

Transcript of Interview of Leslie Grishin by Glenda McGann

**Interviewee:** Leslie Grishin

**Interviewer:** Glenda McGann

**Date:** 05/05/2020

**Location (Interviewee):** Indianapolis, Indiana, United States of America

**Location (Interviewer):** Indianapolis, Indiana, United States of America

**Transcriber:** Mercury Chang

**Abstract:** Leslie Grishin is a worker at an international center in Indianapolis. In this interview she is asked various questions over how her home life, work, employment status, relationship with friends and family, and how their friends and family have had their lives change due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Key points in this interview is how Leslie Grishin's feelings about how the local community has changed and how her employment status has not leading to guilt regarding the employment status.

**GM:** Go. Hi, Leslie, would you please tell me what is the date and the time?

**LG:** Absolutely. It's May 5 2020. And it's 3:30pm.

**GM:** Very good, and what is your full name?

**LG:** My name is Leslie Grishin.

**GM:** Very good. And what are the primary things you do on a day to day basis, for example, your job, your extracurricular activities?

**LG:** Absolutely. So, I work at the International Center, where I hope to welcome international guests to Indianapolis, and Indiana is my hometown. So, I try to be engaged in the community. I love going out to cultural events, things that new fields, movies, spending time with friends, etc.

**GM:** Okay, and where do you live?

**LG:** I live in Indianapolis. Not too far from Newfields actually.

**GM:** Good. What is it like to live there?

**LG:** It's, it's a nice sense of community. I live inside of the 465 loop. And so, it's still a residential part of the city. And we have lovely walking areas throughout the neighborhood. People are friendly, but it's still easy access to most of the amenities around town.

**GM:** When you first learned about COVID-19, what were your thoughts?

**LG:** Initially, I thought it, it sounded awful. The initial reports coming out of China, for example, were shocking. And I was quite surprised at how quickly it escalated. Moving from China, you would then hear stories and reports out of Italy. Other countries and finally the US. So it kind of hit like a ton of bricks but information overload as well.

**GM:** Have your thoughts changed about it since that initial time?

**LG:** Oh, definitely there's been a lot of time to read articles and look at information, try to process and I can't say that my my thoughts have become more positive or in many ways it's, it's a little bit more overwhelming and more daunting, but with every once in a while bubbles have positive stories coming through as well.

**GM:** What issues have most concerned you about the COVID-19 pandemic?

**LG:** And specifically, it's incredibly concerning to see the lack or seemingly lack of organization within the United States, so much of that has been apparent more on the state level and or local level, but federally, it's very disconcerting that we don't seem to be working together as a country in many ways to help prevent an already tragic event from being worse.

**GM:** How has COVID-19 affected your job?

**LG:** The primary function primary role of my job is to help welcome international guests to Indiana. And that would include setting meetings with stakeholders around the city, planning itineraries, setting up hotel and transportation, etc. And that has come to a complete stop for the time being. The program is paused currently through July but, that is a little difficult to know, at this point in time when it would pick up again, or how, how it will change. so, I'm thankful that I still have a job. And it's given me a chance to work on side projects, but the bulk of what I do in my role has been paused. And it's, um, well, in many ways, it's, it's sad, inevitable currently with what's going on, but it's just it's sad.

**GM:** How has COVID-19 changed your employment status?

**LG:** Um, I have not. I am still employed, which is wonderful to be able to say that I have many friends and some family who have been impacted with their employment status. Some for a short period of time, some indefinitely. So, I'm grateful to still be able to say that I'm employed, which is something to say when you look at the unemployment numbers right now.

**GM:** What concerns do you have about the effects of COVID-19 on your employment and the economy more broadly?

**LG:** I'm concerned with long term effects, specifically, short term. I think there's an all hands on deck approach here in Indiana, which locally that's beautiful to see. And I see many stakeholders and partners working hard to to help the local community but with that broader approach as well.

On a more global level, it's, it's very difficult to know how the long term lasting impacts will affect effect things

**GM:** You've touched on this a little bit but how has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the employment of people, you know, specifically?

**LG:** I have, I have several friends who have been furloughed and or laid off with not very likelihood, not very high likely put of coming back to the same position. I've currently seen so many acquaintances mentioned on LinkedIn that they are searching for jobs. Coming from an international higher ed background, I've seen study abroad, offices and international student offices hit really hard. But those types of offices have pulled through many things in the past. So, they're resilient and hopefully people will be able to find another option very soon.

**GM:** How has COVID-19 affected you and or your family's day to day activities?

**LG:** Well, that's uh, our day-to-day activities have certainly been more constrained. We, we used to go out and it's obviously stopped our social interactions with friends. Indianapolis has so many wonderful places to go and grab a drink outside. But at this time, we've chosen to stay in to socially distance to only make very limited trips outside and really be aware of all reasons and times to leave the house.

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

**LG:** Some days or some days feel quite normal and it's, it's easy to just think, Oh, well, you know, it's, it's, it's not that bad we're just everything's going to be okay long term if people can just hang tight and other days it, it, you know just like a wave that comes and you realize, particularly when it's a day full of higher numbers of or you, you hear of someone you know who was impacted or sick or other bad news coming through. So, it's very strange. It's, it's an odd time to, in many ways feel like you're just isolated but still have that ability to connect through technology. But that's definitely not the same. So, it comes in waves Some days are better than others.

**GM:** How has the COVID-19 outbreak affected how you interact and communicate with friends and family?

**LG:** I think I've met more of my neighbors during this time period than the prior, let's say four years of living here. Either by going on walks in the neighborhood, or just yelling across the street, checking in with neighbors or getting that sense of neighborhood, camaraderie through groups online, just checking in with elderly neighbors to see if anyone needs anything. It's been quite lovely to see people introducing themselves coming together. When before it was very rare to see people out, doing yard work or even really hanging around outside much. For example, the lovely one family across the street, they have a little kid, his daily gym class, where he's he's driving, hopscotch on the driveway with chalk or riding his bike. And so, it's, it's been great to just wave from afar. I've also had more communication with my immediate family by phone during this time period. actual phone calls, sometimes daily, sometimes every other day. Whereas before it was maybe an occasional text every once in a while. So, I feel like I'm trying

to communicate more with my immediate family and friends to check in to support which, which is nice, but it's still that juxtaposition of a bit of a weird feeling since it's just a phone call. It's not in person. So...

**GM:** What have been your biggest challenges that you face during this COVID-19. outbreak?

**LG:** I think it's a challenge to see. To see it impact the community so, so much, but really not feel like I'm able to, to contribute or help very much. I know there are ways to volunteer. But because I'm helping elderly relatives, I choose not to go out into the community as much so I'm trying to be thoughtful in how I support local businesses or how I can be aware and support local entities but there's still a feeling of not really being able to, to help and having to support from afar.

**GM:** What have you Your family and friends done for recreation during COVID-19? And feel free here to include details about shows, games, books, etc.

**LG:** I have certainly upped my screen time, which it is what it is. I've really enjoyed the John Krasinski some good things. That's not the right name is it? There's a John Krasinski's YouTube series has been lovely and positive. The Parks and Rec show was a delight. Netflix etc. I've been looking for podcasts. We've done a few puzzles. And I'm slowly making it through my stack of books that I've been meaning to read and catch up on for a while now. But yeah, we're also starting a garden. So yeah, we have a raised bed out back and our starters our seats are hopefully going to be ready in the next couple of weeks to, to plant outside

**GM:** Do you mean an actual jigsaw puzzle?

**LG:** Yeah, yeah we, we found one. So oh, we've also been spending significant quality time cleaning out and sorting through and dusting and cleaning and organizing the house a bit. So we found a puzzle and yeah, that was that was okay. You learn a lot about your significant other doing puzzles [Laughs]. It's been a riot.

**GM:** [Laughs] How has the COVID-19 outbreak affected your community and community to find as many different spheres: schools, club, church, job? You're welcome to speak about as many of those as you might like.

**LG:** I think that- I live in Washington township and their [REDACTED] passed away from COVID-19 at North Central High School. And I specifically like to speak to how beautiful it has been to see the community come together, to have signs around the neighborhood to see an outpouring of support for his family, for the students through social media, other platforms. So I think that in many ways, the community is coming together to support and to mourn. I, I've also, I think I took it for granted, being able to go into my office and to have casual conversations and just chat with colleagues, coworkers. That element of my office is something that I, I miss, you don't really get that through online virtual meetings. And I think that it's something I didn't realize how much I appreciated until it was gone. We're not active in any church community or anything of that nature. But yeah, it's been really interesting to see the Washington township north central area come together during that process.

**GM:** How are people around you responding to the COVID-19 pandemic?

**LG:** I see many people Go on with their daily activities. So not much has been changed or impacted. Some sometimes I see family and friends go out and about shopping very often. No masks, it doesn't seem as though it's clicked. How important or how impactful this pandemic is. Maybe it hasn't directly impacted them yet, so I'm not sure what the missing link is there. And on the actually sorry, Glinda Could you repeat the question, please?

**GM:** Oh, yes. How are the people around you responding to the COVID-19 pandemic?

**LG:** And so, I see some people, frankly, calling it a hoax there, they're not really buying into the importance of staying home and social distancing. And then I see the majority of the people that I interact with, though, taking strong precautions, not really going out, unless it's a necessary trip to the store. It's also been really interesting to catch up with friends in different countries. Friends in New Zealand, I've been chatting with friends in Taiwan, friends teaching in Japan and Singapore and just to hear experiences from Americans living overseas during this time and how different their adopted communities are approaching this has been quite eye opening and very, very different approaches than what I'm seeing here. Or hearing around me locally.

**GM:** How have the opinions, activities and relationships with people around you changed in response to the pandemic?

**LG:** In some ways I feel much closer to, to family and friends. We're trying to stay in contact, we're trying to check in on each other. And then that's, that's wonderful, but I feel like that group has, has gotten a bit smaller. A lot of more people more in the acquaintance realm. There's a virtual interaction through Facebook, for example, but it's a little overwhelming to try to keep up with A large number of people so I think I'm limiting my outreach. More to much closer friends and immediate family.

**GM:** As the pandemic wears on just as a follow up to that question, because it was so multifaceted. Have you noticed any change in the opinions of people regarding the pandemic as it has worn on over the weeks?

**LG:** I see a lot of fellow Hoosiers becoming impatient with the stay-at-home orders. Eager to go out and about, the weather is getting a little bit nicer. Finally, this is I hear people saying this is dragged on long enough. I want to go back out. So, I think there is going to be an eagerness to go back out and participate in those social activities, but it's not like it was before, we're still not in the clear, in my opinion, and there's going to potentially be repercussions for choices made. But that impacts not just them that impacts the entire community. So I wish people could be a little bit more patient less selfish, more mindful of their larger impact and footprint. But since the state of Indiana has been opening up, it doesn't seem like that's going to be the case. But of course, time will tell.

**GM:** How have Self isolation and flattening the curve have been two key ideas that have emerged during the pandemic. have you your family, friends and community responded to the

request to sell isolate and flatten the curve. Any deeper, you want to go into that because you expressed it very well.

**LG:** You know, without going into specific, relationships or identifiable pieces, it's been really disappointing to see how a family specifically has. Family and some friends have their lack of ability to, to see the severity. It's right in front of us. People are people are dying, it's, it's, it's a virus, it's, it's real. It's impacting our community and to see the selfish tendencies creep out and want to go outside and want to still go, go camping and go out and potentially affect others. At this time, we're not testing nearly enough people. We don't know who is asymptomatic. We don't know we don't have those key data points in play yet. So it's too soon, but I see a lot of I see a lot of family wanting to still go out and they're interacting with other people. And they're there in a way very nonchalant about it. And it's just it's disappointing and surprising. But I'm trying to think maybe it hasn't impacted them yet, but selfishly I'm hoping it won't impact them but I don't know it's, it's such a weird wave of emotions when you see people not following what could probably be very Simple Rules or best practice or guidance, or you know, whatever you want to call it, but yeah, I've been a little surprised by that.

**GM:** Is that changing your relationship? Or in what ways is it changing your relationship with family, friends and community?

**LG:** Um, I don't know that it's changed relationships significantly yet. I think I initially tried to bring it up as a conversation topic too inquire into maybe suggest they should stay at home. And then if that was not something that they were receptive to. Now, I'll avoid the topic if I'm reaching out to the middle at this point, so, but again, long term we'll see but short term, a little bit of avoidance tactics, I think, are coming into play. Just to maintain my own sanity.

**GM:** What has been your direct experience or that of anyone you know, with the COVID-19 outbreak sickness?

**LG:** I would say I've been very lucky not to have any immediate family or friends be diagnosed with COVID-19. Following up that we don't have the ability to be tested unless we're showing symptoms. And even then, I think it's pretty difficult to still do the state and go out and get a test. Although the reality of going through that versus what I hear with the daily Gov updates are maybe a little bit different. And I hope that our testing ability increases very soon. Um, I've had acquaintances who have got sick. But friends that are closer to my age have shown a few of them. Let's see, I think I can. To my knowledge, I have maybe five friends who were diagnosed. And so some of them showed very mild symptoms. One was very close to needing to go into the hospital but luckily pulled through. I'd say three of them were more in the medical field though, so they were expecting to get it at some point. Which is crazy and terrifying. And what a sad reality for them have, to have to deal with A couple of other maybe one of the other friends I think they might have been exposed when traveling. And then there was a resource that through work I interacted with, who unfortunately had passed away. So no one close, but it's still quite quite impactful and devastating to read. And to see the obituary numbers and just just see the daily numbers coming out. Yeah, it's strange times.

**GM:** Well, shifting gears now, what have been your primary sources of news during the pandemic?

**LG:** Um, I have been tuning in. I think I missed one. But a daily highlight of information has been through the government Update. You know, at first it was just a good local source of information. In some ways it was comical to hear them repeat to the reporters with questions you have to unmute yourself. It's been, I guess comical to see how everyone has been adapting to Zoom and other conversations over the past couple months. I have tried to stick with the Indie Star, Indianapolis Monthly other local news sources to get information about Indianapolis and Indiana specifically. NPR Of course. I think it's been interesting to use the wide variety of resources we have online, international newspapers, there's a little bit with social media but you have to be really skeptical about anything posted on Facebook for example anymore. And then I've, there have been some really interesting, sorry, our trash is getting picked up. I'm not sure how loud that's going to be. Here. there been some really interesting tracking sites. I think Johns Hopkins has a great source of several other sites as well but just looking at the local numbers, numbers nationwide, and numbers, more of a global level just comparing etc. So trying to get accurate, reliable sources of information Mostly online.

**GM:** Have your news sources changed during the course of the pandemic? Um,

**LG:** I don't think so. I think it's, um, every once in a while I'll discover a new a new, additional source. There's a really interesting page to follow from. Who's your doctor looking at the daily Indiana numbers. But no, not, not significantly. Not significantly. No.

**GM:** May I ask you to hold just a moment we have a workman coming for a plumbing issue. So I'm just going to tell my husband so he can get to the door and you'll probably hear the dog barking. So Excuse me. I'll put on mute, okay. [Silence] I'm sorry about that I couldn't find my mask and is going to have to walk through here to get to the room.

**LG:** It is okay.

**GM:** Thank you for your patience.

**LG:** Oh, of course.

**GM:** What do you think are the important issues that the media may not be covering during the pandemic?

**LG:** That's a good question. Um, I think that my answer to that is in the moment, I don't know. Um, I think in the thick of it in the moment, even, you know, couple months in, but we're still very much in the in the thick of it. I'm not sure what the answer would be to that. I think I would need more time to process more time to move forward and have that hindsight vision. I hear a lot of people mentioned recovery numbers, but I'm not sure if I've seen a question. had a bit of that covered yet. It might just be too soon.

**GM:** And switching topics again now how have municipal leaders and government officials in your community responded to the outbreak?

**LG:** It's been interesting to see the, the response from Mayor Hogsett and his team here, here locally for Indianapolis and for Marion County. As well as with Governor Holcomb and his team, in many ways I see that Who's your hospitality approach? being highlighted being more of a focus than other kind of been brought up is that Who's your hospitality Hoosiers supporting each other I see hopefully it's true but it seems like there's communication between local and state officials to be on the same page to communicate what's been decided for Marion County and how that will roll out with and roll out with this statewide reopening plan. I, I feel like Dr. Box, has a strong sense of empathy and have calmness and a calm demeanor so it's been reassuring, and rather nice to hear her share the medical updates for the state of Indiana and it feels like each state is handling this so very distinctly differently. And it's a little disconcerting to see, maybe or to, to wonder about how this is going to play out long term. Locally, though, it's it appears as though the leaders are working together and showing stronger leadership. Whether that is the view from fellow Hoosiers, I'm not sure I can only speak to what I've seen, and I feel Of course, but I, some days I am most days I'm more impressed with the State Leadership than I was before all of this started at least in in regards to COVID. And there were, you know, some other topics, of course, are a little different, but do

**GM:** Do you have any further thoughts on the differences, the contrasts between the responses at the local state and federal level by leaders to the crisis?

**LG:** I don't have anything nice to say about our federal lack of leadership during this time period. It's panic attack inducing, it's pathetic, it's sad. It's so many words that aren't appropriate to say. And it's really discouraging. I, when this started, I would watch the White House updates that happened in the evening just to get a try to get a better sense of what was going on data numbers, etc. But it was just a bit of a cluster and it was not something I was able to keep watching. So You know, for many reasons, I'm glad that state and local areas have leaders that are doing their best in weird times and circumstances and are facing many challenges but to not see a connected path forward, or that sense of that uplifting needed for the country coming out of the federal offices. It's pathetic. And it's something that hopefully will. Heads will roll, but I don't know if that will actually happen, but it's poorly mismanaged at the federal level.

**GM:** Three more questions. Looking to the future, how has your experience transformed how you think about your family, friends and community?

**LG:** I think that I see a shift to be more aware of local impact local leaders, supply chain issues, things that are, are going around in the community and how I'm I might not have known the details before, but it still has a direct impact on, on everyone's life in the community. I think anytime that you have a tragedy happen at this scale you are as a human being you take the time to start to process but that's still very difficult. While it's still ongoing, and to, to appreciate your health and to appreciate what you have to take the time to value the small things. It goes a long way. And I'd like to think that that's something I can take with me moving forward. But we'll see.



**GM:** Now, knowing what you know now, what do you think that individuals, communities, or governments need to keep in mind for the future?

**LG:** It's, what's that old expression? Something about expect the, plan for the worst but expect the best maybe? I think it would be helpful to worry about the what-ifs? I think what hit people very hard is... its difficult if you were to lose your job or, health impact, but other small details I talked about this with my husband, we are probably going to keep more Lysol inb stock and maybe plan ahead and see if you can purchase from Som's, they turned their restaurants into grocery stores they're, they're having a wonderful impact on doing a wonderful job helping families with food insecurities and we are trying to see where we are shopping and what we are shopping and how its helping and maybe having a plan in place in case another pandemic happens it is always good to have a play if if you never have to use it maybe people will reassess some of the some of those, maybe, I am not sure

**GM:** And Leslie, are there any other comments you would like to add?

**LG:** Its weird feeling, I feel like I haven't been impacted as much as others, its that feeling of guilt and I'm feeling really lucky and the more we hear about a 2<sup>nd</sup> wave or 3<sup>rd</sup> wave and hearing this being a long lasting issue there is such a weird feeling of the long term implications and the unknowns, and that's, another key takeaway is being shocked and surprised to hear people didn't know how to wash their hands well, basic hygiene, so maybe we could be more aware on how to use soap and water and wash our hands and help each other and make our terrible situation better that's cautious optimism but it would be interesting to see how this all plays out.

**GM:** Well Leslie I would like to thank you very much for being a part of the COVID-19 Oral History project and acknowledge you did read and sign the signed consent that will accompany this recording and thank Javier for fixing and assessing our emergency plumbing situation. Thank you again Leslie.