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INTERACTION WITH MR. ZACKERY KOWALSKE



Ms. Prathiksha RS
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We are extremely honoured to have had the opportunity to interview Mr. Zackery Kowalske, who is currently employed as a Detective with the Roswell Police Department's Crime Scene Investigations Unit. Mr. Kowalske has a Master's degree in science with a Forensic Science concentration. His study is based on bloodstain pattern analysis, and he is currently pursuing a Doctorate in forensic science. His areas of expertise are bloodstain pattern analysis and shooting incident reconstruction.

Mr. Kowalske has also been a guest lecturer in the international webinar on “Future of Crime Scene Investigations”, conducted by the Unit of Forensic Science in Kristu Jayanti College, Autonomous. This interaction helped us gain more insight into the discipline of bloodstain pattern analysis and crime scene reconstruction.

1. What was the first-ever case you’ve handled?

I started as a jail officer when I was twenty years old and was really interested in the field of forensics even at that time. So my first case would probably be an investigation of the suicide of a jail inmate.

2. What is the hardest blood spatter pattern you’ve analyzed? What is the hardest blood pattern to analyze in general?

The hardest spatter pattern I’ve worked on was a secondary splash pattern found on the sole of the victim’s feet, who had been executed, and her body had been positioned. I worked on it for a month, going through various body positions consistent with the different factors and components of the scene. The hardest spatter patterns to analyze are nondescript patterns where there aren’t enough characteristics to classify them.

3. What are the routine steps followed during crime scene reconstruction?

The basic steps would be:

- *Documentation (photography, videography, or laser scanning)*
- *Collecting samples*
- *Analysis/synthesis of data*

4. How do you keep your mental health in check?

This topic is very close to me because, being a sworn detective, we come across a lot of cases such as child homicides and violent deaths, and I’ve personally been involved in a shooting as well. So there is a lot of trauma involved. If you don’t know how to process the way it impacts

you, then it can lead to a self-destructive path. I had been there, and eventually, I could comprehend how it had been affecting me so I could move forward, but that is not everyone. There has been an exponential rise in the rate of suicide of law enforcement personnel, so I believe it's important to introduce mental health awareness in training and universities to prepare new investigators.

5. Has there been any case where the modus operandi was something you had never seen before?

A double homicide of two teenagers I worked on a few years ago was brutal. There were acts that took place, which I could tell based on the blood patterns on the victims, which was something I had never encountered before.

6. What is the evidential importance of blood pattern in a case?

In most reconstructions of shootings, needing to know how exactly the shooting happened helps to understand if it was self-defence or not. And therefore, from a forensic standpoint, to provide information through blood pattern analysis to either refute or include a suspect's testimony is important. In cases where finding the area of origin is crucial, it can be shown irrefutably with physics and math how the conclusion was arrived upon.

7. Have there been any changes in the modus operandi of crimes during the pandemic?

One of the most difficult aspects, as a general law enforcement officer, is the fact that everyone wears a mask. It makes it difficult to identify people in video surveillance. So that is the biggest impact from an investigator's point of view.

8. How do you manage your work-life balance?

It is constantly hectic. I am currently working on my PhD as well. So, it feels like I'm juggling three chainsaws on fire. It helps me when I

add all my tasks and schedules in Outlook so that I can have a clear view of what my day consists of. I also constantly send myself emails when I think of ideas or get reminded of tasks to do so they can jog my memory when I get to the office the next day.

9. What are the recent developments in crime scene reconstruction?

Crime scene reconstruction has come a long way. If I had to pick one development that we should focus on and would've had the largest impact on the discipline is the implementation of Artificial Intelligence. AI is a multifaceted tool that can be used in all aspects of crime scene reconstruction, which would process all the different variables and arrive at the most probable scenario that occurred.

Myth - If a computer is found off at a crime scene, it should be switched on to analyze.

Fact - Digital evidence should always be left in the condition that they are found in, and if found in ON, RAM should be collected, and the power supply should be unplugged.