

Transcript of Josh Miller Oral History

Interviewee: Josh Miller

Interviewer: Andrew Pozharsky

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Abstract: Josh Miller is from Eau Claire, Wisconsin and he is a police officer. We discuss how covid 19 has impacted his work, family, and community and how he feels about the pandemic.

SPEAKERS

Andrew Pozharsky, Josh Miller

Andrew Pozharsky 00:00

I think we've started recording. I don't know if you have to. I don't know if you receive a notification for that.

Josh Miller 00:07

I just heard something that said it was recording.

Andrew Pozharsky 00:10

Okay, gotcha. Yeah. So we just started recording. So what we'll get started. So, today is makes it six. I'm with Officer Josh Miller. He is an officer in Eau Claire Police Department. And today we're gonna be talking a little bit about how COVID-19 has affected him, his employment, and his community. And so with that, I guess I'll ask you some questions. Officer Miller, just to get to know you better?

Josh Miller 00:36

Sure.

Andrew Pozharsky 00:37

So how long have you been an officer?

Josh Miller 00:39

I've been an officer for about 11 and a half years now.

Andrew Pozharsky 00:44

Okay, and what made you want to be an officer in the first place?

Josh Miller 00:49

Oh, that's kind of a tough one. Sir, when I when I was young, I wanted to wanted to be an officer, I guess I don't know where it really were to really kind of came from initially, went to school for it at Winona State University kind of decided partway through that I may not want to be an officer. So I kind of switched it up. Eventually at a at a kind of a later age when I was about 33. I decided maybe I wanted to try it try it again. So I started applying eventually got got hired here. So it was kind of a calling from a young age, and I got away from it, then sort of just naturally gravitated back to it.

Andrew Pozharsky 01:27

Cool. And could you give us like a brief job description of what you do?

Josh Miller 01:31

Yes. So I started all working patrol, like everyone does. I worked patrol for five years before I moved to detectives, where I was a sensitive crimes detective. So I investigated crimes against kids, be it physical abuse, drug, endangered kids, juvenile sexual assaults, you name it. And I did that for just over four years before I slid over to Public Information Officer, which is what I do now. I've been here for about two years. And that is kind of community outreach, social media, media relations, kind of a catch all for anything having to do with public information, community relations, that sort of thing.

Andrew Pozharsky 02:14

Wow, you must have had a really fun time these past couple of months.

Josh Miller 02:17

And it's been interesting.

Andrew Pozharsky 02:19

Yeah, actually, I'd like to actually jump into that then with your employment. So you know, as you have, obviously, no, there's been a pandemic for a couple of the past month. And so during that time, has your job on dealing with social media and whatnot, has it become easier or harder or stayed the same?

Josh Miller 02:36

It's that's kind of a difficult question to answer. Overall, it's been more difficult. The only reason that I would say easier as because when the pandemic was kind of at its height, we sort of made the conscious decision that we were going to scale back our social media efforts a little bit, simply because our philosophy here has always been we, we want to highlight what our officers do, we want to educate the public as to what our officers do on a day to day basis recognize their good work. But we also had a lot of fun doing it, we make like fun videos, we try to keep a little bit of a sense of humor in it. But with the pandemic and the hardships that people were going through, it wasn't always we felt appropriate to put that kind of thing out on social media. So we really kind of scaled back with that, just because we realized that the times were difficult for a lot of people, and we didn't want to really be kind of jumping around having a good time, while while everybody is really suffering. So in that sense, we scaled back our content. But we really took a closer look at what material we were putting out there just to kind of be, I guess, more sympathetic, more empathetic to what people were going through. So we really had a lot more scrutiny about what we were doing as before, we could kind of be kind of ad lib a little bit and

just, you know, put out what we thought was fun, but it really required a lot more attention and kind of thought before we put something out really looking at it from every possible angle, how are people going to take this? Are they going to be, are they going to be offended? Or they're going to be you know, just thinking we should be spending our time better or what have you. So that made it a little bit a little bit more difficult. And then in my particular job, the Community Relations aspect of it was really different simply because there wasn't any community events going on. We try to have a really strong public presence in Eau Claire, meaning if there's an event going on, you know, some sort of Kids Expo or anything like that. We'll try to get an officer down there if we can. And if that's not the case, if those events just aren't going on, we don't have as many options to get out there and you know, meet people like kids, look at the squad cars, let kids talk to us, talk with our community members. There's just not anything like that going on. So we really had to scale that back not by choice, but just because of necessity.

Andrew Pozharsky 04:56

And I guess like how have you like, How to Have you or your department reacted to that, because I know about I know, for police officers, being a part of the community and interacting with the community is important, very important part. I'm sorry, it's something you guys very much enjoy doing.

Josh Miller 05:11

Right.

Andrew Pozharsky 05:12

So like, has it been? Like I have cops been like reacting negatively to that, you know, they wish they could talk with the community more, you know, instead of being maybe stuck in an office all day?

Josh Miller 05:23

Oh, absolutely. Yeah, for me, especially, that's the reason that I took this job was to kind of get out there and meet people. And like I said, educate them about what we do, and kind of put the human face to the to the badge a little bit. So it certainly makes it a challenge. And especially when there were so many questions about how are our police going to be the ones to enforce the pandemic protocols and the rules? So we were, again, very measured in how we would go about doing that. But yeah, when the public events that we show up, say that like the Easter icon in in Carson Park, I mean, everyone's happy to see us, then they're not always happy to see us on patrol, because usually we're showing up when people are having their worst days. So it's nice to get out to some of those other events, I think of all the suicide walk that they do in Carson park every year, that was really a very positive experience for the officers that attend that. And just not being able to do that was really kind of a no, a lot of people missed out on that.

Andrew Pozharsky 06:24

Gotcha. Thank you. And you're talking about being like very careful in what you guys publish through social media,

Josh Miller 06:30

Right.

Andrew Pozharsky 06:30

Like any examples you could share?

Josh Miller 06:33

Yeah, I personally remember doing a tweet, not too long into the lockdown. Just kind of offering suggestions on what people can do to maybe make themselves feel better. And I got a while we got a lot of negative comments about it. They ran the gambit for a lot of different reasons. And it just made me think like I was really just trying to do something, say something positive in the way you can just kind of help yourself through the pandemic. And people did not take kindly to it. And I didn't fully understand it at the time. I think I do more now. But it was a little shocking. And kind of just the the anger I think that people were feeling and I don't necessarily think it was directed at the police department or at the Eau Claire Police Department, there were just a lot, I think fear and trepidation about what was going on.

Andrew Pozharsky 07:15

Hey Gotcha. Definitely does sound difficult. You know, you're you're trying to interact in social media. But as you said, there's a lot of anger going on. So you have the best of intentions.

Josh Miller 07:27

Absolutely. And we've always known that, that we're a police department, we understand how we're perceived to some extent. So there's not much we can post that's going to be universally loved or accepted or anything. But even even more, so now we have to be extra careful with that.

Andrew Pozharsky 07:43

Yeah. And in terms like COVID-19 Has it like what precautions are? Is there department taking the COVID-19? Like, for example, what happens if the officer you know, you know, unfortunately gets it?

Josh Miller 07:55

Yeah, we've had officers exposed to COVID. And we've got COVID, we follow our city and county health guidelines as far as them quarantining and not being able to go back to work after a certain period of time and not showing, and they're not showing symptoms or anything. But we really had to look at a lot of the ways that we are responding to calls. I know that our communication center added and still has questions just that they asked in any call that they're going to send an officer to about, you know, as the person been exposed to COVID Has the showing any symptoms do they have a mask available, things like that. So that was added right away. Then we started really directing people to callers directing callers to our online self-report forms, or if this is something that we don't necessarily have to send an officer to, can they just go online, fill out a form, basically, it's a police report, they fill out their report, and that gets forwarded to an officer to follow up with at a later time. So that was very helpful. We started pushing a lot of calls there just to avoid the person-in-person contact. We also would try to do as many calls as we could be a telephone, which sounds a little bit silly, you expect to call police and have an officer show up. But if say if there's like a criminal, like a criminal damage case, like a vandalism, and we didn't have to send an officer there, we would call the complainant. They'd say, Yeah, my mailbox got smashed. Maybe they could take some pictures and email it to the officer

and do it all that way. So it's really kind of a different way of, of handling the calls that we get. Certainly, we were still responding to the more I guess, hot calls, you would say more we need to immediate response, but that scaled back initially quite a bit.

Andrew Pozharsky 09:33

Gotcha. And, you know, earlier you talked about, like, you know, a lot of the anger going on, has there been like an increase like misdemeanor crimes or things like that have people been you know, lashing out as a result?

Josh Miller 09:45

We started running our crime stats fairly soon in the pandemic, just to get a sense of everything. And there was, overall things stayed fairly level. I expected to see a big drop. I think everyone expected to see it. In dropping, we didn't really see that. Some initially, some of the crimes you saw were a lot less I'm like your, maybe your bar fights or things like that. And that's simply because the bars weren't open. Right? So I drop in OWI initially and that's because bars weren't open, people that are drinking are generally doing it at home more. So some of those did decrease, but we saw others that were more of an increase, I want to say our fraud calls might have gone up, which is which is not surprising. But overall, it leveled out. We weren't any, any less busy. During during the real heavy days of the pandemic, we just saw kind of a different, maybe a different type of call and certainly a difference in how we handled calls.

Andrew Pozharsky 10:41

Gotcha. And, you know, you're talking about, you know, bars being closed down. So I like to shift this to like you personally. Has this affected your free time anyway? Because, for example, I know some people are very extroverted, they like to go out a lot. Sure. No, go to the bar, for example, but with the bars are closed, nothing you can do. So it gets a for you, you know, what do you like to do in your free time? And has that been impacted by COVID-19 regulations?

Josh Miller 11:07

Yeah, so I'm a homebody. By nature, I like to go out occasionally, but I'm not not a Barfly or anything. But I do have some friends that we would occasionally go out to a local bar, you know, maybe a couple times a month or something like that, you know, I haven't been out with them in over a year. So just because we're not entirely comfortable going out even with some of the restrictions lifted. But I personally, I didn't mind staying at home a little bit more, maybe it's just my nature. But for what it did affect for me was my kids were heavy into sports. So we got baseball canceled for a year. I mean, we could have played but we opted not to. So my son just played baseball here last night. And that was the first organized baseball game he played in two years. So that really, really affected him. And then just being able to get out with friends was it was a big thing for them, birthday parties and things like that. So we tried to do our best with what we could to keep them entertained and keep them happy. But yeah, we, at the time, we were a host family for the Eau Claire Express, we've been a host family for want to say three years. And then the pandemic hit, we were all set to have two players come in from Stanford. And we found out kind of last minute that there wasn't going to be a season. So that kind of changed everything, everything for us. So that was kind of one of our family things was to go to the Express game. We were there almost every night for a home game to see our players play. And without

that it was just like, well, I guess we're staying at home again tonight. So it definitely affected us. We got a lot more family time, which was good to some extent but stressful, but to some other extent, but we managed through but yeah, there it was a big effect even for someone who may be a little more introverted like myself.

Andrew Pozharsky 12:50

Gotcha. And with any of your friends or your family, you know, has anyone been diagnosed with COVID-19?

Josh Miller 12:57

Um, yeah, we've had people here diagnosed with it. I'm trying to think I don't think anyone in my my immediate close family got it. Thankfully. But yeah, certainly people at work that have gotten it they managed, managed through it a lot had, you know, they had some symptoms, but nobody had anything serious, thankfully.

Andrew Pozharsky 13:18

And do you remember what like those symptoms were?

Josh Miller 13:21

I don't I mean, I think a lot of people said it was generally more of your typical kind of a strong, cold, strong flu sort of thing.

Andrew Pozharsky 13:28

Gotcha. Gotcha. And so. So you were talking about your family. Now? How about your neighborhood? You know, how has that been affected by COVID-19?

Josh Miller 13:38

Um, my neighborhood, I don't think it's affected it. While I should. I'm not going to speak from for my neighbors, of course. But we, you know, before everyone really understood what COVID was, there was a lot of fear. So the kids weren't going out in the neighborhood. Even in playing with the neighbors, they would talk to each other through the window. And we're fortunate that my my sons have, uh, one of their best friends lives about two doors down. So that was a little tough that they couldn't get out with them right away, are they talking through through windows and whatnot. But as they kind of learned a little bit more about it was about what COVID was and how it affects people. We open that up a little bit, we trusted the neighbors, we knew that they took it seriously. And they were we're following a lot of the protocols. So we just kind of made made a decision that the mental health of the kids was worth any risk that they might have just from running around in the yard shooting Nerf guns at each other. So overall, you know, I said, I'm sure each neighbor it affected them differently, but we tend just found a new normal, I guess.

Andrew Pozharsky 14:42

Gotcha. And I guess how do your kids react to that new normal, you know?

Josh Miller 14:47

Well, they were certainly happy to do the online learning. They enjoy the virtual stuff because they got to stay home a lot more. Even though I I'm not convinced that they learned as well. they certainly could have if they were in school, but they got used to that pretty fast. They enjoyed it. They miss seeing their friends, obviously. But we tried to keep them engaged through even just playing video games online, they did a lot of and could talk to their friends that way. So said for for my youngest son, he was a big sports guy. That's what affected him the most was missing out on his on his team sports. So that was kind of a bummer. But I think I think my oldest became an expert at Fortnite. So maybe that'll be something that he can enter into a career someday. Who knows?

Andrew Pozharsky 15:31

Maybe?

Josh Miller 15:32

Yeah.

Andrew Pozharsky 15:33

It's a whole new world.

Josh Miller 15:34

Yeah. Right. Who knows to give scholarships for that now, so.

Andrew Pozharsky 15:36

I wouldn't be surprised to hear that. You know, maybe there'll be like a high school esports team for Fortnite.

Josh Miller 15:42

They had actually talked about having an esports team, and they'll tune it never came around, unfortunately. But they whatever, whatever you can do, I guess.

Andrew Pozharsky 15:50

Yeah, I guess I can speak about that. How do you feel about there seems to be a more of a transition from, like, I guess, real life to the virtual world. Like, I guess like, how would you juxtapose that with your own childhood? You know, when you're growing up? I'm sure there wasn't as many electronic devices

Josh Miller 16:10

Calling me old, aren't ya?

Andrew Pozharsky 16:13

Can assumption there but...

Josh Miller 16:14

Yeah, no, no, I get what you're saying. Like my, my kids will sit down and play video games with friends, you know, that they normally don't, don't get to see. And that just wasn't something that I had

as a as a kid. If you want to play video games with your friends you got in your bike, and you wrote five miles to the neighbors and sat down with them and had a sleepover I and they can't even fathom that right now. They don't understand what what that can be like. But taking away some of the dangers of it. I certainly, I think it's great that kids can just hop online and talk to friends or they can collaborate via Zoom on a school project or something, I think that takes a lot of the hassle out of it for them. So. But like I said, there's a danger as Eric is being online, and the education factor is a huge component of that we talk to our kids regularly about that monitor who they're talking to online. So it opens up a lot of doors, not all of them good. But if you kind of empower your kids, I think to make the right choices. It's a it's a huge learning tool, huge social tool that can really help.

Andrew Pozharsky 17:14

Gotcha. And I guess going back to your childhood, again, if COVID-19 happened during your childhood, you know, how do you think your neighborhood or your family or even you would have reacted to it?

Josh Miller 17:25

Yeah, I've actually thought about that we lived out on on an old farmhouse outside of Chetek. So we were pretty isolated to begin with. I'm not naive enough to say that it wouldn't have affected us. But you know, we just weren't as social back then we didn't have as much organized team sports, we didn't have the kind of the get togethers that a lot of people have now. So if I'm being honest, I don't think it would have changed a whole heck of a lot for us. I will say it'd be hard to get food. Because now you know, you could just DoorDash anything you want and have a great meal delivered to you that would have been a challenge back then. But yeah, overall, I think we would have we would have managed fine. It'd be different if we're living in a city, but out in the country, I think we would have would have been just a small small wave to write.

Andrew Pozharsky 18:10

Gotcha. Any idea of how because you said you thought about how your family would react for any deal how a city would react?

Josh Miller 18:17

How what?

Andrew Pozharsky 18:18

How a city would react during your childhood. You know, I I've never been there. I'm a young man. I mean, I wouldn't know.

Josh Miller 18:27

That's, you know, to be honest, Andrew, I don't even know that I can speculate I was a country guy from from the time I was I was born really so I'm not familiar with what city life was like back then. So I can't even imagine what it would be like for them.

Andrew Pozharsky 18:44

And you talked about like your youngest son, you were doing sports? What kind of sports does he do? Are a lot of them like team sports?

Josh Miller 18:50

Yeah, he's all his big basketball guy a big baseball guy. He decided football wasn't for him. He tried cross country that was a for him which was nice because cross country they can actually do a little bit so they got some races and but yeah, he's a he's a big basketball and baseball guy.

Andrew Pozharsky 19:06

Gotcha. If I remember correctly, you said you organized with other families, a game recently?

Josh Miller 19:12

Um, what I think what we just did is we talked with our neighbors about being able to get the kids together during

Andrew Pozharsky 19:20

Gotcha. That hasn't happened yet, then.

Josh Miller 19:21

Yeah, it was well it had we let them they run around in the neighborhood and play. We our kids generally don't go into their neighbor's house without permission and neighbors don't come in our house without permission. But you know, neighbors have a trampoline, we've got a yard where they can mess around and shoot baskets and stuff so long as they're long as they're being decent about everything. We're fine with that.

Andrew Pozharsky 19:43

Or do you have any like plans in the near future to set up an organized team game?

Josh Miller 19:49

Like for for our boys or?

Andrew Pozharsky 19:51

For your boys or just for the community in general?

Josh Miller 19:54

No, I don't think so. We're back to like the regular Altoona baseball league and all that. So our youngest has taken part in that the oldest is on the tennis team in high school. So we're kind of going that route.

Andrew Pozharsky 20:06

Gotcha. I guess like what precautions are they taking with that? Like our players? Do players have to wear masks? Why are there so that?

Josh Miller 20:13

Yeah, so when he played basketball this past winter, all the players were in masks, they limited the number of people that could come to the games, we had to drive quite a ways for games, because there just wasn't many gyms that were even allowing it. I think we drove all the way to Owen-withee for one game to sit there for 45 minutes and then go back. And even then, I think that some parents had to sit in the car, because they just wouldn't want we're only allowing one or two guests per kid. So it was kind of tough that not everyone that wanted to come see their you know, niece, nephew, grandson, son, even play basketball could do it. Especially when they're limiting the number of games so much, you really want to be there. And there's limited opportunities, but not everyone could so made it tough. But yeah, the kids had to wear masks, it was tough. They're out there, sweating and breathing hard. And it was a challenge for it. For sure. Nobody liked it. But I think everyone understood that they wanted to play basketball, this is what they're gonna have to do.

Andrew Pozharsky 21:08

And, you know, everyone knew they understand just how serious COVID-19 is right now.

Josh Miller 21:15

Oh, a hundred percent.

Andrew Pozharsky 21:15

But like when it was first coming out, when we first started hearing news report about about it, you know, how did you react to it?

Josh Miller 21:23

Well, it's a good question. There was so much, I guess, question about it, I tried to sort of reserve judgment. And I the way I always say it is that I we don't like being second-guessed in our jobs. So I wasn't particularly keen on second-guessing the doctors. So I was just going to kind of wait and hear what they had to say and kind of go by by their recommendation. So I, I tried to not think about it too much or draw any kind of early conclusions. But my instinct was always just to let the experts take a look at it and come up with with a solution and some some plans.

Andrew Pozharsky 21:59

When the experts started saying this was a big deal. You know, were you like, completely on board with it?

Josh Miller 22:05

Yeah, 100% I, you know, I, yeah, definitely. There was a, there was a lot of steps that had to be taken that weren't easy for anyone. But until they could get a grasp on everything. I personally and this is just me speaking as a as a human being not as an officer or anything. But yeah, I understood tough decisions had to be made. And until we could get a grasp on it, they had to be had to be mean.

Andrew Pozharsky 22:27

Did your boys react the same way?

Josh Miller 22:29

I think so. Yeah. My youngest, especially he's, he's pretty nervous about about COVID, even though he probably young enough to not be bothered by it. But he he's very leery about people not wearing masks. He always comments on it when he sees it in public. And he is a stickler for wearing his. So whatever makes him feel better. I'm down with.

Andrew Pozharsky 22:50

Okay, gotcha. And I think that's for the most part, all the questions I had.

Josh Miller 22:58

Okay.

Andrew Pozharsky 22:59

So I guess we do have a couple more minutes left. You know, is there anything else you'd like to add? Like any, any thoughts you have about the pandemic in general? Or?

Josh Miller 23:08

Well, I mean, we, I just kind of been asked this by a, by a media outlet recently. And I think it's worth bringing it up, because I think it will end up being a problem. And that's just for my time and in sensitive crimes. A lot of our reports on child abuse or sexual assault, things like that came from, like an outside witness, really a third party, typically the school system. A lot of times, you know, a child might confide to an adult at school, a teacher, a counselor, something that happened to them at home. And that's where we got a lot of our reports, you know, we don't go looking for those kinds of things, because

Andrew Pozharsky 23:44

It's just very hard to track down too.

Josh Miller 23:46

Absolutely, right. And children will will generally disclose when they're ready, you can't force them to talk about something that's happened to them. And I really do have some concerns about what was happening to kids who were who didn't have that outlet. Were getting abused, and simply didn't have an opportunity to go to school and have a teacher see a bruise or, you know, to have a talk in class about sexual assault, and then that's when a child discloses. So I do kind of fear for possible wave of reports when kids come back to school full time. I hope we don't see it. But like I said, as a from what I've seen in sensitive crimes is something that certainly concerns me, but it's I fear for what happened to kids in bad situations during those during the pandemic.

Andrew Pozharsky 24:34

Gotcha. And do you feel like, because you I mean, you've been in that sensitive department for a couple of years now. Do you think there's any solutions to that?

Josh Miller 24:45

Sadly, I don't know what a solution could be. Like I said, most kids will will disclose when they feel safe to do so. And if they're still in those situations for a long period of time, I can't imagine that they will feel safe enough to discuss So I think it's just important that that human services and departments are

prepared to handle the caseload when it comes in, I feel our department is I know not every city or county has the resources. But I certainly hope that as we come out of this, that those kinds of resources are at least available in place.

Andrew Pozharsky 25:20

And we'll definitely see what the future holds.

Josh Miller 25:23

Absolutely.

Andrew Pozharsky 25:24

And with that, Officer Miller, I think that's the end of our interview.

Josh Miller 25:27

Awesome. Well, thank you, Andrew. I appreciate it.

Andrew Pozharsky 25:29

Thank you very much for your time. You have a very nice day.

Josh Miller 25:32

All right, you as well. Take care.

Andrew Pozharsky 25:33

Bye

Josh Miller 25:34

bye