

Haley Brinker: Okay. All right. Well my name is Haley Brinker and this is for the COVID-19 Oral History Project for IUPUI. I'm speaking with Todd Leonard and he is a - you are a teacher?

Todd Leonard: I'm a university professor.

Brinker: Oh, Anjelique definitely under-sold you. He is a university professor. And then, can you tell me a little bit about where you live and what time it is there?

Leonard: Sure. I'm originally from Indiana, and I basically have lived in Japan for 31 years. I'm a university professor at a national university here in Kyushu, which is a southern island in Japan and Fukuoka, and I've been at this position for ten years, but I was in the northern part of Japan for twenty years. So, I have a long history; over half my life I've lived in Japan. So, it's a long, a long tenure here. It's, right, now 10am, Tokyo time, in Japan on Tuesday, April 14.

Brinker: Alrighty. And then, can you just give me a breakdown of your basic day-to-day, what you would normally do outside of quarantine and pandemic?

Leonard: Mhm. Well, normally I would, I would get up and get ready and go to my university, which is a walking distance from my home, and spend the day there meeting with students, going to meetings, teaching classes. Our school year begins April 1st. So, of course, because of the pandemic, that's been pushed back to May 11th. And, to be honest, I'm not sure if it's actually going to happen on May 11th, because the numbers keep increasing here in Japan. So, just like in the United States, this is really unprecedented, meaning that we don't really know what's going to happen. No one's ever experienced this before. In March, I was at the University of Wisconsin La Crosse on a student exchange. I had fourteen of my students, and we do an educational exchange every year. So, we were there when the whole thing started to get really bad. So, it made me very nervous knowing that I had fourteen kids with me, and would we be able to get back to the States? So, we did move our departure date up two days, and we came back, just in case, because Japan did finally lock down the airports. Anyone coming from the United States had to do a mandatory two-week quarantine. And, you had to have a test when you arrived to the country, and you'd have to stay. And, they, they set up these cardboard beds in the baggage area, and people would have to stay there at least two days to get their test results. Even if they tested negative, the Japanese government said no one could use public transportation, which in Japan is nearly impossible. Most people use some sort of public transportation to get to and from anywhere they go. So, this means lots of people are stranded at the airports right now, flying in from different countries that are on the list of countries that have to be quarantined. Luckily, we got in a few days before that. We were able to take public transportation, returned to our homes, and we all got back safe and sound. But, it's, from the pictures I've seen, it seems pretty, pretty bad situation, meaning that people are having to camp out, basically, to get those tests. And then, hotels around the major airports in Tokyo are refusing having people flying in, because of fear that they might, you know, be asymptomatic to the

virus. They don't want that in their hotel. So, again, it's been botched on many levels, I think, by different parts of the government not knowing how to react to this.

Brinker: And, what is it that you teach?

Leonard: I teach history, actually. I'm a historian as well. Yep. My master's was in Sephardic Jewish history, and my PhD's in American religious history.

Brinker: Okay, thank you so much.

Leonard: And then, I teach culture, as well, cross-cultural understanding, as well.

Brinker: Okay. And then, so you were, first you were in Wisconsin when things started to get more serious, that you said you were concerned. What are your thoughts about it now, after it's been a few weeks?

Leonard: Well, I really think that the governor of Wisconsin and the mayor of La Crosse did an excellent job. They shut things down very quickly. They were having the stay in place sheltering orders much, much earlier than other places, I think, and I think they handled it very well. The hotel that we were staying in was excellent. Of course, they had certain things put in place. For instance, the distancing aspect that has now become a part of our daily, normal life. But, they had started that early on, so I have to say that I was very impressed with Wisconsin and their reaction to it. That, and the University of Wisconsin La Crosse actually had a sheltering order that went in the day we left, so that meant no one could go to the university. People work completely from home. And, I was very impressed that the American universities have in place the platforms to do this type of remote teaching. My university doesn't have that. So, again, I don't know what's going to happen on May 11th. If, if this continues to get worse, will we be able to go into the classroom? Now, they have made some recommendations. For instance, if you have a class of over fifty students, that you should do remote teaching, but they haven't really given us a platform. Of course, a lot of places are using Zoom all over the world, like we're doing right now. And, it seems like a good option. Although, yesterday, I received a message from a friend at a different university, who's very near here, that said that their university banned any type of Zoom platform because of the fear of hackers getting in, I guess, which has been a problem, I know, all over the world. And, I think Zoom is working hard to try to remedy that, but those are concerns that universities have, and it could cause a problem, so I don't know. If, if they, if my university would suddenly say, "No Zoom," I don't know what type of platform they would recommend. I worry, though, it will be a lot more complicated and difficult with a higher learning curve than what we normally would be able to use with Zoom, because Zoom is pretty darn straightforward. Easy to use, you can, you can put PowerPoints in it, so I'm not sure how it's going to shake out after that.

Brinker: Right. And so, that's definitely an issue that you're dealing with. Are there any other issues that are very pressing for you, and that you think about a lot during this time?

Leonard: Well, Japan it's interesting because we haven't --even though my area is in one of the seven emergency areas where we're being urged to stay in -- there's no directive that has absolute shutdown. So, for the most part, surprisingly, things seem to be going business as usual, which is a little bit surprising, considering everything that's going on in other countries, especially the United States and how serious everything is. Restaurants still are open. People are still shopping. And, I just read a very interesting article that one of the big problems in Japan is that 80% of the workforce have no ability to do telework, is what they call working from home. So, only 20% of the population has that ability. So, the, the trains in Tokyo are still full, because people have to go to and from work. And, some of it could be because they don't, their work is, the company doesn't have any sort of platform for them to do that type of work from home, but also Japan, Japanese culture. People feel like they're not really contributing unless they're actually in the office and doing that type of work at their desk. And, another issue that I read about that I found interesting is the personal seal in Japan. It's a, it's a very small, it's a very small thing that you have your name on. That, that is the legal signature of the person. Whereas, in the United States, we will sign our names and that's our legal signature. In Japan, you use a personal seal, and it has the name in Japanese. And, one woman was saying that, you know, she would like to work from home, but most of her job incorporates having to use this seal, and she has to personally do it. So, she has to go into the office to, to stamp these things. So, Japan can be a little bit rigid in rules like that, a little bit officious. And, they may have to start relaxing those types of things, because I don't think that it's very practical for people to be putting themselves at risk, to go to work, just for something that could be done maybe later, once they do return back. So, that is, that's an issue. But, the big issue is the fact that 80%, and I think that's a misconception. People often think of Japan as being so technologically advanced and able to just, very easily, glide into some sort of complete, how shall I say, system of being able to, to use technology. But, in general, it's, it's very analog here on many, many levels. So, it's not as technologically advanced and those types of things as other countries, like the United States.

Brinker: Right. So, as of right now at 9:14pm, on April 13 -- that's Eastern time -- so, Japan has 7,618 confirmed cases. And, here in the United States, we have 586,057 cases. And, you said they aren't putting those same social distancing protocols there, in there. Do you, do you have any insight on why the level of cases are just so much smaller?

Leonard: Well, I think that, I think that the cases probably are a lot higher than what's being officially reported. And, a good example is, of course, the Olympics that are going to, were supposed to be in Tokyo and in the summer weren't canceled till just a couple of weeks ago. And, up to that point, it was very interesting. The levels seemed artificially low. A lot of people have commented on that. But, the day that they decided to postpone the Olympics, nearly almost the next day, the numbers went way up. So, unfortunately, I don't think a lot is going to, I don't think that's going to stay low. I think it's going to rise, sadly, because they need to really put into effect the stay at home

orders and the self-distancing, mitigation measures in order to make sure that this doesn't get worse, because it is getting worse. And, Japan is a densely populated country. It's a small, you know, islands that people live close together. And, it's very hard to not get exposed. I would think if people don't do what they can to, to try to do the social distancing, and, unless the government comes out and actually demands it, I don't see people doing it. Just like in the United States, the places that don't have any type of lockdown, people are still going about their lives, and it's causing a huge problem. Here, Japanese tend to follow directives from the government very well. And, if that would be put into place, I think you'd see a huge difference. Now, some of the governors, our governor, for instance, urged people not to go out on the weekends. And, people followed that, for the most part, but some people, of course, still went because they had to do grocery shopping or whatever. But, I don't see how that would really mitigate very much just having the weekends if, from Monday to Friday, people are going about their daily lives. The virus is still being spread about, I would think, so I don't know. It'll be interesting to see if Japan has a huge spike. What the government's reporting or what they call clusters, meaning they are focusing on places where people were in groups, and then people were infected. For instance, there was a hair salon where a number of customers and workers were infected. And, of course, nursing homes and hospitals are hotspots for that type of thing. So, we've had clusters and reports on that, but we haven't had a lot of reports on other aspects of the virus yet, and I think that it's, it's to come, though. I don't, I don't see Japan escaping this without doing something really strategic and drastic.

Brinker: Right. And so, for your daily routine, I mean, how has this affected your day-to-day life?

Leonard: Well, I, I'm also a writer, so I do -- I've, I've written a number of books, so I can do that type of thing from home. Like I said, I, I'm 10 minutes from my university, and if I would forget something, I could pop over and get it. We are allowed to go on campus. They don't want us to, and, of course, I, I would social-distance from anyone. Students haven't been going to campus, even though normally we would be in full swing right now. But, of course, just like anywhere it has affected. The two weeks after I got back from Wisconsin, I did isolate in the house, so I didn't go out for two weeks. That's really hard to do. It's amazingly hard. To even, I didn't even go down to check the mail. So, coming back for those two weeks kind of put me in the frame of mind. So now, that the entire prefecture's been encouraged to shelter and to distance, I, you know, it's not a big change for me. But, like I said, I can go outside and we're allowed to go for walks and things like that, so we're just careful about being around other people.

Brinker: Right. So, you said you've been socially distancing with everyone, and how have you been able to keep in contact with family and friends throughout this?

Leonard: Well, I, I do -- my family, of course, is in the United States, and you know, telephone. I have a magicJack, which is free-to-call, which is an internet-based type of telephone service. So, I'm able to talk with people on a daily basis. My husband and I have just been staying in the house, though, for the most part. We haven't, we haven't really been

meeting up with anyone because of the pandemic. So, we've just kind of accepted that, so it hasn't been terribly hard. Thank goodness, you know, we have each other to talk with and everything because it would be really lonely if you're alone. And so, I, I think about elderly people who might be alone in their homes and not have any type of contact with people. So, I know that different churches and things around the United States have been encouraging people to call and reach out to people because of that, because, mentally, we're a herd-type of animal. We like to socialize and be with other people. Introverts are probably having a field day. They probably love it, but extroverts, it's a little bit harder.

Brinker: Right. How has the pandemic affected your husband and his job?

Leonard: Well, he's a stay-at-home, house-husband, so it hasn't really affected his, his life terribly much. It's gone on. But yeah, in general, it's just been a little bit different for us to, to not have the option of going out as often as we normally would. So, you know, but we're adapting to it like everyone is.

Brinker: Absolutely. So, how have you guys, aside from your writing, how have you guys been keeping busy?

Leonard: Well, a lot of Netflix. I think that's probably worldwide, but we've really enjoyed and caught up, and people have been sharing suggestions on the internet of what, what to watch. So, I, when I see someone highly recommend something, I definitely take note of that and check it out and do some binge watching. So...

Brinker: Absolutely. And so, in regard to your neighborhood and the community that you live in, how has that affected -- are you, do you participate in any clubs or anything?

Leonard: Well, of course everything's shut down: the university, all the club activities for the students have shut down, all those types of things aren't being held. Now, Japan was very proactive in that aspect. When this first thing started, they shut down all the schools. Now, the thing is, it was during vacation, so people back home said, "Well, Japan shut down all the elementary, junior, and senior high schools in Japan." Well, yes, but it was during our spring vacation in March, so, basically that only affected students who would have had to go to university, to their schools for club activities, sports activities, things like that. So, in general, you know, Japan did do that early on, and I think Japan was trying to mitigate the whole idea that the Olympics would not be able to be held, because the government was very much wanting to make sure of that, but it was the other countries that really pressured them. It was the athletes that said, "Listen, we can't even train because our countries are on lockdown, so we can't go on." So, they finally decided to postpone it, which is a huge, you can imagine, billions and billions of yen, trillions of yen maybe, lost. And, hotels here, of course, who, that were completely full during the summer, a year in advance, are now empty, that people have just cancelled massively, because they're not coming to Japan for the Olympics. So, that's

caused a huge -- as far as timing goes, really bad timing with that. We were scheduled to go to Germany this summer, because of the Oberammergau Passion Play. Part of my research is to do research on religion, and I went in 2000 and 2010. And, we were going this year: 2020. This Passion Play is only held every 10 years, and, coincidentally, it was started in 1634 by this little town in Germany called Oberammergau because of the pneumonic plague that was killing everyone. So, the town leaders got together, and they prayed to God and said, "If no one from our town dies, we will promise to do this play for an eternity," and so no one died. So, for every 10 years since that time, they have had this Passion Play. The entire town participates in it, and hundreds of thousands of people go. It's kind of a once-in-a-lifetime type of thing to be able to attend. I'm so lucky to have gone twice. And then, this will be our, would have been our third time, but it's been postponed to 2022 now. And, the only other time I think it was postponed was during World War II, but, other than that, it's, it's gone on. So, it's a, it's a huge international event that they've had to cancel because of the pandemic. So, it's affecting, of course, coming from Indiana, the Indianapolis 500, which is a huge event, has been postponed as well. The thing that surprised me was how all the sports, the national sports teams early on canceled, and saw the need to, to play to empty arenas and things like that. Even Sumo here in Japan. They had a Sumo tournament with no fans, which -- Sumo is a huge, huge sport here, and it's a traditional sport, and people really do go out and support it. But, it's very odd seeing those pictures of bouts happening with no, no one in the audience, like the Pope giving mass at Vatican Square with absolutely no people around. I mean these types of images will be historically very important because it will really show how the, how the world reacted to this.

Brinker: Yes, absolutely. And, have you seen anyone around you maybe not take it so seriously, and, then, has started taking it more seriously as this is going on?

Leonard: Yes, I -- especially back in the United States. You know that attitude? "Well, no Coronavirus is going to stop me." You know, that ridiculous, you know, 'I'm invincible' type of thing. One thing that really surprised me was how many students at the University of Wisconsin went ahead and did their spring break to Florida and see it. Then they all came back, and the university sent them all home. They, they basically stopped classes until, I think, the first of May. So, and now, I think the classes are canceled for the entire term, which is quite sad for students who are seniors. I mean, seniors in high school are missing out on a lot of the traditional, ritual type of activities that, that are normal. Even graduation may not be held in many schools this year. So, that's, that's a sad result of all this as well. But, I mean, people's lives are more important. So, definitely, though, around here, I haven't really. Again, I haven't really seen people's lives change that much yet. They should, but they haven't. So, I do think people are, are going out to restaurants less, even though the restaurants are open, trying to social-distance. The Japanese, culturally, have always worn masks, so that's not something new here. Even in normal times, people would wear a mask if they thought they might be getting a cold or something, so seeing everyone wearing masks is not an unusual thing. Whereas, in the States, that's not part of our culture, so people have a hard time wearing masks because they're, they do, they're, they're uncomfortable. Your glasses fog up, and it's just not something that we normally do, but here, it's, it's a very normal part of everyday life.

Brinker: Right. So, has anybody you know gotten sick or anything with COVID?

Leonard: No one that I know in Japan. Of course, I've heard of a few people in the States, who have had it and had to recover from it. Thankfully, no one that I know personally has died from it, but, certainly, I think that will change here, as more and more people start to get it, we'll hear about it. One thing that's happening here, which is similar to the States, although everyone's Asian here, so there's no, there's no prejudice against Asian people, I mean, in the same aspect that you hear about the hate crimes against Asian people in the States. Just because they're Asian, people attack them and then say, you know, "You, you have Coronavirus," or whatever ridiculous, bigoted, racist stuff like that. But, there have been instances where delivery people will try to deliver for a package, and, when the people open the door, they spray them with something because they're afraid they might have the virus, so there have been people that have overreacted in that aspect here that I've heard on the news and in the media. But, in general, I think that people are going about it. I think there would be a stigma attached to a person who would come down with it. People would avoid them, even after they've recovered, just because that's kind of the human nature to do that, I guess. Even though it's silly, they do it.

Brinker: Absolutely. And, you mentioned mental health being important in terms of people being lonely. Do you think it's, it's important that we focus on that as well?

Leonard: Oh, I do. I think that that'll be one of the -- even after this whole thing is over and people try to go back to their normal lives, I think that -- especially the kids. I mean, I, I lived through the blizzard of '78, which was this huge blizzard in Indiana that kept us in our homes for three days, and, you know, people freaked out about not being able to get to the store and stuff. So, I mean, the pandemic of 2020, where, you know, kids, for generations, they'll be telling their grandkids about the time that they had to shelter down for over a month in their homes, I mean, and how hard it was. So, I think this is going to have a psychological effect on many people in many countries for a long time to come. I think people will be a lot more careful, so maybe the positive aspects that will come out of this is that people will be a lot more careful about cross-contamination, even in normal times. I mean, right now, they're saying that in the United States, they're recommending people stop shaking hands. Well, I have to say, in Japan, shaking hands is so rare, see, we bow to people, so that's never been an issue here. And, I think there's three things that have been going on here that might have also kept the virus at bay, more so than in other countries. One is the fact that people don't touch a lot; they do, they bow when they greet, so there's not a lot of that hand-to-hand, skin-to-skin contact, so they don't have that contamination as much to worry with. Another thing was what I mentioned before, was people do wear masks as, as a normal power of course for their daily lives, so, when this happened, everyone wearing a mask was not a big departure for them. They, they would do it. And, the other thing, too, is in public spaces, Japanese tend not to talk. So, as they were saying that this disease is spread by just talking, you know, the droplets in the air through normal conversation can spread it. On trains, it's eerily quiet, even though you might have 1000 people crammed into this

little train during rush hour, no one is chit-chatting and talking. Foreign tourists might, but Japanese themselves don't. So, those three aspects, I think, might have been partially responsible for why the disease hasn't spread as prevalently as in other places.

Brinker: So, it's a really interesting, it's interesting information. I had no idea, and, and just to, kind of, shift gears a little bit. What has been your primary source of news throughout all this?

Leonard: Well, of course, being in Japan, I get a lot of different news sources than probably you would in the States. I get NHK, which is the national broadcasting station for Japan, similar to, to PBS, that has, you know, the top news every day that I follow. I also get BBC, which I like, and I tend to watch CNN.

Brinker: Okay.

Leonard: I'm a very, I'm very progressive and liberal, so I would never watch Fox News; but a lot of my friends do, and it's really disturbing, some of the attitudes and things they have from those types of news sources. It's a little scary. Denial.

Brinker: Absolutely. And, that actually brings me to my next question and is what do you think that media is not covering or may need to be covering that they're not?

Leonard: Well, I think the Japanese media needs to step it up, because some of the things that I've told you today, I've gotten from the international media like PBS or NPR, and I haven't heard from Japan. One good example: there was an article talking about students in the Tokyo area, who demonstrated against their school district because of the fact that they were asking them to go back to school, and they didn't think it was safe. Well, that's so unheard of in Japan. Students just don't do that type of thing, so for them to rally together, to be able to have a petition that 5000 of them wrote to give to the, the superintendent of schools of their prefecture was just amazing to me, and it was even more amazing that I heard about it in international news. That wasn't covered in the Japanese news at all. So, I think that, sadly, sometimes, the aspects of what's going on haven't been covered very deeply by the Japanese news, and I think they need to, because people need to know. It'll be interesting to see how all this proceeds to happen, because I don't, it's all very new to everybody. And, Japan's kind of on the earlier side of it. I hope it doesn't end up like Italy or the United States, but, if they continue not to push for sheltering and stay at home orders, I see it just exploding here. I don't see how it cannot. I don't know why we would be exempt from that, from other countries that have had a horrible situation because of it.



Brinker: Right. Absolutely. So, looking to the future, how has your experience transformed how you think about your family, friends, and community? Do you think that There are certain ways that it's been more-so or less-so?

Leonard: Well, I think that appreciating the smaller things that we took for granted. I mean, when I was in, in Wisconsin, there, there was a rumor that went around Japan to say toilet paper was going to run out nationally, because it comes from China, a lot of it. So, Shingo, my husband, sent me pictures of the local grocery store, which is walking distance from our home, that the, the shelves were absolutely bare. So, that kind of panic buying, I think, occurred early on in Japan. It's leveled off now; it doesn't seem to be an issue, now, people aren't doing it, but, during that time, they did. And, just being able to -- we're so used to being able to get whatever we need and want, whenever we want it. And, I think that something like this shows us something that we haven't ever experienced. I mean, perhaps, the, the Great Depression, people who lived through that, know what it's like to have things rationed and things like that, but, for most of us, we've never experienced that. Even after 9/11, I mean, as bad as that was, basically daily life went on. It was horrible, what happened, but we didn't really have any change in our daily life. Yes, gas lines were long for a short period, things like that, but, in general, we just, kind of, continued on. So, I think this, this, in itself, is a huge change in people's mindset; that you can't really take things for granted. Family, especially families that have been touched by this with death, I mean, it's just so sad. To read the stories, there was one woman who lost her entire family, and she was left alone, and she couldn't even participate in the funerals because of the, the social-distancing and things. So, it's, you know, these types of things, when it touches us personally and directly. I think as more and more people sadly suffer from it, and, perhaps, pass away from this disease, it will give us a very different aspect and mindset about how we're going to look forward in the future. And, again, I think that the big change will be people won't be -- I don't know. I can't say they won't be as touchy-feely as they used to be, but I think that's going to change a lot; I don't think people are going to be the huggers and, and touching like they did, because we're being conditioned not to do that during this time. Of course, slowly, people will get back to their normal routines. That always happens as the years pass by, and the distance between what had happened, but who's to say that this won't come back up again next year? That's what they're, they're predicting: that these types of flus just don't disappear, that they will have a reoccurrence in the seasonal, seasonally. So, if that happens, we'll be back in the same position we are today.

Brinker: Right. Absolutely. And, aside from that, what is there, anything else that you feel that we need to keep in mind as individuals, communities, governments as we move forward from this?

Leonard: I think kindness, I think, is so important, and we see a lot of that. I mean, I think the people, the goodness in people have come out because of this, but certainly the ugliness of people have come out during this time, too. The selfishness of wanting to hoard things and, and think of themselves, but, in general, I think people are good, intrinsically good, so hopefully that will continue on. And, let's hope that they can get some type of

an antibody and some type of a vaccine, so that people can be protected against this, that it won't happen in the future.

Brinker: Absolutely. Well, thank you so much for taking the time.

Leonard: No, thank you.