

Transcript for Cody Brown Oral History, 2020/07/25

Interviewee: Cody Brown

Interviewer: Alexis Walker

Date: 07/25/2020

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Location (Interviewer): Fayetteville, North Carolina

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Abstract: A law enforcement officer, student at Arizona State University in the master's program for History and living in a small rural town in the Midwestern United States. Interviewee shares their experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic from their various lens and how it has impacted their life.

Cody Brown 00:00

Use my answers a little bit and that's fine.

Alexis Walker 00:02

Okay, then that's fine. Okay, so we'll start- let me see the time- Okay, so it's about a minute into the recording. Okay, so just to begin the interview, what is the date and time?

Cody Brown 00:12

It is...July 10, 2020, and it is about three o'clock.

Alexis Walker 00:19

Okay, and what is your name?

Cody Brown 00:22

Cody Brown.

Alexis Walker 00:23

And the primary things you do on a day-to-day basis?

Cody Brown 00:29

Besides work- do grad school. I spend a lot of time outside the property I live on 300 acres. So, I spend a lot of time outdoors.

Alexis Walker 00:39

Okay, um, where do you live?

Cody Brown 00:41

Logan, Iowa.

Alexis Walker 00:42

And what is it like to live there?

Cody Brown 00:45

Um, it's very small town. It's about 1,200 people. And it's quiet little town it's about an hour from-from Omaha. So, it's small enough where I can have a small-town life but be able to get in the city if needs be.

Alexis Walker 01:02

Okay, and when you first learned about COVID-19, what were your thoughts about it?

Cody Brown 01:11

You know, I wasn't really sure what to think about it at first. I knew it was a virus. And being from a medical family, I kind of understood what that meant. But with what the World Health Organization was saying, at first, it wasn't really too much of an issue. I thought it was kind of like the flu, really.

Alexis Walker 01:31

And have your thoughts changed over time?

Cody Brown 01:35

Yes and no. Obviously, I realized that it's more deadly than the flu. But I've been paying attention to it a lot and looking at the numbers, at least here in Iowa, you know, less than 1% of the population has tested positive. So, like it's two-tenths of a percent of the population, if you've been tested positive in the state. So, when I look at it in the grand scheme of things, it's more deadly than the flu. But it's not spreading as fast here anyway.

Alexis Walker 02:05

Okay, I'm gonna ask you one more question before we move on to your- to talking about employment. So, what issues have most concerns you about COVID-19?

Cody Brown 02:12

I think probably the most concerning for me is the fact that a lot of people aren't asymptomatic. You know the flu, if someone's has the flu, for example, you know, they're sick. With COVID, you may not know and you may come in contact with it without having any idea.

Alexis Walker 02:37

Okay, then thank you. We're gonna move on to employment. Has COVID-19 affected your job and if so, in what ways?

Cody Brown 02:42

Um, not really actually. Um, being in law enforcement, I still have to do my job on a day-to-day basis, you know. I don't have the opportunity to work from home like some people do. It's made me a little more precautionous in my job, I guess because my interaction people. The only thing that's changed is if we go to someone's house for a call, we try and do everything outside, like on the front porch or outside the house instead of going into the house just for safety reasons.

Alexis Walker 03:15

Okay, then. What concerns do you have about the effects of COVID-19 on your employment and the econ-and the economy and like, in general?

Cody Brown 03:25

As far as my employment, no concerns. I mean, being a law enforcement officer, I have to do my job, and my job is always gonna be there. Especially, you know, a small town like this. As far as the economy, I have seen issues- here in the small town. We have a couple of restaurants in town. Being a small town, they really rely on their consistent customers on a day-to-day basis. We don't have a large customer basis and when they shut things down for a while, a couple of restaurants actually one of them got sold to another family that was gonna try and make a go of it. But it's been really difficult financially for some of the small businesses here in town.

Alexis Walker 04:05

Okay, so we're gonna move on to talking about family and household. How has COVID-19 affected you and your family on day-to-day activities?

Cody Brown 04:16

You know, I usually spend most of my time by myself if I'm not working. You know, work on grad school or I'm out here on the property. So, I don't have a ton of interaction socially with a lot of people anyway. So, my day-to-day activities haven't changed a whole lot. I live four hours away from my family. So, my contact with them is by phone anyway, for the most part. I do go back to visit. So that really hasn't changed for me either.

Alexis Walker 04:43

Okay, then, and how are you managing your day-to-day activities in your household?

Cody Brown 04:50

Pretty much the same as I always have. You know, somethin' needs to be done, I do it. If I got to go get groceries, I go get groceries. I really haven't changed my routine at all. I do wear a mask in places that require it. But if it's not required, I haven't been wearing masks for the entirety of the pandemic.

Alexis Walker 05:10

Okay, then. Has the COVID-19 outbreak affected how you associate and communicate with your friends and family?

Cody Brown 05:16

A little, not much though because like I said, I don't have a lot of face-to-face contact, you know. I work 12-hour shifts overnight. So, you my schedules 180 degrees different for most of my friends. Um, so I don't get to see them a whole lot anyway. So not a whole lot has changed for me, honestly.

Alexis Walker 05:35

Okay, then. What have been the biggest challenges that you faced during the COVID-19 outbreak?

Cody Brown 05:43

Access to some services has been kind of difficult. Just because with the mandated closures of things I haven't been able to go out and do a few of the things that I normally would do. And I think maybe the interaction with people- with me not wearing a mask, a lot of people don't want to interact with me. But with my job, it's very difficult to wear a mask and do my job effectively.

Alexis Walker 06:11

Okay, one more question. What have you your family and friends done for recreation during COVID-19?

Cody Brown 06:22

You know, I don't see my family a whole lot. So, I can't speak for them, I kind of speak to my brother. He used to go to the gym a lot. When they closed the gyms here, him and his wife bought a bunch of equipment for at home. So, they have a home gym. They live right- oh, a block back from the lake. So, they have their boat so they've been doing that the same thing with the open air on the lake, they're pretty safe. Me? I haven't changed at all and I got some workout stuff to do at home because I use the school weight room for my gym. And obviously, we can't go to the school right now. But that's pretty much the only thing that's changed for me, you know. I shoot on the property, I hunt on the property, and then hike on the property and stuff. So not a whole lot has changed for me in that respect, honestly.

Alexis Walker 07:06

Okay, we're gonna move on and talk about the community now. How has the COVID-19 outbreak affected your community?

Cody Brown 07:16

A lot less people milling around and allow us interactions in the community, which is really weird for me because beings, a small community of 1,200 people, 1,300 people, it's a pretty tight knit community, you know. Everybody interacts with each other and talks to each other all the time. But that's changed there's not a lot of people at the parks. Not a lot of people out in public places interacting with each other. It's kind of gotten closer to normal now that we've been in the pandemic for so long people, I think are getting stir crazy. But it's definitely weird seeing the lessened interaction within the community.

Alexis Walker 07:58

Okay, then. How are people around you res-responding to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Cody Brown 08:05

We've got people on both ends of the spectrum. We have a few people that are extremely concerned about it. I know a few people have pre-existing conditions. So obviously, they're rightfully extremely concerned about it. But we have some people on the other end of the spectrum that are almost pandemic deniers, I wouldn't go that far. They understand that it's an issue, and that is here, and that we're not going to get away from it, but they don't see it as severe as a lot of people do. So, I've seen kind of both ends of the spectrum. And I do know a couple of people who have been exposed to it. So, their families kind of changed their tune, once a family member was exposed.

Alexis Walker 08:53

Okay, then. Have you seen the people around you change their opinions, day-to-day activities, or relationships in response to the pandemic?

Cody Brown 09:01

Yeah, it's kind of on a sliding scale of the degree to which they've done it. Obviously, you know, I mentioned that the community interaction has changed across the entire community. You don't have like some people call it places and stuff. You still have people that have small gatherings, you know, like in the yard have barbecues and things like that. And then I think the people who have really changed their perspective are the ones that all of a sudden have a family member or friend that has been affected by COVID I think it hits home and it's more real to them at that point, you know. We can be out there and not know anybody for quite a while that's-that's ever been exposed to it because it hasn't spread that far yet. And I think once they got that close to home hit, you know, their perceptions have changed a little bit.

Alexis Walker 09:56

Okay. Self-isolation and flattening the curve has been the two key ideas that have emerged during the pandemic. How have you, your family, friends, and community responded to requests to self-isolate and flatten the curve?

Cody Brown 10:08

For myself and my family, you know, I hate to be that guy, but I haven't really followed that a whole lot. Partially because of my job, I can't. So, I don't really followed that a little bit and I think the community as a whole, you know, they're not doing a huge gatherings as far as like in the parks and stuff like that. But life for the most part has gone on as normal here. In the small town, we just, I think we feel so isolated from it. And we don't see a whole lot of it, that things really haven't changed, people then- still been out and about, you know, they still go for walks, walk their dogs. They-they'll talk to you more often on walks, they'll keep their distance a little bit. So, I think there's been a little bit of response, but I think it's kind of a business as usual, for the most part for most people. And I think in the county I live in currently, there's only they only met 29 cases total in the county. So, our case counts been so low, I just think that people feel isolated from a care.

Alexis Walker 11:19

Okay, one more community question. Has COVID-19 changed your relationship with your family, friends, and community? And if so, in what ways?

Cody Brown 11:27

Absolutely not. Like I said, business as usual for the most part. I've still gone back north to see my family, you know. I've seen my grandparents things like that, and they're high risk, and you know, my grandma, she's in her late 70s, she's got Crohn's, so she has pre-existing conditions are very susceptible. But she's having a mindset if she's gonna get it, she's gonna get it, if it's her time, it's her time. So really, those interactions haven't changed a whole lot.

Alexis Walker 11:56

Okay, then. We're gonna move on to health questions now. Have you or anybody, you know, gotten sick from the COVID-19 outbreak?

Cody Brown 12:03

I have not that I know. But I've not been tested. So, I suppose it's possible that I would be an asymptomatic carrier. But I don't think so. There is a firefighter on the department here in town who got it. I know him pretty well. He was pretty sick for a while. So, I know one person who is who has gotten it, yes.

Alexis Walker 12:26

Okay, and in what ways do you think the COVID-19 is affecting people's mental or physical health?

Cody Brown 12:30

Physical health? You know, I think it's one of two things. Either people that are kind of staying in their homes and kind of changing their routines a little bit, if they don't have any home exercise equipment, for example. You know, I think your-your physical health as far as your diet, weight, and stuff like that, has definitely gone downhill a little bit. But I also see a lot- of lot more people doing walks, you know, husband and wife, couples, you know, family groups out-out doing walks. You know, it's been a few kids in the park playing basketball. This kind of interesting, because they're calling for self-isolation, but a lot more high school aged kids have been doing activities outside and I've seen in the last few years. So, I think the younger population, their physical health is actually probably improved a little bit, because they are spending more time outdoors. And I think that's because they're tired of having to isolate. And I think your older generation is maybe more opposite, where it's not as good. As far as mental health, I think it's taking a toll on everybody. You know, we had our teens, we had our ways that we liked to live and to a certain degree, we can't do that anymore. But I think the isolation has been really hard on people. As law enforcement officer, I have a little bit different perspective, we have seen an increase in domestic violence calls. People cooped up with each other all the time, you know, it's a serious matter. But you know, as long as we kind of make the joke that married couples are not meant to spend that much time together. So, we have seen that as far as and that's a good indicator of that mental health is definitely suffering right now.

Alexis Walker 14:28

Okay, we're gonna move on to questions about information. What have you been-what have been your primary sources of news during the pandemic?

Cody Brown 14:38

I kind of take news from everywhere. I'm a big believer in knowing as much as I can about as much as I can. Know being a history major at Arizona State, obviously, history is a big passion of mine, but you know, I like the science, I like the art, I like a little bit of everything. So, I pay attention to a lot of what's going on from a ton of different sources from all over the world. And our mayor here in town has actually been sending out information about the pandemic itself, as he received it from our County Public Health Department. He's been making social media posts, and he does daily ones, and keeps us up to date. So that's been really awesome. Not only for me, but for the whole community, because that's a trustworthy source of information you have here in town. You know, he's giving information as he's getting it with no changes and calling for people to behave properly. So that's been really nice as well.

Alexis Walker 15:36

Okay, and have you noticed sources changed during the course of the pandemic?

Cody Brown 15:40

Not really, because I've always been kind of one of those people who takes a little bit of everything and finds somewhere in the middle ground is probably the truth. And where things overlap is probably the truth. And that's always been kind of my belief of how to address news. So, I think probably my news stuff has been the same. However, I have seen a lot more stuff on social media, that is extremely one way or the other. So how I perceived the media or I've taken in my media hasn't changed, but I've definitely seen a change in how the media is presented.

Alexis Walker 16:17

Okay, then. And what issues that are important, do you think the media is or is not covering?

Cody Brown 16:26

You know, nationally, I think they're failing to report the positive side of some of the things that are going on. You know, we don't see a lot of recovery rates and things like that and positive stories coming out in the national news. It's a lot of doom and gloom. So, I think national news outlets are definitely dropping the ball on that, you know. They're-they're definitely focusing on the negative and not the positive, and they need to focus on some of the positive as well. As far as locally, the new stations of Omaha are kind of the same as the national ones. But a lot of our local newspapers, you know, our mayor, he always- they always bring up the, you know, "This is how many total cases we have. This is how many are recovered. This is how many are currently being monitored." So, I think at the local level, there is a lot more focus on the positive, the negative is there. But I think the local level does a much better job at appealing to the people what people actually want to know, versus pushing the negative side of it. And I think the national media has been real...they've been good about getting out changes in information. But I think that's maybe not necessarily a good thing, because every time something new or something different comes up, it's in the national media. You know, they're saying this, and then two weeks later, the same the exact opposite. And then a couple days later, the same the exact opposite. They're bouncing back and forth so bad they're just picking up on the newest, greatest thing that come out with COVID without waiting for peer reviewed studies and things like that, and I think that's a major issue.

Alexis Walker 18:16

Okay, then, and how have municipal leaders and government officials in your community responded to the outbreak?

Cody Brown 18:24

Within my town, it's been fantastic. You know, our mayor has been very supportive of the businesses and the people in town without coming out and saying, "Hey, we got to make these essen-" The only restriction he made was back when, at the end of March, beginning of April, when we weren't sure what was going on with the-with the COVID-19 outbreak. And he knew it was a respiratory issue. He did institute a burn ban through the end of May in the city. We can only burn one day a week in the city

anyways, as far as like leaves and things like that. But he banned that completely and opened up the city dump for people to take their yard waste and stuff to try and eliminate any other external factors that might cause breathing complications along with COVID-19. So, I think at the local level, the response has been fantastic. And I think in a small town of a small community, that's a totally different scenario and totally different ballgame than say, a big city like Des Moines or Omaha, or New York City, even a massive city. At the state level, I think our governor has done pretty decent. You know, there's some things I don't agree with that she's done. There's other things that I agree with and I think she's been fantastic. But I think she's been juggling the ball between, "Okay, what do we have to do to keep the state safe? And what do we have to do to make sure that the stability of the economy and people's mental health is maintained as well?" So, I think she's done a very fantastic job. Overall, she's done a lot to deal with, but I think she's done a pretty good job.

Alexis Walker 20:07

Okay, and do you have any thoughts on how local, state, or federal leaders are responding to the crisis differently?

Cody Brown 20:16

You know, I think the local and state level, they have more of an idea of what's going on in a smaller area. So, I think local and state responses are far more important than federal responses, especially in a country as big as the United States. You know, what works in New York City doesn't work in Iowa, or doesn't work in Texas or Kansas, but it might work in California, just because your-your population and your cultures are a little bit different. So, I think federal guidelines are good, but I think the ultimate decisions need to be left up to the state and local levels, because they know their population base and they know their area much better than people at the federal level do.

Alexis Walker 21:01

Okay, and have you experienced transformed how you think about your family, friends, and community? And if so, in what ways?

Cody Brown 21:06

Not really, you know, my mom has been a nurse for 34 years now, I think. So, obviously, her response is kind of how I expected it to be. Maybe my perception of how my dad handles things like this, I kind of thought that he might be a little more uptight about it, but he's pretty nonchalant to this whole thing. And pretty resistant to any restrictions, which kind of surprised me a little bit. But as far as community and friends, not really. You know, I've been pretty proud to be in this town and how people interacted and treated each other. I think the pandemic has really showed that we do have that kind of community here. So, you know, my perception was just reinforced, I think, with the community.

Alexis Walker 22:05

Okay. How does this pandemic compare to other big events that have happened in your lifetime?

Cody Brown 22:09

Let's see big events in my lifetime. I remember 9/11 very well, I was in middle school when it happened. I could recall exactly where I was. I remember how the country acted after 9/11 and I think this is a complete 180-degree shift from how the country reacting to- After 9/11, the-the country came together, you know, we were all one. But this pandemic has really, really created some very severe divisions within this country. You know, there's, there's a major us versus them mentality with this. I don't think it's the pandemic itself has caused that I think over the last, you know, 19 years, I think the society- I think society actually has changed and driven us to that. And the pandemic really highlighted how society has changed. I was in the Navy during the H1N1 pandemic and I remember thinking about that, and you know, I was a nineteen-year-old kid at the time. And I'm like, you know, I wasn't sure I didn't-I didn't have a lot of world experience so I was pretty terrified of that. I actually got H1N1 during that so there's a difference right there. I haven't gotten COVID yet and I got H1N1 during that pandemic. It was absolutely awful.

Alexis Walker 23:43

Okay, and how can you imagine your life being in a year?

Cody Brown 23:46

How can I imagine being in a year? You know, that's kind of hard to predict. Because that's going to depend on the next few months, and how the next few months go. And in all honesty, I think that's going to depend on what happens in November with the election. I think that's going to be a huge determining factor of what happens a year from now. Because a situation like this, you know, I would say for the worse has become very political. It's not been a...it's not a public health issue, but it's there's a massive political component to it and I think that's gonna be a big driving factor in how things look in a year. I would expect that COVID is going to hang around. I'm hoping that you know, the next round this next winter isn't as severe as this one. We have a vaccine that's going to change, you know, I hope we have a vaccine by then. I think there's maybe still going to be precautions in place forever. For better or for worse, I think that's what it's gonna look like any year, we're gonna have precautions. I don't foresee us wearing masks like we are now a year from now. Just because of the mentality of the American people, you know. We might tolerate this for, you know, the next few months, but I think, you know, we don't have a huge spike come November. But you know, November, December time, when the flu season is in full swing, I think you're gonna see a lot of people be like, "I'm done with this. I'm over with this." So, I don't perceive things look like they do now. But I don't necessarily see a full return to normalcy either.

Alexis Walker 25:43

Okay, what do you hope your life is like in a year?

Cody Brown 25:45

I would hope, you know, this might be a pipe dream. But I would hope, you know, things are back pretty much to how they were before, you know, the whole COVID pandemic started. I don't know if that's necessarily feasible. I think in a rural area, like I'm in, I think things are gonna probably go back to normal here. But I think, you know, you don't the cities like Omaha and stuff like that, and you get to sell more populous states. And I don't think that's going to be that way. But I, I think here, it's gonna be pretty much business as usual, a year from now.

Alexis Walker 26:27

Okay, this is the last question. Knowing what you know, now, what do you think that individuals? Sorry. Knowing what you know, now, what do you think that individuals, communities or governments need to keep in mind for the future?

Cody Brown 26:38

I think, for the future, we need to be prepared for something like this if it happens again. I think-I think this caught us on our heels. I don't think we were ready for this. But I would say that would be the biggest thing is we need to have proper precautions in place if something like this does happen again. Now, I think. [cough] Excuse me. I think proper precautions include proper equipment response and policy response, but I don't think proper response should include a massive shutdown, like it did this time. I think the massive shutdown was in response to the fact that we were unprepared for this situation and that was the only option we had because of our unpreparedness. So, I think that's a huge thing. Because I think pandemics are going to start becoming more and more common as we get a larger population. And we start living in closer proximity to livestock and things like that. Wild animals, the virus mutation and spread from animals to humans, which is where most of our viruses come from, is going to start increasing. And I think with the current climate change going on and the thawing of the permafrost in Siberia and things like that. You're reading a lot of science type stuff. I think those diseases that we haven't been exposed to as humans for thousands of years. You know, they're going to start reappearing slowly first, but I think there's definitely more pandemic potential out there. So being prepared for those situations is huge.

Alexis Walker 28:26

Okay, then. Well, thank you for your time. I'm gonna stop recording right now.