

Episode 10: Joey prevented a kidnapping

What I'm about to tell you is based on a criminal complaint and investigation. All suspects are presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

This happened in Waldo, Wisconsin. Thursday, September 27, 2018. Just after lunchtime, around 1 pm. Dean Hoffman entered the home of his former girlfriend, whose name I'm not going to mention. He was not invited in; he came in without permission. She told him to leave, and she started to call the police. He stopped her from calling, grabbed her by the waist, and pushed her backwards into the stairs that led to the second floor. He pulled her hair, ripped her shirt, and dragged her up the stairs. He punched her, causing a bloody nose and a black eye.

He locked them both in the bathroom for about a half hour while she tended to her bloody nose. Then he tied her up, and kept her from leaving her own house for the next several hours. He even used HER phone to text her children, who lived nearby, telling them that she was sick and not to visit for a few days.

Then he made a mistake. He ordered a pizza from Dominos.

The delivery driver that brought the pizza was Joey Grundl. While the suspect was checking the pizza, Joey was able to make eye contact with the victim, and she communicated with him silently that she needed help. And because Joey was alert and willing to help, the story has a happy ending. The woman is safe, and Dean Hoffman is behind bars.

Pretty exciting night for a guy who expected to just bring some food and collect some money. Like most people who are in some kind of situation like this, he said he doesn't consider himself a hero. But he is.

And check this out – not long after this happened, Joey was at a Taylor Swift concert and she actually recognized him from when she saw this story on the news, because on the news story he was wearing some Taylor Swift merch. He was invited backstage after the concert and got to meet her. That story is here:

<https://www.wisn.com/article/taylor-swift-superfan-who-saved-kidnapped-woman-gets-meeting-with-singer/23630467>

If you'd like to contact Joey and congratulate him on his quick thinking, I'll have his email address in the show notes for this episode, at WhatWasThatLike.com/10, because this is episode 10.

And if you want to get some really cool content on a regular basis, including a photo of Joey when he met Taylor Swift, follow me on Instagram, [@whatwasthatlike](https://www.instagram.com/whatwasthatlike).

And here's my conversation with Joey.

Scott

Have you ever made national news just by delivering a pizza before?

Joey

Everything that happened over the last few weeks or so was all new to me. I used to just show up, make the delivery, go home, and nothing big happens.

Scott

So that was kind of weird, huh?

Joey

Yeah, absolutely.

Scott

How long have you been working for Domino's?

Joey

Over two years. August would be, like, my two-year anniversary mark there or whatever.

Scott

Before this happened, have you ever delivered pizza to that house before?

Joey

I had a lot of deliveries, so maybe there was a lapse in my memory. Both people who were there and the house were unfamiliar to me, so I don't think I've been there before.

Scott

When you got there to deliver the pizza, did you ring the doorbell? Did you have any kind of weird sense or feeling about it - like, maybe something was not quite right or anything like that?

Joey

Everything seemed normal up until the point where I actually got to the door and the couple answered the door. It was just a normal delivery - people just wanted some food at night. I mean, it's late and people need to eat. So, that was the only thing in my mind at that point.

Scott

Let's talk about what actually happened. Obviously, somebody from that house called in and ordered a pizza. When you went up to the door, who answered the door?

Joey

The person who answered the door was her ex-boyfriend. At that time, I didn't know that. I just assumed it was her current boyfriend or husband or whatever. He was the one who answered the door, he seemed super friendly. He was super excited, like, "Oh, my food's here!"

Scott

He's the one with the long gray hair and beard and his name is Dean Hoffman. Did you go inside at all?

Joey

No, I never left, like, the front step porch area.

Scott

Alright. Tell us what exactly happened once he answered the door. How did it play out?

Joey

So, I gave him the food. Then, at one point, he just kind of grabbed the box and open it up just to make sure the toppings were right. Then, he asked the woman he was with, "Is this what you ordered?" She's like, "Yeah, that's what I ordered." I just happened to look up at her while he was, kind of, looking down at the pizza. That's when I noticed that she had a black eye on her left eye. She mildly pointed it to me and mouthed, "Help me" She didn't actually ask for help - she just wanted me to see that she needed help without vocally saying it so that he couldn't hear it. Then, a few seconds went by. I kind of froze at first because that was something so unexpected. I'm like, "Wait, did I just see that?" Then, shortly after, she mouthed to me again, "Call the police." So after that happened, he disappeared for a few seconds, went to get some money, and came back to give me the money. I said, "Thank you. Have a good night." At that point, as I was walking to my car and driving back to the store, I dialed 911.

Scott

When you saw her mouth that she needed help, were you deliberately thinking in your head, "Okay, I got to keep a straight face, I got to act normal."? What were you thinking then?

Joey

I was trying to keep calm and make everything seem normal because, obviously, she was in a dangerous situation. If he finds out that I know something's going on, things would get so much worse.

Scott

So, you just went back to your car and immediately dial 911...

911 Operator

Tell me exactly what happened.

Joey

So I'm a delivery driver for Domino's. The restaurant I work for is in Plymouth. I had a delivery and there was a middle-aged couple. It looked like the woman clearly had a black eye. She pointed to it and, I swear, she mouthed "Help me." As I was leaving, I swear she also said, "Call the police."

911 Operator

All right. How long ago did you leave there?

Joey

It's been, like, four minutes. I'm on my way back to the store.

911 Operator

Did you see any other person in there besides the female?

Joey

It was her and, I'm assuming, her husband or whatever. He is the one that paid for the pizza. She was standing behind him. That's when I saw her mouth those things to me. I don't know if there's anybody there or not.

911 Operator

What's your name?

Joey

Joey Grundl.

911 Operator

Alright, we've got some deputies on the way.

Joey

Okay, thank you so much.

911 Operator

You're welcome! Thank you!

Scott

So, you drove away and called while you were driving?

Joey

Correct.

Scott

Okay. How did you find out what had happened afterward?

Joey

The next day, the officer - I think he was the officer who went to the house that night - showed up to my door and wanted, like, a written statement. He's like, "This was a serious hostage situation. He had tied her up and all that stuff." He didn't share too much detail partly because I don't think he legally could. He was like, "Yeah, it was a dangerous situation for her. There's a good chance that she was not going to make it alive that night." He didn't think that the man had any intention of letting her live through that night.

Scott

Wow. That is so scary. From the news reports that I read - of course, this is just alleged, there hasn't been any conviction yet - Hoffman broke into the house, the ex-girlfriend tried to call the police, he took her phone, and began beating and tying her up with a power cord. She ended up with a black eye and a bloody nose. He tied her up on the bed and shoved a towel in her mouth. He even remarked that he had a gun in his car and he should just shoot himself and her. At that point, he faces charges of kidnapping, false imprisonment, strangulation, suffocation, felony, intimidation of a victim, and burglary of a building. The lady was saying that she truly believed that he was going to kill her that night. How do you feel knowing that you were just face-to-face with someone who may have committed all those crimes?

Joey

It's just crazy to think about that. As a delivery person, you couldn't know what's going on. You would always just, maybe, assume that everyone's just a normal person when they were getting their food. I don't know much about these people other than their faces. There are never too many interactions - just a "Thank you. Hello. Goodbye. Etc." So, it's just crazy to think that you never really know what are these people's intentions or how they are.

Scott

Or what's going on behind that door. After this has happened, have you been in touch with that woman at all?

Joey

I have not. The only real interaction I had was with her son. He came to the store and said, "I just want to thank you personally because you saved my mom's life. I just want to thank you for doing that." That's the only connection I had with her family. I just wanted to, maybe, kind of, keep my distance because I don't know if she was ready to talk. If she ever was, I'm always open to meeting her personally - but I'll leave that up to her.

Scott

I think that's a good idea. I mean, seriously, you have saved her life that night. You know that, right?

Joey

Yeah, I do know that. I've heard that so many times, but I try not to think of myself as a hero. I think anyone else in such a similar situation - if they've noticed - would have, at least, dialed 911. But, I guess, I don't know if anybody else would have.

Scott

Yeah, it's a good thing that they had you that night instead of somebody else. Many people went through their whole life facing their phone and not really being aware of stuff that's going on. It was good that you just happen to notice that this person needs some help. Are you kind of a celebrity at your Domino's store now?

Joey

A little bit. I mean, it kind of died down a little bit until everything's kind of back to normal. For the first few weeks, it was just all about, "Hey, it's the famous guy or hero or whatever." I heard that a lot for a few weeks from my co-workers.

Scott

When you're delivering a pizza now, did you feel any differently when you approach a house - like, "Hmm, I wonder what's going on in this one."?

Joey

I just keep my eyes open a little more just to be aware. Even with that in mind, I'll probably never have something like this happen again because this was a rare instance. I mean, I'll always keep my eyes open for anything suspicious.

Scott

Yeah, you never know. You got to be ready for anything. Well, it's a great story. We appreciate you sharing it with us. Hopefully, we'll see a follow-up, perhaps, to find out what happens with this guy. It sounded like you saved this lady from a pretty scary situation.

Joey

Yeah. I guess, he'll be away for a while. At least, that's what my hope is.

Scott

It sounded like it. We'll see how it turns out. Joey, thanks again for sharing your story!

Joey

Thanks for having me. Great to tell it!

Scott

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