

Interviewee: Wyatt J. Weisensel
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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.

WLW: 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

WJW: 8:57pm Central Time Zone.

WLW: Oh yeah.

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

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

WJW: 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, a teacher 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 and it was contained.

WLW: Ok, so no one seemed worried about it?

WJW: No.

WLW: No one had any idea what scale it would become?

WJW: No.

WLW: Ok, so your initial reaction nothing to worry about?

WJW: Right.

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

WJW: No.

WLW: Ok

WLW: So what region of Japan was the that city in?

WJW: Ah, down south. Kyushu, which is the southernmost main island.

WLW: Okay. What's like the nearest largest city?

WJW: Fukuoka.

WLW: 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?

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

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

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

WLW: Okay.

WJW: Cause of the language barrier.

WLW: Right.

WJW: 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]

WLW: So Corona didn't really affect your work environment? Or did it change over time?

WJW: 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 in 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.

WLW: Is it just because of air pollution?

WJW: 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 close all the schools for the last I think two weeks.

WLW: Is that in March?

WJW: Yeah, I remember my last two weeks of work. I had to report to my schools. I didn't have any classes to teach.

WLW: Because the students were all at home?

WJW: Right.

WLW: Okay.

WJW: 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.

WLW: Okay.

WJW: 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 we read 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 while 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.

WLW: 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?

WJW: No.

WLW: Okay.

WJW: I don't think students were worried about it.

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

WJW: No, I don't think so.

WLW: Okay. Then, with

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

WLW: 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?

WJW: Just the schools?

WLW: Okay.

WJW: [Long pause] People were kind of staying at home, but I remember I saw I, the two weeks of school, or I didn't have anything to do because they were shut down. Then I two weeks kind of to myself before my flight. 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.

WLW: it was- was there any call for social distancing? like there was in the US?

WJW: [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.

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

WJW: I don't think so.

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

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

WLW: Right. Okay. Yeah.

WJW: now I think about it, no, no one is really wearing masks around each other at school.

WLW: Okay.

WJW: Or- No, I think they were. It might just varied school to school.

WLW: Okay.

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

WLW: Okay. kind of depends on the school administration and how they wanted to enforce it.

WJW: Right.

WLW: Okay.

WLW: 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?

WJW: 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.

WLW: In the US? That you felt like?

WJW: well, I don't think so. No.

WLW: 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 [_____]?

WJW: 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 [interruption: Oh really?]. 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 and needing a passport 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 like I bet in that airport before, what I remember, Tokyo to America, big international flight like that. That was like dead. Normally those flights and those airports 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. When we arrived at the Houston airport getting to my next flight, Houston to Chicago, well, I road like their train completely alone. Well, cleaning staff, that was it.

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

WJW: No, and I wasn't quarantined or anything. No temperature checks.

WLW: Everyone was wearing masks, though, right?

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

WLW: 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.

WJW: 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. 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 to 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 stay at home as much as they could, and it went away.

WLW: Would you go that that? Would you say that the Japanese government handled the pandemic better, then the Trump administration?

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

WLW: 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?

WJW: No, not at all.

WLW: 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?

WJW: , 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.

WLW: 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?

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

WLW: 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?

WJW: , 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. So why couldn't you have done this a month ago, I already took a job.

WLW: 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?

WJW: 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.

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

WJW: , 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 toat 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.

WLW: Right. Okay. So then, how has a pandemic affected your current job environment?

WJW: 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.

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

WJW: 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.

WLW: 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.

WJW: 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. Not only 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?

WLW: Do you know if anyone at work has gotten COVID?

WJW: 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. Right?

WLW: So the company didn't have to do anything major because of that?

WJW: Hmm.

WLW: Okay.

WLW: 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?

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.

WJW: 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.

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

WJW: Yeah, and some bad luck, cause 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?

WLW: Hmmm

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

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

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

WLW: Yeah.

WJW: that was an American thing.

WLW: Yeah. Did anything like that happened in Japan?

WJW: Maybe very briefly.

WLW: Okay.

WJW: I brought home some toilet paper.

WLW: Oh yeah.

WJW: Oh! You couldn't buy masks.

WLW: Where? In the US?

WJW: In Japan.

WLW: Okay.

WJW: , 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 will kind of where the mass Anyway, there 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 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.

WLW: 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?

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

WLW: Right.

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

WLW: Ride it out?

WJW: But everyone will everyone already knows that.

WLW: 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?

WJW: 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.

WLW: 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?

WJW: 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.

WLW: Right.

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

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

WJW: Alright.