**Interviewee:** Josh Miller

**Interviewer:** Andrew Pozharsky

**Date:** May 7th, 2021

**Format:** Audio recording

**Location of interview:** Eau Claire, Wisconsin

**Transcriber:** Andrew Pozharsky

**Additional Transcription Equipment used:** Zoom

**Project in association with:** University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

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

**Josh Miller** 00:00:04.000

I think we started recording, I don't know if you have to. I don't know if you receive a notification for that. I just heard something that said it was recording.

**Andrew Pozharsky** 00:00:11.00:0

Okay. Gotcha. Yeah, so we just started recording. So what we get started.

So, today is makes is May sixth, I'm with officer Josh Miller.

He is an officer in Eau Claire police department, and today we're going to be talking a little bit about how carbon 19 has affected him his appointment and his community.

And so with that I guess I'll ask you some questions officer Miller, just to get to know you better.

So how long have you been an officer?

**Josh Miller** 00:00:41.000

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

**Andrew Pozharsky** 00:00:45.000

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

**Josh Miller** 00:00:51.000

Oh, that's kind of a tough one.

When I was young I wanted to wanted to be an officer I guess I don't know where I really where to really kind of came from initially went to school for it.

I wouldn't want to stay 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** 00:01:28.000

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

**Josh Miller** 00:01:32.000

Yes, so I started out 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 assaults, you name it, and 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** 00:02:15.000

Wow, you must have had a really fun time these past couple months as it's been interesting.

actually I would like to actually jump into that So, you know, as you have obviously known there's been a pandemic for a couple of the past month.

And so during that time. Has your job you don't deal with social media and whatnot, has it become easier or harder or stay the same. Um, it's that's kind of a difficult question to answer.

**Josh Miller**

Overall it's been more difficult. The only reason that I would say easier is because when the pandemic was kind of at its height we sort of made the conscious decision that we were going to scale back or social media efforts, a little bit, simply because

our philosophy 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 recognizing 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, or on social media so we really kind of scale 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 and 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 kind of be, I guess more sympathetic or 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 on 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 in Eau Claire Vinnie if there's an event going on, you

some sort of kids Expo or anything like that will 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 a scale that back, not by choice but just because of necessity.

**Andrew Pozharsky** 00:05:00.000

How 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.

**Josh Miller** 00:05:09.000

I'm sort of something you guys very much enjoy doing. Right. So like has it been

like a half counts been like a reacting negatively to that you know they wish they could talk with the community more, you know, instead of being may be stuck in opposite day.

Oh absolutely, yeah for 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 our police going to be the ones to enforce the pandemic protocols and the rules.

So we were again very measured and how we would go about doing that but yeah, when the public events that we show up say like the history icon and 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 and people are having their worst days.

So it's nice to get out to some of those other events I think about the suicide walk that they do in Carson Park every year that was really very positive experience for the officers that attend that and just not being able to do that was really kind of a lot of people missed out on that.

**Andrew Pozharsky** 00:06:24.000

And gotcha. Thank you. And now you're talking about being like very careful and what you guys publish your social media right I think any examples you could share.

**Josh Miller** 00:06:34.000

I 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. We got a lot of negative comments about it.

They ran the gamut for a lot of different reasons and it just made me think like I was really just trying to do something, say something positive and the way you can just kind of help yourself through the pandemic and people did not take kindly to it

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 the anger I think that people were feeling and I don't necessarily think it was directed at the police department or at the all clear police department that we're just a lot I think fear and trepidation about what was going on.

**Andrew Pozharsky** 00:07:17.000

Gotcha. And definitely does sound difficult, you know, you're, you're trying to interact and social media but as you said there's a lot of anger going on.

**Josh Miller** 00:07:29.000

We've always known 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** 00:07:42.000

Yeah. And in terms like Covid-19, like what precautions are department taking Carbonite team, like for example, what happens if the officer, you know, unfortunately gets it.

**Josh Miller** 00:07:56.000

Yeah, we've had all sorts exposed to Covid have got cold that 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 headed and still has questions just that they ask in any call that they're going to send an officer to about, you

know, as the person that exposed to call vid 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 the report, and that gets forwarded to an officer to follow up with it at a later time.

So that was very helpful. We started pushing a lot of calls there just to avoid the person to 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 the police officer show up.

But let's 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 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 to the more is hot calls he would say, more we need an immediate response but that scaled back initially quite a bit.

**Andrew Pozharsky** 00:09:34.000

Gotcha. And you know earlier you talked about, like, 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** 00:09:46.000

Um, we started running our crime stats fairly soon in the pandemic just to get a sense of everything and there was an overall things stayed fairly level.

I expected to see a big drop I think everyone expected to see a big drop and we didn't really see that some of 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 of ours

That's simply because the hours were open right so I drop in ow eyes initially and that's because bars weren't open people that are drinking 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 level though we weren't any, any less busy during during the real heavy days of

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** 00:10:42.000

Gotcha. And you know you were talking about, you know, bars being closed down, so like your ship this to like you personally has this affected your free time anyway because, for example, I know some people are very extroverted.

**Josh Miller** 00:10:55.000

They like to go out a lot. Sure, go to the bar for example, over the bars are closed, nothing you can do. So I can say for you, you know, what do you like to do in your free time and has that been impacted by Kobe 19 regulations.

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 and we would occasionally go to a to a local bar, you know maybe 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 what it did affect for me was my kids were heavy into sports.

So we got baseball cancelled for for a year, 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 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 say three years, and then the pandemic Hill we're all set to have two players come in from Stanford and you know, we found out kind of last minute that down there wasn't going to be a season

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 the some other extent but we managed through but yeah there was

some big effect even for someone, maybe a little more introverted like myself.

**Andrew Pozharsky** 00:12:50.000

Gotcha.

And with any of your friends or your family, you'll Has anyone been diagnosed with covid-19?

**Josh Miller** 00:12:58.000

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 manage manage through it a lot head know they had some symptoms but nobody had anything serious, thankfully.

And you remember what like those symptoms were i don't i mean i think a lot of people said it was generally more of your typical kind of a strong colds and flus sort of thing.

**Andrew Pozharsky** 00:13:29.000

Gotcha, gotcha.

And so, um, so you were talking about your family now how about your neighborhood. You know how has that been affected by Colby 19.

**Josh Miller** 00:13:39.000

Um, my neighborhood I don't think it's affected it while I should I'm not gonna speak for for my neighbors of course but we, you know, before everyone really understood what it was, there was a lot of fear, so the kids weren't going out in the neighborhood

he's even in playing with the neighbors, they would talk to each other through the window, and we're fortunate that my, my son's have a one of their best friends lives about two doors down.

So that was a little tough but they couldn't get out with them right away and I'll be talking through through windows and whatnot but as to kind of learned a little bit more about it was about what cold it 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 up made a decision that the mental health of the kids was 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 cannot just found a new normal I guess.

**Andrew Pozharsky** 00:14:43.000

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

**Josh Miller** 00:14:49.000

Well, they were certainly happy to do the online learning, they enjoyed the virtual stuff because they got to stay at home a lot more.

Even though I I'm not convinced that they learned as well as they certainly could have if they were in school but they got used to that pretty fast they enjoyed it, they, 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 that 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 sport so that was kind of a bummer but i think i think my oldest became an expert at fortnight so maybe that'll be something that

he can turn into a career someday, who knows, maybe. Yeah. It's a whole new world. Yeah right, who knows it gives scholarships for that now so I wouldn't be surprised to hear that, you know, maybe they'll be like a high school eSports report knife.

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

**Andrew Pozharsky** 00:15:52.000

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 when you're growing up I'm sure there wasn't as many electronic devices, call me old larger

**Josh Miller** 00:16:14.000

assumption there but yeah no no I get what you're saying like Mike, my kids will sit down and play video games with 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 are in

the play video games with your friends you gotten your bike and he wrote five miles to the neighbors and sat down with him and had a sleep over.

I, and they can't even fathom that right now they don't understand what what that could be like but taking away some of the dangers of it. I certainly, I think it's great that the kids can just hop online and 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 forum so.

Well, like I said, there's a dangerous 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 huge learning tool huge social tool that can really help.

**Andrew Pozharsky** 00:17:16.000

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 either you would have reacted to it.

**Josh Miller** 00:17:27.000

Yeah, I've actually thought about that we lived out on an old farmhouse outside of shoe tech 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 word a 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 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 and 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 right.

**Andrew Pozharsky** 00:18:11.000

Gotcha. Any idea of how good you said you thought about how your family would react, for any idea how city would react, how what our city would react or their childhood.

**Josh Miller** 00:18:23.000

You know I never been there, I'm a young mountain, yes I wouldn't know that so I you know to be honest Sandra I don't even know that I could 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.

And he talked about like your youngest son you're doing sports. What kind of sports does he do or a lot of them like team sports.

Yeah, he's all he's a big basketball guy big baseball guy, he decided football wasn't for him he tried cross country that wasn't 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.

Gotcha.

**Andrew Pozharsky** 00:19:07.000

If I remember correctly, you said you organize but there are other families, a game recently.

**Josh Miller** 00:19:13.000

Um.

We, I think what we just did is we talked with our neighbors about being able to get the kids together during gotcha that hasn't happened yet then yes well it had we let them they run around in the neighborhood and play with our kids generally don't

go into their neighbor's house without permission, and neighbors will come in our house well 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

they're being decent about everything we're fine with that.

**Andrew Pozharsky** 00:19:45.000

Do you have any like plans in the near future to set up an organized team game of like for for our boys or now for your boys or just for with the community in general.

**Josh Miller** 00:19:55.000

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

**Andrew Pozharsky** 00:20:07.000

Gotcha. And I guess like what precautions are they taking with that.

00:20:11.000

Like our players do players have to wear masks, why are there so that yeah so when you play basketball this past winter of 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 own with the 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 guess per per kid, so it was kind of tough that not everyone that wanted to come see you there.

song even play basketball could do it, especially when they're limiting the number of games so much you really want to be there and those limited opportunities but not everyone could so made a tough but yeah the kids had to wear masks It was tough they're

they're out there, you know, 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 going to have to do it,

**Andrew Pozharsky** 00:21:21.000

you know, everyone they understand you know how serious covid-19 is right now. Oh hundred but like when it was first coming out when we first started here news report about about it, you know, how did you react to it.

**Josh Miller** 00:21:24.000

Well, it's a good question that 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 we don't like being second guessed in our jobs so I wasn't particularly keen on second guessing the

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 really 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.

When the experts are saying this was a big deal. You know where you like completely on board with it.

Yeah, hundred percent i you know i. Yeah, definitely that there was I.

There was a lot of steps that had to be taken the worries 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

**Andrew Pozharsky** 00:22:25.000

Did your boys react the same way?

**Josh Miller** 00:22:30.000

I think so, yeah. My youngest especially, he's, he's pretty nervous about about Kobe 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 I know when he sees it on public

and he is a stickler for wearing his so whatever makes them feel better I'm down with.

**Andrew Pozharsky** 00:22:51.000

Okay. Gotcha.

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

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** 00:23:10.000

Well, I mean we I just kind of been asked this by a by a media lead 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 insensitive 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.

Right.

A lot of times you know a child might confide due 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 kind of things because he's just

trying to track down to absolutely right and children will will generally disclose when they're ready You can't force them to talk about something that 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 or 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 I fear for what happened to kids in bad situations during those during the pandemic.

**Andrew Pozharsky** 00:24:35.000

Gotcha. And do you feel like, because you I mean you've been in that sense of department for a couple years now.

Do you think there's any solutions to that.

**Josh Miller** 00:24:45.000

Um.

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 disclose so I think

it's just important that that human services and departments are prepared to handle the caseload where that 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 that