

Interviewer: Glenda McGann

Interviewee: Rise Ruser

May 14, 2020

Interview done for IUPUI Arts and Humanities for COVID-19 Oral History Project

Location: Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

#COVID-19, shutdown, Indianapolis, Indiana, healthcareworker, pandemic, Over60, foodways, simplelife, Second Helpings, volunteer, outdoors

Abstract: Rise Ruser is a retired critical care nurse. She is a widow and lives very simply. Her immediate family and friends have not contracted COVID-19, but a few acquaintances have. Personally, her life remained the same before the pandemic and during it. She is a volunteer for an organization that feeds the hungry and teaches people to cook and care for themselves, called Second Helpings, located in Indianapolis. (<https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.seconddhelpings.org/>). Ruser stressed the need for people to be kind to each other and care for each other. She also mentioned that we knew a pandemic was inevitable and would be coming, that another will come again. Ruser's hope is that we learn from this one as we have from the pandemics in the past. She enjoys being outside, walking, and riding her bike. She tries to find little things to do to give her joy.

(Note: the timestamp feature stopped working after 22:45 due to a glitch.)

Ruser: Did you get my consent, I felt like I sent it but I can't. If I did not mail it to you or.

McGann: Let me check my email really quickly.

Ruser: Okay. Yeah, I'm not the best at doing like, stuff like that. I downloaded into a PDF signed it, and then trying to send it back but

I don't see it in here yet but who knows it might be stuck in a server someplace we'll figure it out. Okay. But so far it hasn't come over. Okay, what is the date and time.

Ruser: It is May 14 1:54 pm.

McGann: Thank you. What is your name?

Ruser: Rise Ruser.

1:02

McGann: What are the primary things you do on a day to day basis your job extracurricular activities?

1:09

Ruser: I am a retired critical care nurse, so no job to speak of. I volunteer at a nonprofit in Indianapolis, Indiana. Can I tell you the name?

McGann: Sure.

Rusher: Second Helpings. And right now I'm spending most of my time trying to help them during the pandemic.

1:32

McGann: Okay. And the next question was, where do you live you mentioned Indianapolis?

1:38

Rusher: Yes, I live downtown right in the thick of things on the White River canal.

1:43

McGann: What is it like to live there?

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Rusher: I think it's great. Yeah, I just feel like it's nice to be downtown in the middle of things. Yeah, there's always lots going on, lots to see and do. It's just a really nice place to be. I live in a variety of habitats, and this is nice urban living.

2:12

McGann: When you first learned about COVID-19, what were your thoughts about it?

2:18

Rusher: Initially I was like everybody else just trying to make note of it. I mean I've been following it since the first cases out broke in Wuhan. And, you know, at that time, it seems pretty remote, but a lot of things do remind me a lot of like the SARS and different outbreaks of different things in the past. So I was just trying to be vigilant just you know make sure I was informed about what it was just, just tracking it like everybody else just trying to see where it was headed or if it were headed. So yeah, I was pretty, pretty calm at first, just make to make sure I was staying informed.

3:04

McGann: How have your thoughts changed since then?

3:08

Rusher: It's definitely evolved. It started out with just some cases on the west coast and then it just seemed like overnight, then it caught on fire, and just spread throughout the country. So yeah, it kind of went from just something to maintain a little bit of watchfulness about to something that you're in the middle of. Seemed remote, now it doesn't.

3:44

McGann: What issues have most concerned you about the covid 19 pandemic?

3:49

Rusher: It's just the number of people that are obviously getting very very ill from it and dying. I mean as a critical care nurse I could immediately visualize what was going on on the front lines in the hospitals, and so I knew it was deadly serious. I mean, I never had any doubt about that. And, yeah, just that, more than anything. I've been in the critical care environment so I can easily imagine what was going on there.

4:31

McGann: This next section of questions has to do with employment and since you've already mentioned that you're retired but you're volunteering, I'm just going to swap out the word employment for volunteering if it's applicable it's for questions.

Rusher: Okay.

McGann: How has COVID-19 effective your volunteering?

4:50

Rusher: It's really just affected the way I do it more than anything, I mean I'm still volunteering like I had been. It's a really great nonprofit, and I knew from the get-go, they would be considered essential during all of this. So I just tried to make sure I stayed in contact with them. I knew their need for volunteers would change and then the availability for the volunteers that they had to be able to continue doing what they were doing would change. So I just tried to stay informed about what I can continue to do to help them more than anything.

5:31

McGann: How has COVID-19 changed your volunteer status?

5:36

Rusher: I don't know that it's changed as much I've always been a pretty loyal volunteer. Yeah, I don't think it's changed as much as al.I I'm still very, very proud to be a part of the organization and I still try to get in there and help them as much as I can.

6:01

McGann: So same number of hours that sort of thing same types of things?

Rusher: Probably just a little bit more just because they need it. And just how I go about it is a little bit different than. All in all, is still the same rock solid place trying to get out there and do what they always do.

6:19

McGann: and what exactly is that that they do? And that you do?

6:25

Rusher: Second Helpings is a nonprofit and they are basically are a hunger relief, food rescue, job training organization. What they do is they get food from different sources around the city. It's good food it's from, you know, grocery stores, restaurants, food suppliers food distribution centers all sorts of

places in his food that would otherwise go to waste. being brought in made into meals and sent out to people that are in need of food.

7:13

McGann: What concerns, do you have about the effects of COVID-19 on your volunteering and the economy more broadly?

Rusher: I don't really feel like it will affect me personally as a volunteer as long as I stay healthy and I'm able to get in there and try to help them.

7:37

McGann: And on the economy more broadly?

7:45

Rusher: You know I don't know that I don't really give much thought to that question.

7:52

Rusher: I mean, as far as Second Helpings goes they are filling a big need right now, I mean there's just a lot of people that are in need of help when it comes to sourcing food. I think they'll just continue to grow. And then with unemployment being what it is and just folks being in trouble and need a little bit of help as far as keeping themselves.

8:20

McGann: How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the employment of people that you know?

8:29

Rusher: I know of some folks I mean being a nurse, a lot of my colleagues are still working because they're essential workers on the front line. A lot of my friends and families are retired so employment hasn't really affected them. I guess I have some younger people in my life, whose jobs have suffered because of this. But all in all, in my small world has not seen a lot of that. But I'm aware that it's, it's out there and it's a, it's a real thing for a lot of people.

9:07

McGann: This next section is about family and household. How has COVID-19 affected you and or your family's day to day activities?

Rusher: I'll be honest with me it's, it's just me since I'm a widow and it doesn't keep a whole lot to keep me going. So other than just, you know, keeping myself fed and, and trying to stay healthy. My life really hasn't changed much. I mean it's just a fact, I mean I am appreciative of how other people's lives have changed so drastically with job loss and kids' education and that but for me personally, I mean it's not impacted me on a personal level. I'm just well aware of it. And, yeah, worried about it.

9:56

McGann: How are you managing day to day activities in your household?

10:01

Rusher: Pretty much the same. [laughs slightly] I mean I strive to try to stay home as recommended. But when I can, and when I feel like it's appropriate, get out and enjoy sunshine and fresh air and yeah I still try to take all the safety precautions and get out to the stores as needed, but I don't do a lot of frivolous kind of running around because I think it's important that we all not do that until the science catches up with what's going on and we can get this thing more under control. And I don't want my actions to affect somebody else just if I'm asymptomatic and out there I don't want to get other people said so. Pretty simple life. [laugh]

10:54

McGann: Oh has the COVID-19 outbreak affected how you interact and communicate with family and friends.

11:03

Rusher: I'm very fortunate I mean I still have family that check in on me and I on them and same with friends. Of course there's always that miss enjoyment of just being in, you know, with people. But I think everybody, pretty much understands that just needs to be for the time being and they're kind of adapting to it and yeah, trying to take care of each other as we can as much as we can in this unusual world.

11:37

Rusher: I have a really really lovely cousin that I missing. [laughs] But that will return.

11:50

McGann: What have been the biggest challenges that you have faced personally during the covid 19 outbreak,

12:01

Rusher: Just worried about my loved ones that are affected by it. Just like everybody else. I mean, it's just something that's beyond all of our control, so just they just dealing with that. Just knowing there's just so much you can't do and then trying to figure out the things you can do and then figuring out how to do.

12:27

McGann: What have you, your family and friends done for recreation during the covid 19 outbreak? And you're welcome to include details about any shows you binge watched or games or books, anything.

12:42

Rusher: I get outdoors as much as possible. I mean, I'll go to the state parks and hike and ride my bike, can I love to read. I try to stay on top of the news and things like that but not to the point where it's detrimental. A little bit of movie watching. I'd like to say I'm one of those persons that have embraced

the opportunity to learn to play the piano or learn a new language or something but I keep it pretty simple, I just try to find little things, to enjoy and yeah keep, keep everything good as far as mental health issues. Yeah.

13:26

McGann: And now switching to a category of questions about community. How has the COVID-19 outbreak affected your community? And you can define community, however you like whether it's related to your volunteerism, or your close friends or your city, however, or in as many ways as you would like to try to define it.

13:55

Rusher: I just think it's like everybody else it's just, you're a little bit isolated from things that you're usually not isolated from. I don't I really don't feel like my community has changed that much to me. Hopefully, you know, it'll stay that way but everybody in my small circle of friends and family seem to be coping and staying healthy. Yeah, so I don't know that it's changed a lot. I hope it stays that way but I mean this is kind of a data time thing.

14:38

McGann: How are people around you responding to the covid 19 pandemic?

Rusher: No surprises there I mean the people in my life that are involved in their church or whatever they continue to do that think they of course corrected [unintelligible] where necessary. Everybody that had gainful employment is still employed. I don't think the people I know has changed a whole lot, other than maybe their areas of concern for different people have shifted a little bit.

15:20

McGann: How have the opinions activities and relationships of people around you changed in response to the pandemic?

15:46

Rusher: It seems like politics gets pulled into this a lot. I don't know that nobody's opinions have really changed on anything if anything they're heightened. So, yeah, no big changes.

16:04

McGann: Self-isolation and flattening the curve have been two key ideas that have emerged during this pandemic. How have you, your family and friends, and community responded to requests to self isolate and flatten the curve?

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Rusher: We're pretty good at self-isolating I don't know what that says about us but from the get go, I mean everybody in my family and circle or friends they locked down pretty hard.

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McGann: Oh and flattening the curve? Have you seen that?

16:44

Rusher: Yeah, I feel like, not just friends but just the whole community at large, at least here in this part of the Midwest, I think they did a really good job. I think they took all those people took the personal responsibility of staying home and and self-quarantining self-isolating I think they took it very seriously. I think it's basically very seriously and I think they did a really good job of flattening the curve here in Indiana. I don't know that we could have done any better job. I'm kind of proud of people, at least from what I've observed.

17:22

McGann: We're good, real good Hoosiers.

McGann: In what ways has COVID-19 changed your relationship with family, friends and community.

Rusher: Well, maybe we check in on each other a little bit more. I mean, my family and friends were kind of the mindset that a lot of times, no news is good news. I mean we tend to reach out to each other when things are up. So I think if anything we're doing a little bit more of that. But all in all, I mean, it's that it's not an obsessive thing. It's just people check in on each other and they trust each other that if they need help, they let somebody know and vice versa. So, yeah, really, much like everybody else.

18:16

McGann: What has been your direct experience you or anyone you know with the COVID-19 sickness?

Rusher: Let's see. I've known some acquaintances, that have had it, and recovered. Within a few distant acquaintances have had it and not recovered, but really nobody in the close circle of family and friends has had it or so far tested positive. I mean even folks on the front lines of health care—that I know anyhow—they've not tested positive—they've not actually acquired it. So I don't, I don't have a whole lot of folks that I know of that have had it. And, of course, that could change overnight.

19:12

McGann: In what ways do you think that COVID-19 is affecting people's mental and or physical health?

19:21

Rusher: That's a biggie. I mean, I know folks it's just the whole unknown of where we're headed with this and when it's cool you know things are going to shift towards the better. I think there's an understandable worry about that. And a lot of anxiety, with the unknown. I think most people are managing that pretty well. We're still pretty early into this scenario. So it could be that people were more than with those sorts of things as, as this goes on but, you know, Hoosiers are pretty solid people. I think they've just dug in and they're just doing the best they can just see where this is all headed and I'm just trying to keep the stress and anxiety about it under control and they they're doing what they always do is just attack it with practical things, you know, try to be productive, to help each other, and not get too caught up and just the worry of it.

20:32

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

Rusher: I try to make sure I get it from a variety of sources. I don't know that I should mention any particulars but, yeah, I just try to stay good enough just to make her feel like I'm understanding what's going on but then not get overloaded with... I tried to stick with the science side of things and not too much with the finger pointing or that sort of thing. I'm real careful about where I get my news from trying to make sure it's from trusted sources that I've always gotten news from. Just being careful about it, and just try to be wise about what it is I'm listening to and acting on.

21:34

McGann: So, have your news sources changed at all during the course of the pandemic?

Rusher: Not, not one bit.

21:43

McGann: What do you think are important issues that the media may not be covering or is covering, I should say?

21:58

Rusher: I know my sources. Anyhow, I think it's just a matter of: it changes daily and just trying to keep current on what's going on. Yeah. And, just the science behind it. I feel like most of the information that I'm hearing seems to be pretty solid. But I try not to jump to any conclusions about any one particular thing. Just trying to stay informed about what is going on.

22:36

McGann: How have municipal leaders and government officials in your community responded to the outbreak?

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Rusher: I think they've been pretty appropriate, where I am anyhow, um, as far as closing down, the slow openings of things. And it was difficult early on, it was just a judgment call, but I think for the most part, things were done appropriately, maybe not as soon as they should.

Rusher: I feel like we shut things down pretty hard and fast here in Indiana which was the right thing to do. At the time the only time will tell, really, if it was the right thing to do if we did it soon enough. Once again, history is going to be the big teacher here. So, yeah, I think they've locally they've done the best job that they could have hoped to have done.

McGann: Do you have any thoughts on the differences in response, among local, state, and federal levels of the leadership in the crisis?

Rusher: I think probably at the local levels, we did a better job than at the national level. I just think it was ignored a little bit too long up front on the national level I think some things that happened before all of this probably were to our disadvantage too as far as things, the national level. I think they could've done a better job at the national level.

McGann: Just three more questions.

Rusher: Okay.

Rusher: I think had we had better people in leadership, I think that's the level, we would have been much better off. Yeah, well personal bias there.

McGann: Okay, on to the next question.

McGann: How has your experience transformed how you think about family, friends and community?

Rusher: Um, I think they're, this will probably start a little bit of a shift and back towards the things that are more important. I mean as any crisis does. But yeah, we just need to be kinder to each other and look out for each other a little bit more, not get too caught up and things that just really aren't that important. So yeah, things like that, just. Yeah, we're all we got so we need to help each other.

McGann: Knowing what you know now what do you think that individuals, communities, or governments need to keep in mind for the future?

Rusher: Well, I think this was a long time coming. And I think we knew that. That is just when it's not important you know when it's not inevitable immediately inevitable. We tend not to worry about it too much so I think this is just another wakeup call that, that this is a thing this, you know, there always be pandemics so obviously things like this happening. So we probably should do a better job of not losing sight of that. Because it's gonna happen. It's just how the world is at this point. History has proven that. I mean, this won't be the last pandemic. So, hopefully we'll learn from this one just like we have all the ones in the past and make good use of what we've learned to the future.

McGann: Are there any other thoughts you'd like to add?

Rusher: I don't think so.

Rusher: I just appreciate being a part of this I think what you're doing is very valuable. I think that it's kind of an honor to be asked to participate, so I'll be anxious to see the project that is completed and the sorts of data that you've archived. Looking forward to hear what other people have to say,

McGann: Okay, Well thank you very much for your time today and I'm going to stop recording at this point. Okay, thank you.