**Transcript of Interview with Josh Wright by Andrew Ziehr**

**Narrator:** Josh Wright
**Interviewer:** Andrew Ziehr
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**Abstract:** Josh Wright, a food services employee, discusses how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted his job and the economy. He discusses what working in a restaurant looks like during shelter-in-place mandates. An avid sports fan, Josh talks about how the pandemic has impacted his favorite hobby. Josh details how he interacts with customers and the different ways co-workers reacted to the pandemic. He shares the changes in his interactions with family and friends due to COVID-19. Josh explains a visit with his mother and brother, as well as the way he is helping his kids navigate their new world. He also reflects upon how his local community is responding to safety protocols, as well as the ability of the national government to respond to this crisis.

**AZ:** And we're recording. All right, it is May 21 2020. I am here with Josh. Josh, can you tell me your full name and race, gender and where you live?

**JW:** My name is Joshua Wright. I'm white. A male. 38 years old. I live in Madison, Wisconsin.

**AZ:** Can you tell me a little bit about what it's like living in Madison right now?

**JW:** Obviously different given what's going on with COVID. But seems like people are starting to kind of acclimate themselves and people are getting out and about a little bit more. But it's still different - being more careful wearing masks, gloves when you're outside, etc. A few more businesses are starting open - which is nice. But yeah, it's different. That's the best way I can describe it.

**AZ:** Can you tell me a little bit about what you do on a day to day basis during - or what you have been doing on a day to day basis - during this?

**JW:** Majority of my time, if I'm not at home, maybe an exciting trip to Kwik Trip or Walmart to get something once a week - stock up. And, I'm going to work pretty much daily since this all started like March, mid-March.

**AZ:** And can you tell me about what type of work you do?

**JW:** I'm the general manager of Mr. Brews and Taphouse, it's a bar restaurant. So right now kind of transitioned into just carry out and delivery business and curbside pickup. So that's taking up a lot of my time. And renovating the place has been part of it too. So.

**AZ:** Okay. Has the pandemic effected like your family life in any way - your home life?

**JW:** Family life a little bit. My mother - and actually my brother and mother live together in Lake Delton, my brother's diabetic. My mom being her age - so you know going to - I visited her once since this. Gloves, mask, etc. Yeah, it's been different. I mean, seeing family. I have two small children that live with my ex. So seeing them - just trying to find the best way to inform them, of you know, what's going on - you know, a four and a six year old. So it's been different. It's been trying. A lot of cartoons with them. A lot of TV. We'll go to the park here and there - just try to explain to them why we need to be careful and respect other people's distances and so forth. Yeah, I mean, it's been tough, it's different. You know?

**AZ:** Were they in school before?

**JW:** My son was, yes - kindergarten.

**AZ:** And how has that changed? How are you adapting with that?

**JW:** He's fine. I mean, we do bunch of stuff on the on the iPad. You know - we'll do number - you know, basic kind of stuff they do in kindergarten. It was just half days as it was. But still, I mean, he misses his friends, he misses going to class, so forth. But we're doing our best just to keep him heading in the right direction as far as reading, writing, things like that. There's a lot of online tools - I mean, for kindergarteners there's not a lot of online stuff - but it's there's learning tools he's using.

**AZ:** Do you remember when you first heard about COVID-19?

**JW:** It was like November-ish, I think. October, November, something like that when it arose in China and and all that. To be honest, what raised awareness for me was how it was affecting the sports world. 'Casue I'm an avid sports fan and they talked about removing fans from stadiums and so forth. And then when it really hit the fan was when Rudy Gobert, a player for the Utah Jazz, tested positive. And that was like March 16, or somewhere around there. The next day, they shut down everything. And it seemed like - I mean, obviously that wasn't the thing that really raised awareness around the world - but for me that was. And then from there on out, it was just like everything shutdown indefinitely.

**AZ:** Being a sports fans - an industry that's been majorly impacted - at least different - how's that going for you?

**JW:** Say that one more time.

**AZ:** Being the sports fan that you are, the sports world is very different right now. It's either different or you're getting repeats or whatever it is, but how is that? How are you dealing with that?

**JW:** Well, I mean, the sport that I follow closest is definitely the NFL. So that's kind of - there's some type of normalcy there in the offseason the draft is coming up. So there's a lot of that - they're still kind of business as usual. So I just follow that a little closer watching a lot of repeats. The Jordan thing is on ESPN. I can't think of the name of it. It's like a ten part series. I've been watching that. Reliving their glory days But yeah, I mean, it's tough. I mean, there's like so much you can do as far as repeats and stuff like that watching sports. Yeah. I still watch SportsCenter every day. It's kind of boring.

**AZ:** How have relationships with friends have been altered by this? Do you still communicate with friends? If so, how?

**JW:** Yeah, I mean I do. I'm not the biggest social media guy. I don't even know my Facebook password to be honest with you. Phone calls, so forth. I live actually with my best friend here in the in this house. So I mean, kind of the same type of deal. I mean, we don't really have people over. He had his mother and his sister in law over for a barbecue. That was like the first time we really even had people over since this whole thing happened. And I mean, it's different. We don't have people over, we don't go out, we don't go to you know, local poker tournaments or Pooley's Bar - you know, we [used to] go up there. So. Yeah, I mean, it's - trying to keep in contact with my friends best I can, you know, phone call, text. So I mean, in the age we're living in now it definitely makes it easier. You know, I couldn't imagine doing this 20 years ago, 30 years ago, it would have been really tough. But yeah, I mean, it's definitely taking its toll on spending time with friends and closeness and doing things like that. We're getting through it.

**AZ:** We talked a little bit about - well, you talked a little bit about work earlier. When this first came out, what were your concerns about your job - about employment?

**JW:** Initially, it was kind of like a panic thing. Just realizing, you know, and learning more about it, but just not knowing - just the uncertainty of it all. Yeah, I mean, I I'm glad I was able to fit in where I did. There's a couple of folks that couldn't come back to work either because of pre-existing condition, medical conditions, and so forth. It just wouldn't be safe for them - which actually allowed me more time to be there - sometimes too much time. And it was pretty much myself, me and owner for about a month, month and a half. So it ended up working out quite well as far as getting hours and working. But initially I was thinking "Geeze. What am I going to do?" And after about a week into this, all of our carry out and delivery service - like Grubhub, Uber Eats, Eats Street, Doordash, call-in orders, so forth - like really picked up quite a bit. Response was good, support was great around our area. So yeah, I was shocked that it actually turned out as well as it did. And we were as busy as we have been. But yeah, initially I wouldn't say panicked, but I was just like a deer in headlights. I didn't know what to think or do.

**AZ:** Any thoughts on the Madison economy? The national economy? Any just general thoughts on that?If not, it's okay.

**JW:** I mean, to be honest with you, obviously, everything's taking a hit universally. And you know it, we'll deal with it the best way we can. The gentleman that's currently in office here in the United States, I don't know is best suited for this. But, you know, we've just got to weather the storm, I guess. I mean, I, obviously there's concern, but hopefully, things will fall in line. I don't know. I mean, I'm not the biggest Trump fan - to be honest - at all. And it sucks. He's there right now. God if Obama was there right now, I'd just, I'd feel a lot more secure and safe. But there's nothing you can really do now. His handling of this though - the one benefit is I don't think he'll be reelected. So..but yeah. I don't know. The economy - it's gonna be tough - just like everything else. Different I guess it's the nicest way to put it. Yeah, but that's all I got.

**AZ:** All right. Do you consume news? If so, kind of what sources do you...

**JW:** It's CNN pretty much - just an app on my phone. That's it. You know, I'll watch a little bit here and there, local news and so forth. I try to stay informed, but I don't let it consume me. Sometimes. I lived in Chicago for 15 years. I just moved back to Madison a few years ago. And I have to say, I used to watch the news quite a bit and watching news, their local news, it was just so negative with all the crime and everything in it. I kind of just got turned off from it. But I mean, now I'm trying to keep myself informed for what it is, you know, I'll do a daily checkup - corona updates, what I can do to be safe for my kids and so forth. But other than that, I wouldn't say I'm a heavy news guy.

**AZ:** Okay. So we've all heard of self isolation, flattening the curve, all that. Do you feel that you've been participating in that in a in a strong way, medium way, weak way?

**JW:** I'd say somewhere in the middle. I don't always wear a mask, actually, usually I don't. When I'm at work clearly I wear gloves - we're constantly washing things, sterilizing things. You know, obviously with like curbside pickup, I'll ask the people if they want to come in, if they want me to bring it to their car, they want to just put in their trunk, you know and so forth. I definitely respect - I keep my distance you know unless it's welcome within a couple feet even it's just a hand a bag to someone. We might go to Walmart that once a week or whatnot - yeah I keep your space, self checkout. Yeah I mean I probably should wear a mask more - I noticed more often than not people are wearing a mask in public and I don't on a regular basis. I mean I do at work and other - like I actually got my eyes checked today I wore masks when I went into Stanton Optical. But yeah, I'm somewhere in the middle. And it's not that - more or less I want to keep other people safe. And you know, I probably should wear a mask. I was checked actually they took my temperature and Stanton Optical today and did stuff like that. It's also for peace of mind for other people to see us with masks - so with that said the uncomfortability of wearing it, it's kind of stupid, I should just have it on. Not all the time. Not like when I'm in my car driving or when I'm riding a bike, per se, but yeah. So I'm somewhere in the middle, but I definitely respect other people - you know the distance, especially from people that are at risk, you know, and it might be in fear of coming in contact with someone. So I try to respect that as much as I can. Outside of not wearing the mask all the time, but...

**AZ:** I know the number of co workers has been somewhat limited with being kind of partially closed, but what have you seen like from coworkers as far as reactions to this? To the pandemic?

**JW:** It's a mixed bag. Really. I mean, there's one younger guy Jake that I work with. He worked leading up to this - I remember he was there the night that it was actually Rudy Gobert night when it kind of went national, the NBA and then they started shutting everything down the following day. He was kind of joking around about it a little bit. The next day - a couple days later - it was like a Thursday or Friday night he came into work and his mom called twice during work to see how he was doing. I'm not sure really sure what was said. But needless to say, that was his last shift there. His mom didn't feel comfortable with him being out. So I - and we respected that we offered him hours doing like prep work or something when we weren't even open. So he didn't have to be around people at all. And as it stands now, it would be myself and him or he in the owner. And then as far as contact with customer - even when they do come inside the pay. We set the bag on a counter, walk 6 feet back to a register, take the card we've got you know, and so forth. But yeah, so I mean his reaction, I respect it, but he's been non responsive and didn't really want to work. And then in the last couple of weeks, we've had a couple employees reach out saying, you know, maybe they were ready to come back into the mix as long as we're safe. And once they got their foot in the door and kind of saw how we're operating and everything Blaire and Ann is back, you know, and they, they seem to be fine with enough, you know, not fine. Everybody's, like I said, different, you know, and respecting space and everything like that, but they seem to be acclimating themselves, as well as as they could. So we don't want to force anyone to come back to work if they're not comfortable or they have whatever condition.

**AZ:** So I know there are plans because the Dane County ordinance expires, I believe next Wednesday at 8am?

**JW:** Yeah, the 26th or whenever that is. Yeah.

**AZ:** What are your thoughts on opening up to the public?

**JW:** I understand like we can go - I think it's a quarter capacity - like it's normally 100 people and go down to 25. I'm okay with it. I mean - in some ways I think Wisconsin may have kind of jumped the gun on this a little bit especially with what happened - was it last week or whatever - outside of Dean County, the opening of bars. It's just nobody fully understands this COVID thing - it's a different strain. You know, there's all the other stuff going on and reopening I understand to boost economy is important. And people are ready for it. But at the same time, the threat of things getting worse - like yesterday, I think it was the highest cases ever in Wisconsin. Literally the day before - it was the 20th or the 19th - so it's just scary that you know, people get back in contact, and this thing just gets exasperated, and just gets even worse before it gets better. That's the only thing I'm worried about. But just if we are open, I'm going to be there. I'm gonna have a mask on all the time, you know, just for people's safety and my own safety. And yeah, I mean, I think it'll be good as long as everybody's safe. But that is the one thing I'm worried about. It's jumping the gun now rather than waiting a couple of months or, you know, even if it is until there's a cure or regular testing is almost mandated. It might set everything back even farther. So that's my thought on that. So for now, we're going to open we're going to be safe, kinda play it by ear.

**AZ:** All right. So kind of a couple broad, kind of sort of wrapping up questions. Has your experience changed in any way how you think about your community, your family, and friends?

**JW:** No. I mean it's a universal thing we're all dealing with together so I try not to pass you know judgment on it. Everybody's gonna deal with it their own way. My family clearly - like I couldn't be more protective - just be safe in general you know. You think about all the little things that get touched and you do or we did on a daily basis and just how we're gonna have to change a little bit you know. And I mean not in the interim, we're talking for the foreseeable future - years really. Yeah, I mean I... It's tough on everybody, everybody deals with it their own way. Yeah it's closeness in families - you enjoy spending more time with them and things like that. It'd also be nice to kind of get away and be able to do other stuff, but hey, you know, it is what it is.

**AZ:** Right, and kind of knowing what you know now and kind of knowing what we all know now. Do you see anything different? Better happening if this would happen again, say in three to five years?

**JW:** Like another pandemic outside of this?

**AZ:** Yeah.

**JW:** I mean, having this I guess experience with it universally may help people, you know, like they wouldn't turn like a deaf ear to it. Like when I heard about it in China in October, whatever it was. But if something like this arises again, or something different, but another pandemic, I think, you know, society will be a little bit better prepared for such a thing. So it'll be alright masks - and they'll take it more seriously right away, which could help the spread. That's all I got.

**AZ:** All right. Well, thank you very much Josh. I'm going to stop the recording.