeah.

Wyatt J. Weisensel 0:22

My name is Wyatt Weisensel. I'm a white 26-year-old male, and I'm from Wisconsin.

Weston L. Weisensel 0:35

Alright. [laughs] where were you when you first heard about Coronavirus?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 0:42

So I was in Japan at the time. I was teaching English as sort of a gap year in between software development jobs. I was in Coca Prefecture in a city called Kama. I don't remember the exact first time I heard about it. I think it was at my middle school. ateacher who I talked to a lot and knew a little bit of English. he just- I remember him telling me one day "oh there's this virus in China and kinda keeping an eye on it." That's all it really was, and I think stuff like this that kinda happened before when it was contained.

Weston L. Weisensel 1:40

Okay. So no one seemed worried about it?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 1:45

No.

Weston L. Weisensel 1:45

No one had any idea what scale it would become?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 1:49

No.

Weston L. Weisensel 1:50

Okay. So your initial reaction was nothing to worry about?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 1:58

Right.

Weston L. Weisensel 1:59

Like you weren't going to like, go home and do some research on it or anything?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 2:06

No.

Weston L. Weisensel 2:07

Okay. So what region of Japan was the that city in?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 2:17

Uh, down south. Kyushu, which is the southernmost main island.

Weston L. Weisensel 2:25

Okay. What's like the nearest largest city?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 2:29

Fukuoka.

Weston L. Weisensel 2:30

Okay. So then, how did like- so the- the teacher you're working with told the students about it? Or were the students really aware of what was going on?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 2:49

This was in the break room, not in front of students.

Weston L. Weisensel 2:52

Oh, okay. So as far as you're aware, did students know about Corona?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 2:59

Not as far as I'm aware, not that I would have asked.

Weston L. Weisensel 3:02

Okay.

Wyatt J. Weisensel 3:07
'Cause of the language barrier.

Weston L. Weisensel 3:08
Right.

Wyatt J. Weisensel 3:09
Like I said, I didn't think it was a big deal. I don't think that ever occurred to me is a topic.
[Laughter]

Weston L. Weisensel 3:16
So Corona didn't really affect your work environment? Or did it change over time?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 3:26
So, I'm trying to think about when I first heard about it. I want to say it- when everyone was like, "Oh, it's not a big deal. It's not a big deal. It's not a big deal." And then, they found that- and like, "Oh, there's some cases in Japan, you know, wear your mask," which everyone Japan kind of does anyways, even before all of this, that's just what they do. And a lot of... I don't think it's just Japan. I think a lot of Asian countries do that.

Weston L. Weisensel 4:18
Is it just because of air pollution?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 4:20
Air pollution. My Japanese friend, she would wear it if she wasn't wearing makeup that day or something. If you're sick, people would wear them. So they're already kind of doing that. But then kinda all of a sudden, they closed all the schools for the last, I think, two weeks.

Weston L. Weisensel 4:49
Is that in March?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 4:52
Yeah, I remember my last two weeks of work, I had to report to my schools. I didn't have any classes to teach.

Weston L. Weisensel 5:03
Because the students were all at home?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 5:04
Right.

Weston L. Weisensel 5:05
Okay.

Wyatt J. Weisensel 5:07

The middle school, I was just desk warming. My elementary school's I had a little bit to do. They're kind of doing daycare for kids since-

Weston L. Weisensel 5:19

Okay.

Wyatt J. Weisensel 5:20

-parents had to work. Yeah, that was it for my last two weeks of work. And I remember that being pretty controversial. Yeah, I think I remember reading some news articles. People felt it kind of came out of nowhere that the Japanese government shut all schools down nationwide for the last two weeks of the semester. And well, I came home at the end of March, not because of Coronavirus, but because my one year was up at that time, just the way it worked out. It sounded like all my friends that I keep in touch with that they started making up classes over the summer and stuff.

Weston L. Weisensel 6:02

Okay. Did you- so once schools closed down, and I know you didn't have contact with a lot of students, but in the students you were in contact with, could you tell it they were worried about it in any way?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 6:25

No.

Weston L. Weisensel 6:26

Okay.

Wyatt J. Weisensel 6:27

I don't think students were worried about it.

Weston L. Weisensel 6:29

Did the other teachers or your coworkers feel like something bad was going to happen?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 6:38

No, I don't think so.

Weston L. Weisensel 6:40

Okay. Then, with-

Wyatt J. Weisensel 6:43

I feel like, people were more stressed out about their jobs and livelihood and how their schedules are being affected more on the virus itself.

Weston L. Weisensel 6:55

So was it only the schools that were shut down? Or did the nation itself shut down? Like businesses having to change the way you know, people could like, go to restaurants and everything? Or was it strictly just schools?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 7:10

Just the schools.

Weston L. Weisensel 7:12

Okay.

Wyatt J. Weisensel 7:27

People were kind of staying at home, but I remember I saw- I- the two weeks of school where I didn't have anything to do because they were shut down. Then I had two weeks kind of to myself before my flight to go home. And I traveled during that time. And I was mostly doing hiking and stuff outside. But we still went to some restaurants and some hotels. So stuff was open. There was just less people.

Weston L. Weisensel 8:01

It was- was there any call for social distancing like there was in the US?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 8:10

Um... [Long pause] Yeah, there was. I believe so. Because I remember people being like, "How are we gonna be around kids, but still stay away from them" and stuff like that? But I don't know. Not much. I remember during the last two weeks, like the daycare stuff for the elementary schools, like we weren't making the kids social distance.

Weston L. Weisensel 8:47

Okay. But did the students have to wear masks in class.?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 8:56

I don't think so.

Weston L. Weisensel 8:58

Oh, wow. Okay. But what- was there like a was a government telling people to wear their masks when out in public?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 9:09

I'm not sure. See, that's tricky, because everyone kind of does it anyways.

Weston L. Weisensel 9:13

Right. Okay. Yeah.

Wyatt J. Weisensel 9:16

Now I think about it, no- no one wa really wearing masks around each other at school.

Weston L. Weisensel 9:20

Okay.

Wyatt J. Weisensel 9:23

Or- No, I think they were. It might- it probably just varied school to school.

Weston L. Weisensel 9:36

Okay.

Wyatt J. Weisensel 9:37

I recall at least at my- at one school always wearing it.

Weston L. Weisensel 9:43

Okay. Kind of depends on the school administration and how they wanted to enforce it?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 9:48

Right.

Weston L. Weisensel 9:49

Okay. So then while you were in Japan, the US kind of went on lockdown and the US government told everyone to stay home for two weeks. Do you remember hearing about how Corona was affecting the United States while you were in Japan?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 10:24

See, at that point in time, everyone was still trying to say, “Oh, this isn't going to be a big deal, it's gonna go away.” Remember Donald Trump definitely talked that way. But even the experts were like, “Hey, okay, if we act now we can contain this.” So no one was really worried about it back in March, I don't think.

Weston L. Weisensel 10:53

In the US? That you felt like?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 11:00

Well, I don't think so. No.

Weston L. Weisensel 11:03

Okay. [Pause] So when you had to come back to the United States, was there any difficulty in getting, you know, an airplane ticket to come to the US [unintelligible]?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 11:25

When I started trying to get back home, then that's when I was like, “Okay, this might be a lot more serious, maybe I wasn't watching the news enough.” I originally bought a flight back in like December, like, three, four months before I needed to leave, and I was going to have a layover in Taiwan, but then Taiwan banned all air travel, even just lay overs, and so my flight was canceled. And I found out about that on the news on my phone

Weston L. Weisensel 12:07

Oh really?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 12:08

I didn't get an alert from the airline. Did some research and found out that yeah, it was- everything was so crazy that the airlines weren't even really like alerting people. People I think they were going to their airport and stuff and were told to go away [laughter]. So I cancelled that, and I had like a week to get a new ticket. Wound up like- but airlines were doing- they were being lenient on cancellations and stuff. I cancelled that got my money back. Then I had a flight that was gonna take me into Canada for a layover. But then I was worried about Canada shutting down the US border or something. So then I cancelled that and got a ticket that took me from Tokyo to Houston right into the USA, and that's what I used to get home. Yeah, the flight from Fukuoka to Tokyo, it's pretty normal. Hard to say. It's not like I bet in that airport before. What I remember, Tokyo to America, big international flight like that. That was like dead.

Weston L. Weisensel 13:48

Really?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 13:49

Normally those flights and those airports are terrible to be in. This was completely dead. I had on the flight, I had all three seats to myself. I could lie down just, about everyone did. That's unheard of. Most people pay very good money to get a business class or something in order to get to lie down. Even TSA was super chill, and like laughing and joking with people as they were checking some through-

Weston L. Weisensel 14:30

Oh yeah? That's interesting.

Wyatt J. Weisensel 14:33

-in Houston. When we arrived at the Houston airport getting to my next flight, Houston to Chicago, well, I rode like their train completely alone. Cleaning staff, that was it.

Weston L. Weisensel 14:50

Like, did- was anyone taking your temperature at all at the airports?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 14:55

No, and I wasn't quarantined or anything.

Weston L. Weisensel 14:57

Okay.

Wyatt J. Weisensel 14:58

No temperature checks.

Weston L. Weisensel 15:01

Everyone was wearing masks, though, right?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 15:08

Yeah, maybe not everyone but pretty close, I think so.

Weston L. Weisensel 15:13

Okay. So then were you kind of shocked at how different the US was reacting to Corona versus Japan, with how everyone in the US was staying home and quarantining at the time that you came back to the US versus Japan, where everyone seemed to be kind of going about their normal everyday lives for the most part?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 15:43

I think stuff is really starting to shut down in Japan towards the very end of my stay, I was focused on getting moved out anyways, so it's hard to say. I know, like a couple of weeks after I got back, Japan didn't let people come back in. Actually, when I left Japan, there's an immigration officer who you talk to, you give him your visa. And he asks "You- are you coming back? Or are you out of here for good?" I had some jobs I applied to at the time that I was waiting hear back from. I told him I was coming back.

Weston L. Weisensel 16:23

Oh really?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 16:25

He was just like "Yeah, okay" like normal. Something that even if I had gotten an offer, I would have been banned, they wouldn't let people come in from the US. Another interesting thing too, is they didn't have the- see- people weren't sure what numbers to believe. You know, because at least at that time, people were thinking, "Oh, is China even giving us the real numbers? It could be the black plague over there and they're just lying to the world." All these countries do stuff like that. Japan too to an extent, people are wondering how much they're really telling the rest of the world, I think. I never heard a single thing about like hospitals being filled up in Japan, ever. But I think because they wear masks all the time pretty normally anyways, I don't- I think they just weren't hit that hard. They just weren't like we were. They kinda just wore their masks and stayed at home as much as they could, and it went away.

Weston L. Weisensel 17:56

Would you... would you say that the Japanese government handled the pandemic better, then the Trump administration?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 18:06

Oh, definitely. They probably seemed like an overreaction at first but I'm sure they're not regretting things like shutting down schools now.

Weston L. Weisensel 18:15

Right. In Japan, was there- what kind of backlash was there initially towards the government like telling people to wear masks or to shut down the country? Like in the US, you have people protesting against like wearing masks and social distancing. Was there anything like that happening in Japan that you know of?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 18:45

No, not at all.

Weston L. Weisensel 18:46

Okay. Do you think you would have been better off staying in Japan, like ride out the pandemic in that country versus coming back home to the US?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 19:01

Up until I managed to get this job I was thinking, yeah, I totally could have stayed in Japan for another year and it wouldn't have hurt anything.

Weston L. Weisensel 19:12

Well, what would have- would you have like continue with your teaching job? Or would you have gotten a job someplace else if you would have stayed?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 19:21

Through lack of options I probably want to stay in a teaching job. But I probably would have kept applying for software jobs to see what would happen or something.

Weston L. Weisensel: 19:31

Okay, yeah. So then how has the pandemic affected trying to find a job in the US? Did you- do you think that without the pandemic you still would have had a hard time trying to find a job that you would have liked?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 19:58

Well, I kinda had nothing for like four or five months, three, four months. And then the interviews started coming in again. I think in like, August, maybe. Businesses, at least for software, which has never really been too affected by this, because it's an office job, we can work remotely, for us. That seemed like when businesses are kind of like, "Alright, this isn't going away anytime soon, we're just going to have to rese as normal as much as we possibly can." Because I remember... I got this job and like, after I accepted, all of a sudden, a bunch of companies I had applied to, good companies, wanted to interview me. Like, why couldn't you have done this a month ago? I already took a job.

Weston L. Weisensel 21:07

So do you think that is a kind of a part of the kind of national feeling of fatigue towards the pandemic, that everyone's just kind of sick and tired of social distancing and businesses shutting down, so everyone now is kind of ignoring it, is, do you think that that fatigue affected how businesses were then just going back to more regular hiring practices?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 21:40

Yeah, I think so. Think maybe it started with the businesses, and then everyone else followed. Businesses started getting more lax about their mask policies and stuff. So then, people are like, Okay, so that's not as big of a deal anymore, evidently. And we're just ignoring it.

Weston L. Weisensel 22:00

Right. So then, how's the pandemic affected your current job environment? Also, What job do you have currently?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 22:13

So I'm a software developer at Orbis Corporation. They make plastic totes for a lot of industrial uses. So a lot of car companies use our products to, you know, they'll have like a bin of headlights, or whatever car components, and they're going through their factory. And then at the end, the totes, well, we made it and sold it to them. But we'll also be responsible for getting that tote back to suppliers to fill back up with car parts. So the software I'm writing it's kind of logistics software for managing where containers are at any given moment and the best way to load them into a semi-trucks so that it can make efficient route.

Weston L. Weisensel 23:07

Right. Okay. So then, how has the pandemic affected your current job environment?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 23:16

Well, we're all working from home. So they have a corporate office here that I would normally be out with like 200 something people. Everyone's just working from home and Zoom, Microsoft Teams. Tomorrow, they do like company events and stuff, you know? They're trying to do some of that via Zoom. Something tomorrow; will be interesting to see how that goes. Because Yeah, I'm the first, I'm the first person they've onboarded this way. So like, man, my coworkers are all people I've barely seen in person if at all. I don't even know what they sound or look like.

Weston L. Weisensel 24:12

Uh, have you been required to go into the office at all and work with anyone in person?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 24:20

On like my first day, that's it. So unless I need to, like, pick something up, like I had to get a barcode scanner to test some software with once that's it.

Weston L. Weisensel 24:38

Do you like working from home? Or do you wish you could go into an office and have that, you know, a space to focus in versus at home?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 24:51

I would prefer being in the office for reasons you just mentioned. It's easier to communicate with people too because I run into situations where like, you messaged someone, because you need something answered so you can keep working on whatever it is you're doing. Now you're like, Okay, are they at their desk, at a meeting? I don't know. Are they going to answer this in 30 seconds, should I just wait for a bit? Or is it going to be 20 minutes? Should I do something else for a bit until they get back to me?

Weston L. Weisensel 25:30

Right. Do you know if anyone at work has gotten COVID?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 25:47

I want to say a few people have. But to the best of my knowledge, never became a big deal, I think, they kind of just quarantined. I don't know if they would have taken off of work. They're already working from home.

Weston L. Weisensel 26:01

Right. So the company didn't have to do anything major because of that?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 26:08

[shakes head no] Mm-mm.

Weston L. Weisensel 26:08

Okay. Then, have there been any other challenges that you face during a pandemic outside of you guys trying to find a job in the middle of a global pandemic?

WJW 26:46

I mean, it's harder to socialize. I've been wanting to join a gym. But apparently, that's not fun to do right now because you have to wear a mask. So I haven't done that. That's it really. And I think of working from home- well, so I'm trying I moved into a new apartment too, for my job. So now trying to furnish an apartment, buy stuff during this pandemic. So I have a couch that's taken three months so far. It's not going to come until December 19.

Weston L. Weisensel 27:35

And that's just because of that global supply chain being affected by the pandemic.

Wyatt J. Weisensel 27:42

Yeah, and some bad luck, 'cause I know people who have bought furniture as well, they haven't had that extreme of problem like mine at least, but yeah. Surprised they even sell it to me, at what point are you just out of stock? What else was hard to get? Some canned food was hard to get. Remember that?

Weston L. Weisensel 28:23

[Shakes head no] Mmm.

Wyatt J. Weisensel 28:25

Mom was making one of her casseroles or something and it wasn't right. She said she had to buy different vegetables for it.

Weston L. Weisensel 28:33

Oh, I don't know. I might have not been home for that.

Wyatt J. Weisensel 28:38

I doubt it was a true shortage, It's probably people panic buying again like there were with toilet paper. Remember that?

Weston L. Weisensel 28:44

Yeah.

Wyatt J. Weisensel 28:47
That was an American thing.

Weston L. Weisensel 28:49
Yeah. Did anything like that happened in Japan?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 28:55
Maybe very briefly.

Weston L. Weisensel 28:57
Okay.

Wyatt J. Weisensel 29:01
I brought home some toilet paper.

Weston L. Weisensel 29:04
Oh yeah.

Wyatt J. Weisensel 29:05
Oh! You couldn't buy masks.

Weston L. Weisensel 29:09
Where? In the US?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 29:10
In Japan.

Weston L. Weisensel 29:12
Okay.

Wyatt J. Weisensel 29:15
Well, everyone was buying them up. I even remember in February, I traveled to Osaka, a friend was going to help me apply to some jobs, at a place called Hello Work, kind of like their unemployment office. I was like, Oh, I need to pick up some masks and I couldn't find any. And I think even in February, it's still- yeah, I want to say in February, everyone was wearing a mask. But that was it; no one really thought it was a big deal, and you kind of wear the mask anyways. They're just kinda like "Oh nasty flu of some kind is going around. I'll be diligent on my mask wearing." Whatever. That's all it was at that point. Yeah, I took a ferry up to Osaka, and that was pretty cool. And nothing was really shut down, went to the Pokémon store there. Think that was mid if not late February.

Weston L. Weisensel 30:45
Okay. And where do you see COVID going now? Do you think with the presidential election going the way that it did, do you think we're going to see another government lock down-government mandated lockdown?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 31:11

I really don't know. I feel like it's too late. I mean, it's out 200, what, 230,000 people died, right?

Weston L. Weisensel 31:20

Right.

Wyatt J. Weisensel 31:22

It's too late. Everyone's just gonna have to wear masks and social distance and hopefully-

Weston L. Weisensel 31:30

Ride it out?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 31:35

But everyone will; everyone already knows that.

Weston L. Weisensel 31:38

Right. So you don't think there's anything besides social distancing and mask wearing we can do to help keep the numbers down and to keep it from spreading?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 31:53

I don't think so. That's exactly what you need to do. It's a virus. Wear masks and social distance and it won't spread as much.

Weston L. Weisensel 32:01

Mhm. Do you think places like restaurants and bars need to close down so people don't have as much reason to go out and be together in large groups?

Wyatt J. Weisensel 32:22

Yeah, that's kind of what I meant by like, it's too late. They'd have to really permanently shut down and then probably go out of business. If we had just done that back in like March, maybe.

Weston L. Weisensel 32:38

Right.

Wyatt J. Weisensel 32:38

Really shut down, we wouldn't be in this mess.

Weston L. Weisensel 32:48

All right. I think we should call it there then. Alright, well, thanks for talking.

Wyatt J. Weisensel 32:57

Alright.