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David Hepp's Interview

This interview was conducted on behalf of the oral history program of century high school, the interviewee is David Hepp the interviewers are Ashley Real and Tida tan. The interview took place at his house on may 24 2005 at 6:30

A: What is the title of your job?

D: my job title is under sheriff for the Washington county sheriffs office

A: ok..and what exactly do you do?

D: I'm second in command at the sheriffs office, there's 500 people at the sheriffs office, it's a full service police facility that handle corrections police detectives forensics evidence civil training and the jail, and I am number two , and I am number two, I am not an elective official, I'm appointed, and I'm the second highest ranking for the facility

A: awesome. what kind of training have you been through?

D: what kind of training have I been through? I've been through a lot of training, starting from basic police, academy and training types, to intermediate to supervisor level , I've got 19 years exposure with the swat unit or tactical operations, so I've got 19 years of training specific just to that. Having going back over my career, general patrol investigations, felony crimes, drug investigations, under cover work, tactical operations, and then on to supervisions, so there's supervisory classes management classes, the FBI national academy, and that's just a very brief over view, and I mean thousands of hours.

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A: do you think the training changed through out 20 years?

D: yes

A: yea

D: obviously it has

A: in what way?

D: Well technology, if you look at the technology available today, the training is different not only in the tools that we use to be proficient in our jobs, but also um the methods to teach, to teach adults, adults learn in different matters so there's different technology used there

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A: One of the officers said technology is slowing us down, do you think?

D: I think that It may slow us down in some ways but it enables us to do a better job, for example officers have computers in there cars now, and they get all there calls for service over the computer so instead of a dispatcher telling you that you have a robbery in this intersection go deal with it gives you the print out of the call to show the type of call, the suspect information there is, a map how to get there, and any information, so it takes a little bit long to read the call, but you get so much more information, and after the fact you can type your report on the computer, and it may take you longer to type then write it out long hand, but then once you get back to the office its an automatic download into the data system and its more legible and its more clear and more details there, so it makes us much better as a profession.

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T: um do you feel like since you guys have like so much technology offered to you like different weapons, new weapons, and all that stuff, do you think its cut down on like on the police officers technique of not talking to the suspect as much, like they'll turn there weapons faster then like in the 80's or something like that?

D: no not at all, I think its just the opposite of that. Um in the 70s in 80s there were few defensive tools available to a person you know, you had a shot gun, hand gun then you had a night stick, and well now if it's a matter of using force, now we have OC, pepper spray, and we have bean bag browns, and we have tarsiers, so there's a much broader spectrum of trying to accomplish what you need to do. Think of it as painting a pictures, back in the 80s we may have had 10 colors to paint a picture and now we have 150 colors, so there are so many more options available to you

A: do you think that means its safer? Yea?

D: no I think its more dangerous now then It was then

A: you do?

D. sure. Its more dangerous because of the number of violent crimes um there's more violent crimes then there where in the 80s. Our mental health system the state was not as good as it was then so there are more and more people out in the street who have mental health issues, the drugs back in the 80s you have people who where trying marijuana and LDS and some of those other drugs, but now Meth, I mean its out

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there and its crazed, all you have to do is pick up the paper any day and you can see some person who is whacked out in Meth who is trying to hurt somebody. Gangs, in the 80s there really weren't gangs up hcre in Washington county area, maybe southern California but that wasn't the issue. Um when I went to high school in 73, it was a violent high school in Portland and we had fights and stabbings and guns, and um people being shot at from outside the school this is back in 72 73, you think there's no problems then, but I think that wasn't typical from all the high schools, but if you look at the high schools now, with the pressures placed on the kids and gangs and all the other problems there's more violence in high schools and violence in communities, people are less able to deal with it because of the mental health issues and the impact of drugs

t: can you talk more in depth about like the gangs and like especially in Hillsboro with like is there bilinguals especially like Hispanics

D: a lot times people say gangs and they say Latino gangs, and Hispanics gangs, and there white gangs but there's also Russian gangs, Asian gangs, polinician gangs, and you know to what degree. Washington county is a very safe place. If you look at crimes, rate per thousand, that's how they categorize a lot of things, they look at how many murders for every thousand people, how many robberies per thousand people. And the crime rate in Washington county has consistently gone done the last few years, property crimes are out, but in general the person violent crimes have gone down. Why has it gone down? Is hard to say. Because Washington county has a very educated population they have jobs for the unemployment pay is less and the average pay per job is higher then the average then rest of the state. So its like educated, unemployed, they have a lot of services to take care of them selves. And I think there less inclined to be involved in crimes in general.

Back to your question about gangs. I think because of that I think there are less gangs in Washington county then there are in other areas. We find that west side light rail. When that opened up it was like a flood gate of gang related problems because the west hills for some reason for the 80s and 90s it was a deterrent I guess, it was just easier to stay in Portland. But once the light rail opened up, and I don't want to suggest its just tied to the light rail. Because other things have changed also. But where finding gang people

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from Gresham out in Washington county. Our Washington county people where out in Gresham. We have had an inter agency gang enforcement team. Have you heard of that?

A & T: no

D: alright, so it was police offices who where dedicated to identify gangsters to identify what criminal activities they where involved in and help arrest and do enforcement actions against them, its not longer an enforcement team, its just a sheriffs office. City of Beaverton has had issues with there department, and man power struggles and have pulled there people off. Hillsboro has pulled there people off also, Tigard has pulled there people off also. And its not really smart because gangsters don't really stay in there city. They go back and forth all the time, and unless you have everyone talking together and working together there going to split through the cracks.

T: so do you think the media is depicting the wrong message to the public about the gang war or what not that is going to happen this summer?

D: oh there's going to be gang problems, no doubt about that, we got assaults already now. We joke that its terrorists season at the office. Because, well during the winter its cold and wet and rainy in Oregon and people are inside more and what happens when it gets nice, everyone is outside and the more your outside the more you drink, the more you do different things. And its just not the people that are out that are the problems, but there are more potential victims out there. If someone wants to victimize somebody like younger people, like yourselves. I mean if you late out at a movie and there's a whole bunch of people out there's an opportunity to break into your car, more opportunities then not. And the other thing is that during the summer when It gets hot people get irritable, we find crime increases, its usually a known person against a known person, assaults increase because husbands and wives are bickering, because its hot and there not getting along, and family beefs really go up quite a bit during the late summer months when its hot.

A: what kind of crimes do gangs typically do? Most popular?

D: I think it depends on the gang. (we had a plane crash)- takes a break to work

(we took a break for an emergency telephone call, where back on at 6:51 PM)

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A: what kind of weapons do you carry?

D: me personally or the department?

A: you personally then the department

D: I'm in uniform with most of the standard gear that guys on the roads have but I'm in the office, I'm in administrator. I deal with personal issues, budget, political, and overall commander and big incidents. I'm not like everyone else on the road so I have a hand gun. Specifically I mean we have blocks, 40 calibrator, 45 calibrator, the guys on the street they have hand guns, bean bag shot guns, and bean bag shot guns are less litithal rounds, did u ever play with a bean bag when you where a kid?

A: yes

D: well its like that but it's a little tiny 2 by 2 inch square, and it's a projectile, its like getting hit with a hard ball. They have those, they have carving rifles, for longer shots then a hand gun, up to 100 to 200 yards, they have tarsiers which shoots a darts that send an electrically pulse through somebody and its like

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an involuntary muscle spasms and they just fall down, it doesn't hurt you, but you can't control it and you fall down if they connect. They have the OC of pepper spray, you hear on TV they say it's mass but it's not mass, it's micro pulverized pepper, and it's sprayed on you and your eyes close shut and you have mucus come out of your nose and you have a hard time breathing, and we have hand guns, or not hand guns, hand cuffs, it's not really a fire arm or defensive tool but it's used to secure people. that's the general patrol force, on the squat team we have a lot more than that. Different kinds of rifles, to different kinds of munitions, chemical agents, there's a broad spectrum of less lethal munitions from riot control type things. that's about it.

A&T: ok

D: I think

A: how do you feel about the budget?

D: how do I feel about our budget? See all the budgets are different. There are 13 different law enforcement agencies in Washington county. 13. Alright. So we are just the sheriff's office, and the sheriff's office has ultimate authority over the entire county, so that's over 700 square miles almost 500,000 people. Now the cities, they have authority with the -----, and they usually are the first responders of the ----- and then we back them up or to take care of the unincorporated areas. So out of a population of 500,000 what do you think the population is for the unincorporated area, how many people live in outside cities.

T: a 1/4 of them?

D: a 1/4, that's close, it's little over 200,000 so it's less than half. Our budget is pretty good, last November we had a public safety levy that failed which is about 20% of our budget. And it helps to operate the district attorneys office, the juvenile department, community corrections, the jail, our patrol divisions, our forensics, and our detective divisions. So we're going to go back out before the voters in November of 06 to see if they want to support it, if not we're going to lay out a couple hundred people in the county, which means jail beds will close. Uhh that's about 65 jail beds will close, which isn't good, it's not good for the community, it's a safe community now, and if there's people that need to be in jail there not gonna be in jail, there gonna be out on the street and most likely doing the crimes that put them in there in the first place

T: but overall has the tax payers been pretty giving? Since like the 80s, you know, there supporting the officers and doing their job?

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D: for the sheriff's office yes, we have never, well I take that back, in the early 70s or a couple of times they were hesitant, but since the 80s every single time we went out and asked the voters for money to support law enforcement and they've given it to us since this last year

T: why do you think they didn't support it this time?

D: because it's confusing, and I don't think we did a well enough job in educating them. And it's confusing because we the sheriff's office is funded by the Washington county general fund tax, the local option public safety tax, if you live in urban unincorporated area you'd pay enhanced sheriff patrol taxes, there are some that are permitted tax rate and some that are a temporary tax rate. So when you look at your tax bill it looks like your pay taxes four times for the same service but it's not. It's not proportional, you pay a part of the taxes through one means, a part through another, and another. So it's confusing.

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T: that's pretty much the only thing

D: that's what we believe

A: back to crimes, what kind of crimes do you see on a typically day?

D: what kind of crimes do I see on a typically day, I don't see very many crimes on a typically day.

A: yea you don't see..

D: accidents, traffic related crimes, those are a common occurrence, burgurlys, property crimes, are a common occurrence, and they have been since the 80s. Thefts, thefts from vehicles. During the winter months people go out and start there car up to warm it up and they leave it unlocked, sp people jump in there cars and steal there cars. We see those. So id say that Those are pretty close to what's occurring all along. Big changes, in the last maybe 5 years, are Meth related crimes, identity theft, property crimes that relate to identity thefts, to burglars that break in your car to get money to go buy more Meth. Shop lifting, forgery. Forgery has gone through the roof. We have a multi agency fraud and identity theft team, it started January of 05, and until 2 months ago we said that every single crime they investigated was Meth related. Every single crime. And we've had a couple that were, that were no evidence of Meth so we cant say that anymore. But still its incredible, Meth is the epidemic that's attacking our community now, if we could get rid of all of the Meth and all of the Meth users who are addicting to Meth, today, it would be like where in heaven because crime would go down so much

A: do you think its more adults or teens that are using it?

D: that's one thing about Meth, is that it touches all social classes, it touches all ethnic backgrounds. Its not like heroine. Back in the 80s, heroine over on the east coast they had white heroine, Asia china white heroine. On the west coast they smoke tar heroine. Its just based on where it came from, tar heroine came from Latin America and Mexico, and Asian heroine came from Asia, and process through Asia on the poppy plant. Those uhhh I think dependent on the city, and more to a particular area or social class. Or to a particular minority or ethnic background. But Meth is everywhere, you hear of politicians, there kids, there adult kids are tied up on it. You may have someone else whose not a politician whose a blue worker whose involved with it, and there involved with it, there parents are involved with it. I think where finding more kids, young kids, young teenagers who are involve with it, who have grown up with it. There was a city council meeting in Tualatin, just a couple weeks ago, and it was reported that any 7th grader could go to this jr high and buy Meth if they wanted to. It was being sold at the 7th grade level. Easily. One thing about Meth addicts. They don't live very long. Because you age and your body falls apart, and you don't see very many 50, 60 year old Meth addicts because there dead.

T: that's an eye opener right there

A: I know

T: because when I think about it, at century, maybe where just blind and don't pay attention to it

D: ecstasy, I mean there's a lot of drugs out there

A: oh yea

T: probably

D: we did an educational video tape and um we interviewed two people from southridge in Beaverton who where addicted and I mean there's a lot of people in the school who are doing it, you guys are good kids. Keep it that way

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T: kinda makes you feel a little bit stupid, but that's ok right. Do you think the dare program has helped?

D: we have a dare program and we've had a dare program for a lot of years and based on what we hear from the parents and kids yes it has helped. We've done slam to, have you seen the skid car accidents training for alcohol related deaths about drugs.

A: I don't think so

D: we've done something at century, Alan zogg a lieutenant with Hillsboro PD has come and talked

A: we do something before prom or something and they talk about, I don't know

D: we haven't done century for a couple of years

A: probably why, probably weren't there

D: yes I think it has an impact, how much of an impact is hard to measure

T: right

D: not all of the 13 agencies do, I think there's only 2 or 3 left

David Hepp

T: maybe DARE slows down the process for kids to test with drugs, maybe, or what do you think?

D: there's physiological evidence to show that as people grow old, when your in your teens parts of your brain and I probably not going to say it exactly the way it is, but you don't develop enough, and if you start using or abusing substances that your likelihood of becoming addicted to them is much higher under 20 21 then it is over 20 21. then some of the others. Its something to do with you brain and how its operates. And development of it. that's one of the reason I learned just a couple years ago why they said 21 is the age you can start drinking. Because your brain matured to a certain level. You probably have teachers that can explain it a lot better then I can.

T: with the budget cuts in schools and when they cut the amount of days kids where in schools do you think that had a huge affect in crimes because kids didn't have as much to do and there's not as much recreational things around?

D: yea, I think it would, I mean I don't know how high of an increase that would be. If its unscheduled snow day or something we do see that there is more activities going on because there's more kids out there. I mean if you're a bad kid and you have to be in school that's 8 hrs your not doing crime or thinking about doing crime. Or as if you where on the street or home or bored its an opportunity.

A: would you change anything with the law enforcement? Do you think there doing good?

D: yes, I think there doing good. My opinion is that sometimes there's to much redundancy in the agencies, and they don't always talk and work together. I said there's 13 police agencies in the county, I don't believe there needs to be 13 agencies in the county. There are some small cities that have like one officers so they are there during the day for 8 hrs, 5 days a week, not 7 days. And they deal with what's going on. Do they have the tools for what they need? Probably not. Because of the funding that's available to them. Do they have the training that some of the agencies get. I know that don't get the training because when something bad happens they cant deal with it. Other agencies there's an agency to the west of us that has 12 people

working there, the chief, they have the commander, and 3 or 4 sergeants. Lets say they have four. that's 6 supervisors for 6 people, patrol officers that go and work the streets. that's a supervisors subordinate ratio for one to one, well at the sheriffs office we have one sergeant for ten people. So what's that mean?

T: money going to waste kinda

D: it is. Because you have to pay the supervisors more money then you pay the other people. And if you have fewer supervisors maybe they could put 2 more patrol men out on the street to deal with the crimes and the traffic and the things that are going on. And you can look at that from an accounting perspective, on a much larger scale. Instead of 12 13 agencies you have 4. Think of what you could do with the economy of the scale, for training and hiring and background. We have a full time background investigations unit because where processing 500 employees , always processing so many people through. They do them well and they do them quickly because they know what there doing. Another agencies that may hire someone once every one or two years, how well are they doing and how long does it take them. Its obvious I like my department though. Its obvious I like my department though.

T: that's ok, oh the measure 11, is that the one with the minimum mandatory sentence, has there been an increase or a decrease in teens committing crime? What do you think

D: I cant answer that, because I couldn't say whether teens are committing more or less crimes because of measure 11. Since measure 11 went into affect a lot of things have changed as well. The Meth epidemic, so is there more crimes because of measure 11 or because of Meth. There was a boost homicide in Cornelius, a 17 old forest grove high school boy who was addicted to Meth breaks into the house murders the father, brutal attacks the son who was under 7, left him for death. He goings to go to prison for the rest of his life. But measure 11 has been into affect for a long time, he did that but didn't have no thought of measure 11, just that the drugs where over powering him. He was going to steal something to buy more drugs. So I don't know, I don't know if its had much of an impact or not

-pause

D. How long have I worked at the department

A: sure

D: you didn't ask that, 28 years this summer

A: did I ask you why ?

David Hepp

D: when I was in high school I had an uncle that was a cop and I didn't really interact with him very much and I went to college and my first yr I just took general studies and then the last quarter I took one police related class, and I thought that's interesting, I really liked that. I kinda of thought always public service kind of things, then the next year I took more classes and more classes and the more I took the more it fascinated me. It seem to be the right thing for me to go out and help people. Its not boring, its like you're a banker or accountant and you crunch numbers all day, you know exactly what your going to do when you go to work everyday. I can go to work and wonder what today is going to bring me. No day is the same. You may have burgerlrs, you may have family deeds. But everyday is different, its fun, its exciting. And if you get a little boredom with your job, I didn't know this then, but I know it now, if you get a little boredom with your job, "alright ive been working patrol for 3-4 years, I want to go do traffic patrol or I want to do canine, or I want to go work the drug team, or the swat team. Or riot team. There's so many options out therc so its real easy to make a small step, still making a small step. still doing basically the same thing. Buts its like its all brand new and very exciting. Its very satisfying. it's a great profession, I

think anyone who cares about people should consider doing it, men women, anyone. Doesn't mater. There's a lot of woman in the department.

A: with the drug team do you guys have a lot of under cover cops and stuff?

D: everybody was. Its multiple purpose. You would do some things if you worked a case and if you need to be undercover then you would do it. Its not like superico, have you ever heard of superico?

A: no

D: alright, that's a 70s to 80s person about a person that went deep under cover for months and months and months. When your undercover its , your planning a role for a period of time, its like id see you guys and you'd take me to your drug dealer to buy drugs and id come back and process it and we might do that a couple of times before we arrested you and your drug dealer. But that's undercover

T: do you feel like we didn't cover something that you wanted to talk about?

D: well comparing 80s to today we talked about some of the fire arm equipment. When I started in 77 ballistic vest where optional. Prior to that. So by the 80s it was pretty much mandatory everywhere. But it wasn't to much before that that police officers didn't wear basaltic vest, now, you cant catch anyone not having one, its just not safe. The cars, you know, we talked about computers, in the car at the time we had a radio with two channels, now I think I have on my portable radio there's about 56 channels. So its not only talking to the sheriffs office, I can talk to Canby TV, I can talk to just about anybody if there's a critical incident, I can talk to the fire department now. In the jail, I think we do much more in the way of programs to try and help people, to try and break that cycle. Back in the early 80s you'd put people in and they'd go to jail, go through there treatment and they'd be done. We have a GED program in our jail and if your in custody for more then 90 days your eligible to participate with it, and you go to class everyday inside the jail and its sponsored through Hillsboro school district and you can work towards obtaining your GED. So programs, trying to help people break that cycle. I think that's there now and wasn't there in the 80's. that's about it I guess. You guys where very good interviewers

T &A: thanks!

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