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## ANXIETY. Violence & Mental Illness UNUSUAL.





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MOMENT OF SILENCE



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# BLUE

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So, what is a magazine? Coming from the Arabic word *makhzan*, meaning 'storehouse,' the term magazine was originally used to describe books, as they were considered to be storehouses of knowledge. Eventually, the word came to refer to published periodicals, like the storehouse of knowledge that is the BLUE Magazine!

The BLUE Magazine writers, new and existing alike, are some of the most talented in sharing wisdom and knowledge with our readers. Honing our writing skills, our contributors are masters of concise thought-sharing while avoiding any double meanings or mistaken interpretations.

Please welcome some new writers... Marty Katz, Stan Popovich, and renowned attorney Lance LoRusso to our BLUE Magazine family. When your badge is wrongfully threatened, Lance is a go-to expert for his knowledge and expertise in your defense. His inaugural article for us appears in this edition of the magazine.

We are focusing attention in this issue on violence prevention and mental illness through our cover story *CRISIS: Violence and Mental Illness* as we seek to unravel the complex connection. Companion articles by Joe Pangaro, *Understanding the Kill List* brings attention to an important red flag for Law Enforcement and others. Leonard Sipes explores *Can The Justice System Help Violent People With Mental Health Issues?* Ken Dye writes *Making the Case FOR Excited Delirium*. All are must read articles along with many other articles of interest and benefit.

Sadly, we have lost one of our own. BLUE Magazine mourns the loss of Baltimore City Police Major Wesley Wise (Ret.) who passed away earlier this year. In addition to being a prolific writer, after his service to Baltimore he became a computer system trainer for the Kauai, Hawaii, Police Department. His reach and influence was far and wide. He is missed by his family, friends and all of us here at the BLUE Magazine. Be sure to read our tribute to him in this issue.

As always, reach out to us, share your thoughts and continue to give us your wisdom. We are here for you as we collectively navigate the often tough world around us together.

Joel E. Gordon, Managing Editor

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# 10-13

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# IN LIFE AS IN POLITICS, *Timing is Everything*

By Sheriff David Clarke (Ret.)

**A**t the start of the new school year right after Labor Day I wrote a column referencing how many large school districts across America were reversing their emotionally based policy of canceling contracts with police agencies to place officers into public schools. This reversal is based on an increase of disorder incidents some of which rose to the level of criminal behavior such as assaults against both students and teachers.

All of this started as a result of the war on police that included a defund police movement after the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis. It was a politically motivated decision and was led by anti-cop groups like Black Lives Matter and other leftist groups advocating for some inane idea of racial, gender and economic justice. These are the last people you want driving public policy decisions. Floyd's death had nothing to do with school safety. The decision had everything to do with race politics based on a misapplication of statistics. The Milwaukee, Wisconsin public school system was one of many large urban school districts that did a "me-too" by making the ill-fated decision in 2020 to cancel police in schools. The claim was that black, Latino and Native American students were disproportionately referred to law enforcement that could lead to arrest and criminal charges or citations. Let's forget about the reality that

this behavior contributed to a threat to the personal safety of students and teachers or that it disrupted the learning environment. It was more important to engage in identity politics than protecting teachers and students in the classroom.

In a study by the Center for Public Integrity, the data revealed that after canceling the police contract, Milwaukee high schools called police more than 200 times. Leaders suggested that the district reverse course and bring officers back to patrol campuses. In Pamona, California, a school shooting near a school prompted the district to bring back school resource officers four months after canceling the contract. The Denver school system increased armed security, and in Des Moines, Iowa parents pleaded with school board members to bring back police.

That brings me to the point I made about timing in life and politics in the title of this column. There is enough of a sample pool of data to make some determinations about the effect of removing law enforcement officers from large urban public schools across America. The fact that more and more school districts are moving back to placing armed school resources back into schools should be enough to convince other school boards to move in the same direction. But then there is Chicago.



**STRAIGHT *TALK!***  
WITH **DAVID CLARKE**  
AMERICA'S SHERIFF



---

**“A loss of life is horrific under all circumstances,  
but it is especially harsh when our young people  
are targeted.”**

Recently the mayor of the city of Chicago made the decision cancel the Chicago Public School District contract with the Chicago police department. He was criticized for this decision, yet he stood by it saying, “there is an intergovernmental agreement between Chicago Public Schools and the Chicago Police Department. To end that agreement, there’s no qualms from me there.” The news stories and data that other school districts are moving back to placing police in school must be traveling by carrier pigeon in the Windy City. I would think that Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson did at least some due diligence before embarking down this path but then again it must have felt better

Chicago voted her out in the primary last spring. Johnson headed into the general election against an opponent who vowed to make public safety his number one priority. Voters choose the woke candidate Brandon Johnson.

Just one day after Mayor Johnson made the decision to cancel the contract to keep police in schools, the unimaginable happened. Three Chicago students were shot leaving one of them dead and one critically injured in a targeted school shooting. What followed was the typical empty rhetoric uttered by mindless politicians. Johnson stated, “A loss of life is horrific under all circumstances, but it is especially harsh when our young people are targeted. We do everything in our power to keep our children safe. So this hurt and I know our city is hurting.”

How can Brandon Johnson say this with a straight face just one day after callously saying that he, “had no qualms from me” with his decision to remove cops from schools? For him to make the statement that all of Chicago is hurting is appalling. The arrogance of this is breathtaking. That he lacked understanding of the moment demonstrates to me that he lacks the empathy required to be in a position of leadership. He might have gained some goodwill by announcing that he will reconsider his decision to remove police officers from Chicago public schools. That however would require political skills that Mayor Johnson appears not to possess.

We always hear from school officials and politicians when it comes to school safety that we must do everything we can to secure the personal safety of the kids. Once again however when push comes to shove, politics wins out. 🌐



to side with the anti-cop cabal. Johnson was elected less than a year ago. He replaced another Chicago police hating mayor Lori Lightfoot. This identity politics choice was a disaster as crime and violence rose through the roof under her reign. Chicago voters got a reprieve as residents of

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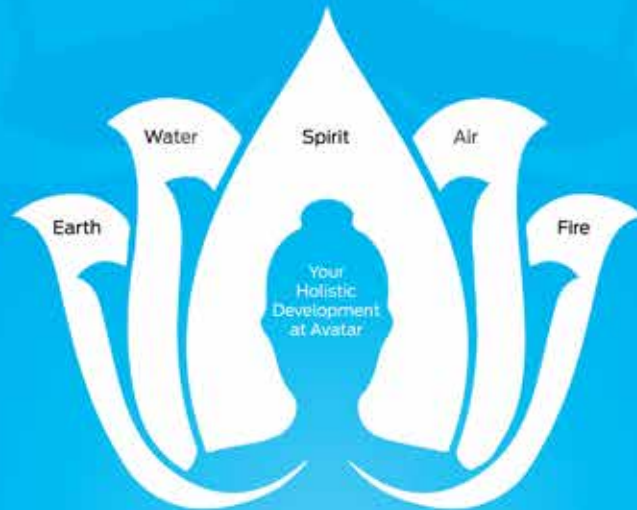
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# Making the Case for Excited Delirium

By Ken Dye

**E**xcited delirium, as a medical diagnosis has been banned in California. Can other states and/or the American Medical Association and the Department of Health and Human Services be far behind in striking EX as a reason for an in-custody death?

You get a call. A person is standing on top of a car screaming at passersby. He has a machete and swings it violently. You and several other cars are at the scene. What to do?

The onlookers want the police officers on scene to “Do something.”

The weirded-out subject is in no mood to listen to calm and reasoned conversation. De-escalation techniques fail... miserably.

As officers attempt to gain some kind of communication, the person jumps off the car, and in the process of doing so loses his machete.

He is now chasing after pedestrians...the police officers, having already called for an ambulance, must move.

And they do. The officers “swarm” the suspect.

They are met with an aggressive and violently resisting subject. The officers TASER the person and use chemical agents to gain control. Nothing seems to work.

The subject has superhuman strength and is impervious to pain.

The officers finally get control of the person and he’s rushed to a trauma hospital.

While at the hospital a paramedic tells the attending physician the patient has had Ketamine injected. The medical professional is trained on when, how and the quantity of the drug to

administer. He also tells the attending physician the in-custody person’s temperature is 115 degrees and his blood pressure is 200/160. The classic telltale signs of out-of-control drug abuse.

The subject admitted to use of cocaine, PCP and meth. After the admission, the patient calms down for a short time where he calmly speaks about the quantity of drugs taken during the last 24 hours.

The patient then dies. He dies from what? It’s not “Excited Delirium”... then just what the hell is it?

Pathologists are reluctant to use EX as a cause of death. OK, how about self-induced drug intoxication that overwhelmed the drug abuser?

Often, police officers are the faux bad guys. Medical, political officials and chiefs can be the biggest critics when it comes to an in-custody death.

The fact is that people die in police custody. Usually from excessive drug use that causes the body to shut down. Police officers desire to be able and efficient. If the EX diagnosis is no longer valid, those that dispute the diagnosis better come up with a plan to deal with these out-of-control subjects... and quit using law enforcement as the whipping boy for these deaths. 🌐

*Ken Dye is the author of 5 books about crime, cops and bad guys in the St. Louis area. He Blogs under “Cops Perspective” and has over 20,000 followers. Ken served with the St. Louis County Police Department for 13 years and finished his LE career with the Illinois Criminal Justice Authority as the administrator for the statewide MEG’s and Narcotics Task Forces.*



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# CAN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM HELP VIOLENT PEOPLE *with Mental Health Issues?*

By Leonard Adam Sipes, Jr.

**T**his article addresses programs designed to assist offenders with serious mental health problems, from laws designed to stem violence or mass shootings to the rehabilitation of criminal offenders.

No one is questioning the efficacy of mental health treatment for the general public. The challenge is criminals with a history of violence or people in the community threatening violence or a mass shooting.

When I was the director of public information for the Maryland Department of Public Safety (a combined law enforcement and corrections agency), I was asked by the media why the state didn't do more to "rehabilitate" prison inmates or those on parole and probation. As I was new in the position, I put that question to the four commissioners in charge of our correctional operations.

"Leonard, most offenders come from abusive family backgrounds with massive substance use and serious mental illness. Nothing short of a substantial intervention will get them to mental competency and sobriety."

So I asked what was standing in the way of massive interventions. Wouldn't it make sense to assist them? As one stated, "There isn't enough money because there's little proof that programs work, especially for those seriously afflicted who have violent backgrounds."

Their replies come to mind when I read a recent article from the New York Times about Kendra's Law and treating violent people in the community which has been cited as a national model for involuntary treatment programs. The investigation found that people under Kendra's Law orders "have been accused of committing

more than 380 subway shovings, beatings, stabbings and other violent acts in the past five years alone, more than a third of which took place in New York City. In addition, more than 90 people have killed themselves while subject to Kendra's Law orders in the past decade. Eighty-five percent of the attempts to use Kendra's Law to hospitalize people against their will in New York City did not result in hospital admissions." Critics of Kendra's Law acknowledge that there's insufficient money for correctional treatment.

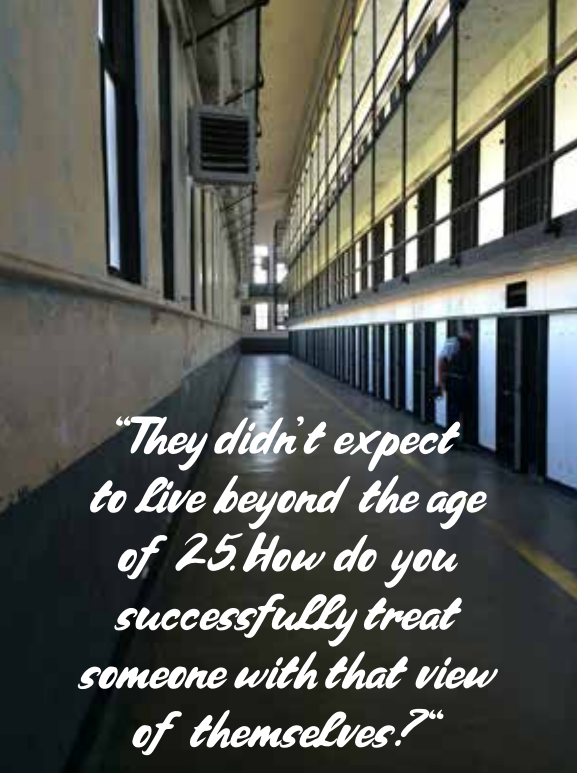


There's not a prison warden in the country who's against treatment programs while understanding that mental health is the core of rehabilitation efforts. It doesn't matter whether it's getting a GED or bricklaying or preparing for life on the outside, having a healthy relationship with yourself or others is vital.

Programs for inmates create stable environments within correctional facilities. Inmates who are meaningfully engaged in programs behave better. Programs create safer and saner environments for correctional staff and when you realize that most inmates have current or past convictions for crimes of violence, keeping prisons safe becomes primary goals.

Per the Bureau of Justice Statistics, 78 percent of inmates had previous incarcerations. Forty-two percent had 5-10 or more incarcerations. 62 percent were violent. 66 percent of male inmates are serving time for violent crimes. If one looks at criminal histories, the percentage of those in prison for crimes of violence easily reaches 70-80 percent.

The simple answer for the lack of money for correctional treatment is, quite simply, that they have



*“They didn’t expect to live beyond the age of 25. How do you successfully treat someone with that view of themselves?”*

questionable track records of success.

There’s not a chief of police who disagrees with mental health interventions for people with potential violence issues, but they understand that there are endless complexities to getting a person into treatment, keeping them there and making sure that they get the right treatment.

Even when states do the right thing regarding mental health programs for potentially violent people in the community, counties may not comply because of a lack of funding.

I sat with one of our correctional commissioners in a facility housing hundreds of inmates charged with murder or serious violent crimes. We were gaining intelligence for a governor’s crime summit. It was just he and I. The inmates spoke openly.

We were told that violence was a necessary component in their lives. They said that being scary-violent and the willingness to use violence was in their best interest. It kept them and their family and possessions safe. “You don’t get it, Mr. Sipes, being violent is a good thing.”

When we asked questions about their backgrounds, a reputation for mental illness was a plus. If you’re known as unpredictable and willing to use violence, people keep their distance. They are careful about what they say or do regarding you. The

inmates we spoke to believe that the crazier, the better.

They describe being raised by absent or uncaring parents who engaged in abuse or neglect, that their neighborhoods were dangerous, and that substance abuse and gangs were logical outcomes that offered protection.

In short, they made dysfunction something they willingly embraced. They didn’t expect to live beyond the age of 25. How do you successfully treat someone with that view of themselves?

So are most correctional or community programs doomed to failure? Whether it’s “assisting” mentally ill people in the community or the correctional system, the interventions need dramatically more funding. We impose Red Flag (firearm confiscation) laws that cops don’t have the person power to enforce (thousands of police officers have left the job). We pile on responsibilities (i.e., school security, mass shooting prevention, keeping communities safe) when cities are stating that they have lost hundreds of cops.

I’m guessing that most in the criminal rehabilitation field would insist that this finding applies to their programs as well, which is why the vast majority of offenders are rearrested or incarcerated upon release.

The collective literature states that programs for offenders either do not work or do not work well. Yet, daily, I read about programs that are providing wonderful results.

States have different interpretations of released inmate recidivism. Some states are merely changing the rules of bad or criminal behavior that ensure that their recidivism rates decrease.

Most offenders have mental health backgrounds.

In the final analysis, we might be able to save the government billions of dollars and cut violence considerably “if” the interventions were suc-

cessful. With such a massive payoff, why are governments so reluctant to properly fund interventions?

It’s because violent criminal offenders can be extremely difficult to assist. Many in parole and probation describe them as at war with the world; they have chips on their shoulders the size of Montana. It’s because criminal offenders see crime to be a logical path. It’s because, regardless of what advocates suggest, the results of programs suck (an opinion most inmates embrace).

Society insists that people in the community threatening violence who have mental health issues be addressed by mental health providers and law enforcement and both lack the resources and staff to comply.

Advocates constantly tell us that the vast majority of people with serious mental health problems will never commit violence. Where is the data that allows us to distinguish between the truly dangerous and those not?

Interventions for the seriously mentally or emotionally ill with violent backgrounds (or those threatening violence) need exceptional research and funding. Unless that happens, little will change. 🌐

*Leonard Adam Sipes, Jr. is a retired federal senior spokesperson. A former Adjunct Associate Professor of Criminology and Public Affairs - University of Maryland.*



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# COVER STORY



# CRISIS:

## *Violence and Mental Illness*

By Joel E. Gordon

**M**ass shootings and violent acts continue to shake communities worldwide, leaving devastation and questions in their wake.

As society grapples with understanding these heinous acts, one common question arises: Is there a link between mass shooters, violent acts and mental illness? In this article, we delve into this complex topic, examining the intertwining factors and shedding light on the reality behind the headlines.

Contrary to popular belief, the vast majority of individuals with mental illnesses are not violent. In fact, studies consistently show that those battling mental health issues are more likely to be victims of violence rather than perpetrators. It is crucial to dispel the myth that mental illness directly leads to acts of mass shootings, as it perpetuates stigma and hampers our ability to address the true root causes.

While mental illness alone does not predict violent behavior, it is es-

sential to recognize that certain risk factors can increase the likelihood of someone with mental health challenges engaging in violence. These risk factors may include:

**1** Untreated or undertreated mental illness: Lack of access to or compliance with appropriate mental health treatment can exacerbate symptoms and increase the risk of dangerous behavior.

**2** Substance abuse: When substance abuse co-occurs with mental illness, the risk of violence may escalate due to impaired judgment, altered perception and increased impulsivity.

**3** Previous violent behavior: History of violence, regardless of mental health status, is a significant predictor of future aggression.

**4** Social isolation and marginalization: Feeling excluded, lonely or marginalized can fuel anger and resentment, potentially leading to violent acts as a means of revenge or attention-seeking.

---

*"Recognizing warning signs and providing timely intervention can make a significant difference."*

While it is critical to acknowledge the role of mental health in the broader context of mass shootings, it is equally important not to overlook the societal factors that contribute to such acts. These factors include:

**1** Access to firearms: Easy access to firearms can significantly escalate the risk of violence. Responsible gun ownership is vital.

**2** Media influence: Desperate for attention and infamy, some mass shooters seek to make headlines. Sensationalized media coverage can inadvertently contribute to copycat incidents.

**3** Social contagion: Mass shootings can trigger a contagious effect, inspiring others to commit similar acts. This contagion factor is amplified through the rapid spread of information via social media and online platforms.

To effectively address the issue of mass shootings, a comprehensive approach is crucial. This approach should encompass:

**1** Improved mental health services: Enhancing access to affordable and quality mental health services can ensure individuals receive appropriate treatment, reducing the risk of violence.

**2** Early identification and intervention: Recognizing warning signs and providing timely intervention can make a significant difference in diverting potentially violent individuals toward appropriate support systems.

**3** Promotion of social connectedness: Creating inclusive communities that foster social connections and support networks can alleviate social isolation and reduce the risk of violent behavior.

**4** Responsible control measures: Implementing control policies that lawfully balance individual rights with public safety are also in need of further exploration.

My own experience as a law enforcement official has been that when I encountered an individual who clearly seemed to be a danger to themselves or others and showed a propensity toward violence, mental health practitioners routinely requested criminalization through a request for legal charges of a criminal nature, or when forced to perform in-person evaluation, would often release the individual untreated.

While the connection between mass shooters, violent acts and mental illness is complex, it is essential to dispel misconceptions and approach the issue from a holistic perspective. By focusing on early intervention, better and more responsive mental health support, and addressing societal factors, we can work toward a safer future minimizing the risk of violence and protecting our communities. Remember, combating the stigma associated with mental illness while addressing the multifaceted nature of violence and mass shootings is crucial for progress in prevention. 🌐

*Joel E. Gordon, Managing Editor of BLUE Magazine, is a former Field Training Officer with the Baltimore City Police Department and is a past Chief of Police for the city of Kingwood, West Virginia. He has also served as vice-chair of a multi-jurisdictional regional narcotics task force. An award winning journalist, he is author of the book Still Seeking Justice: One Officer's Story and founded the Facebook group Police Authors Seeking Justice. Look him up at [stillseekingjustice.com](http://stillseekingjustice.com)*





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# A Deepening Crisis: The Struggle to Recruit and Retain Police Officers

By Lt. Joseph Bucco, Jr.

In recent years, police departments across the country have faced an unprecedented challenge: the struggle to recruit and retain qualified police officers. This growing crisis has far-reaching consequences for public safety, community trust and the overall well-being of our society. As we examine the underlying factors contributing to this predicament, it becomes clear that urgent action is needed to address the root causes and restore the integrity of our law enforcement agencies.

One key factor contributing to the struggle to recruit and retain police officers is the rapid change of public perception of law enforcement. High-profile cases of police misconduct and excessive use of force have eroded public trust and created a negative image of the profession. These rare incidents are amplified by social media and 24/7 news coverage, and have led to increased scrutiny and criticism of police practices. As a result, many potential recruits are deterred by the fear of being associated with a profession perceived as corrupt or abusive.

Law enforcement officers face an unprecedented level of scrutiny in today's digital age. Every ac-

tion, decision and encounter can be recorded and instantly shared, often without proper context. This constant surveillance, fueled by public demand for accountability, places an enormous burden on police officers. The fear of being unfairly judged or publicly shamed, even for minor mistakes, has contributed to a sense of demoralization among law enforcement personnel. This intense scrutiny is yet another thing that has dissuaded many potential candidates from pursuing a career in policing.

Another significant factor affecting recruitment and retention is the heightened risk and danger faced by police officers. The nature of police work is inherently dangerous, but in recent years, the job has become even more perilous. Officers routinely face the threat of violence, confront armed individuals and find themselves in life-or-death situations. The rising tide of gun violence and the prevalence of heavily armed criminals have exacerbated these risks. The fear for personal safety, coupled with the emotional toll of witnessing trauma and tragedy, has made the profession less appealing to potential recruits.



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## "First and foremost, rebuilding public trust must be a priority."

The issue of compensation and support for police officers cannot be overlooked. Many law enforcement agencies struggle to offer competitive salaries and benefits, making it difficult to attract qualified candidates. The demanding nature of police work, coupled with long hours and irregular schedules, further compounds the problem. Moreover, inadequate funding for training and equipment places additional strain on officers, hindering their ability to effectively perform their duties. The lack of support and resources creates an environment where burnout and dissatisfaction are prevalent, leading to increased attrition rates.

The consequences of the struggle to recruit and retain police officers are dire and far-reaching. Shortages in law enforcement personnel result in reduced police presence and slower response times, jeopardizing public safety. Overworked and stressed officers may be more prone to making errors or engaging in misconduct, further eroding public trust. Moreover, a lack of diversity within police departments hampers their ability to understand and effectively serve diverse communities. This crisis has a detrimental impact on crime prevention, community relations and the overall quality of life for citizens.

To address the struggle to recruit and retain police officers, comprehensive and systemic changes are required. First and foremost, rebuilding public trust must be a priority. Police departments must engage in transparent and accountable practices, emphasizing community-oriented policing and fostering positive relationships with the communities they serve. Implementing robust internal systems of accountability and oversight can help identify and address misconduct, restoring faith in the profession.

Additionally, competitive compensation packages must be offered to attract and retain qualified candidates. This includes competitive salaries, benefits and greater opportunities for professional development. Prioritizing mental health support for officers, including regular counseling services and trauma-

informed care, is crucial to mitigating the emotional toll of the job.

Investing in comprehensive training programs and modernizing police equipment is also essential. Emphasizing de-escalation techniques, cultural sensitivity and non-lethal alternatives can improve officer effectiveness and community relations. Collaborating with educational institutions to develop recruitment pipelines and incentivizing individuals from diverse backgrounds to join law enforcement can lead to more representative and empathetic police forces.

The struggle to recruit and retain police officers is a pressing issue that demands immediate attention. Rebuilding public trust, addressing concerns of accountability and transparency and improving compensation and support systems are critical steps toward resolving this crisis. By investing in the well-being of law enforcement personnel and fostering community collaboration, we can restore the integrity of our police departments, ensuring public safety and promoting trust between officers and the communities they serve. 🌐

*Joe Bucco is a Municipal Police Lieutenant in New Jersey. He is currently in his 20th year of service and is assigned to the Detective Division as a supervisor. A certified police instructor since 2011, Joe has taught a variety of topics at police academies and academic institutions across New Jersey. Some of his past assignments include the departments' Patrol Division, Street Crimes Unit as well as an on-loan assignment with a multi jurisdiction Fugitive Task Force. He received a Bachelor of Arts from Ramapo College of New Jersey and a Master of Arts from Seton Hall University's Police Graduate Studies Program. In 2018, Joe accepted a position as a Business Development Manager with a national communications and media company that is solely focused on serving our nations law enforcement officers.*



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# UNDERSTANDING THE KILL LIST- FOR SCHOOLS and LAW ENFORCEMENT

By Lt. Joseph Pangaro, CSO, CPM

**A Kill List definition: A list of the names of people a person intends or desires to kill.**

We often see “Kill Lists” discussed in relation to a school shooting. In the course of the investigation after an active shooter attack has taken place, the law enforcement agency will often find a kill list in the shooter’s belongings or at their house. Finding this after people have been injured and died is very unfortunate. In some cases, the kill list is found before any violence takes place. This is a good thing and can save lives if the school and the police know how to respond to finding such a list.

A little personal experience here to help explain the concerns. About five years ago, I conducted a training program for school personnel on the topic of identifying dangerous people by reviewing their writings, journals, drawings, social media posts and other expressions that could indicate their mindset of violent intent.

One of the things we must understand is that when it comes to a young person considering violence such as an active shooter attack on a school, or an adult at a workplace, the people who do this very rarely wake up on a random Tuesday and decide they will kill their classmates or co-workers.

What we find from the investigations after an attack and the lessons learned in these cases is that the attacker often thinks about this activity for weeks if not months before they actually strike out. It is during this “Thinking it over time” that they can express themselves in ways that can give clue to their violent intent. If we can identify this intent, if we can see it, we can intervene to prevent a violent incident.

In this program I talked about the concept of “Leakage” as it relates to people who commit violence. Leakage is a term to describe the things a person planning violence often does, and that

we can often see, as they prepare themselves for the attack.

Their intent or plans may be “leaked” out intentionally or unintentionally through their social media posted comments, pictures, drawings, journaling, or other forms of expression. We may see they have written a “Manifesto” or a written record of their frustrations, angers, hatred or descriptions of abuses they are facing, real or imagined. These manifestos often include their plans on how to strike out at the person or people they hold responsible for their suffering.

Leakage develops as the person falls deeper and deeper into the thoughts and plans for violence. These thoughts become ever present and can overtake their lives. In an effort to vent these feelings, they can reveal their inner thoughts.

Looking for signs of leakage is a way to identify potential danger.

Some of the leakage we look for or see can include making statements that sound scary or dangerous, offering veiled threats to a person or group of people, posting pictures of themselves in their battle dress or displaying guns or other weapons, writing stories of violence with them as the attacker.

The change of clothing styles is a sign of potential violence. The person might begin to wear things associated with a violent incident such as battle gear. Think of a law enforcement SWAT team and how they dress. They wear BDU’s (Battle Dress Uniforms), gun belts, camouflage and military- or police-style boots. All of these items have a legitimate use in law enforcement and the military, but the average citizen does not wear such things for style or trends. These kinds of clothing items have a specific purpose that we all know from the news reports of military or police action and from every TV show we have ever watched. You wear those things when you are going to battle.

This is something that many of the active killers we are familiar with have done, both adults and juveniles. This of the Columbine Killers, they wore BDU's, gun belts, boots, and gloves. The Parkland Killer wore the same things. The adult killer of police officers and civilians in Dallas about 10 years ago wore the same things, and in recent times we saw the Covenant School shooter in Nashville wearing the same kinds of things -- dressing up for the action is often part of the killer's activity and it is a red flag if we pay attention it. The lesson here is simple: If you have a student or co-worker who starts wearing this kind of clothing or posting social media pictures of themselves dressed like this, we must investigate.

Their expressions through drawings often take the form of cartoon doodles or very detailed drawings depending on their skill level. These kinds of drawings often

depict the person drawing in the first-person perspective. They draw themselves into the cartoons as the person committing the violence or punishing the people they consider as bad or evil.

Shortly after I gave this presentation, I had two teachers reach out to me with drawings they saw made by students. The first one depicted a very active scene with a central theme. The teacher took the picture from the student. Here is that picture:

This picture immediately got my attention and for good reason. The wording itself is disturbing -- "Kill List" was the original title of the drawing, but the word list was scratched out and replaced with "Plan." To properly interpret this drawing, we have to see the movement and evolution of the ideas and thoughts of the person drawing.

In its original incarnation, he makes a statement about what the

drawing is, it is a kill list, but over time, as his thoughts evolved, and he was drawn deeper into his suffering he updated the drawing and changed the statement to "Kill Plan."

This change tells me, the investigator, that the person was dwelling on this concept, the kill list had power and he was trying to develop a way to express his feelings. When he changed it to "Kill Plan," that told me he had advanced his ideas from a mere expression of anger, hatred, victimization to a plan of action to fight back against that which was hurting him.

Looking closer we can see that after changing his statement to a plan of action he asks "How". How would he do the things he was considering, assuaging his negative feelings or emotions?

We see his answer to how he would do this- "A Gun." And finally, he made a declarative statement- "No More", his actions were solidified, his plan created.

This tells me that these thoughts and ideas were percolating, developing and evolving in his mind over time and his burgeoning plan was now taking tangible shape.

I visited the school and asked the principal to find the student and bring him to the office, with the caveat that he should be separated from any backpack or bag he may have with him.

This was done and the student sat before us in the office, he was a freshman boy.

## THE INTERVIEW

Once the young man was seated, the principal explained why he was in the office and who I was. We produced the picture, and I asked him if he drew it. He said he did draw it.

I asked him to explain to me what the picture was trying to say.

*(Continued on page 30)*



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## “Yes, after I kill them, I’m going to kill myself, I can’t take it anymore.”

He looked down and shook his head saying, “I’m not sure.”

I prodded him gently, saying I believed he knew what he was expressing and that it was OK to tell me, I told him it looked like he was sad and angry. He shook his head yes.

I had to build up to what I knew the picture was saying so I started with ancillary parts of the picture. I pointed to the “Cage” depicted in the top left corner of the drawing and what looked like four people in the cage. He had labeled them as :

“Misery, Hate, Sue and Sick”

I asked him who these people were. He said they were kids in his class. He had been a part of a month’s long class project and the people in the cage were kids on his team for the project.

The young man was not a classic bullied kid, but he was not well-liked. He was considered “Different” by other students, a loner, he dressed differently, and he was more solitary than other students. He was excluded from many activities for these reasons.

I asked him why they were named Misery, Hate, Sue and Sick. He said “Misery” was a name he gave to one of the girls on the team who made him feel miserable about himself. The boy he labeled as “Hate” was another young man who treated him very badly and he hated him, He said “Sue” was not a girls real name, she was the least offensive team member who simply went along with the poor treatment, so he wanted her to be sued and go to jail. And finally, “Sick” was another young man he felt was sick in the head for the horrible things he said to him about his clothes, his family and other personal things.

I then turned my attention to the other characters depicted in the picture, the ones on the bottom of the page. These appeared to show young people being shot with a handgun, crossed out, and some were saying “No” as if terrified.

I asked him who they were, and he said they were the kids in schools he hated for how they made him feel, including his project team.

I then turned my attention to the central character in the drawing, a stick figure of a young male. This character was larger than the others and centrally placed. Notably the eyes of this character were crossed out and closed. I think it is clearly an expression of a dead person when we

see their eyes ex’d out and closed.

I asked the young man who the person in the middle is. He began to tear up and said -- “That’s me” I said are you dead in this picture, and he said, “Yes, after I kill them, I’m going to kill myself, I can’t take it anymore.”

This picture was filled with information about the young man’s state of mind, his stresses, his thought process, his intentions and his plan of action. The investigator who can interpret this information can take action to prevent tragedy.

The teacher who saw this picture was moved to action because she was given the information before she saw the picture to understand it had important meaning and she took action. In fact, she told me that if she had not had the training and understanding about what drawings can tell us, she might have just taken it and ripped it up, advising the boy not to draw such ugly things anymore.

What else was this drawing besides an expression of pain by the young man who drew it? It was also a kill list, it said so in the title. It told us so because specific people were targeted (His project) even if not named by their real names. It showed us the progression of his thoughts and actions.

For an epilogue, I can say that he did have access to guns, and he told me that he was going to act on it sooner rather than later. When pushed he said “maybe two weeks”

The young man was removed from the school that very day for psychological evaluation. His parents were not aware of his feelings or intentions or his suicidal ideations, they were shocked. He did not return to the school, but reports I’ve gotten indicate he is doing very well; he no longer has a desire to hurt anyone including himself. He got the psychiatric help he needed and in the 10 years since he drew this picture and harbored thoughts of homicide and self-destruction he has thrived. Education and observation saved his life and his classmates as well.

### **FIRST-PERSON**

While the young man in this first example drew in first-person and the drawing was about him and his plans, my second example is a bit different, but just as important for police investigators and school personnel.

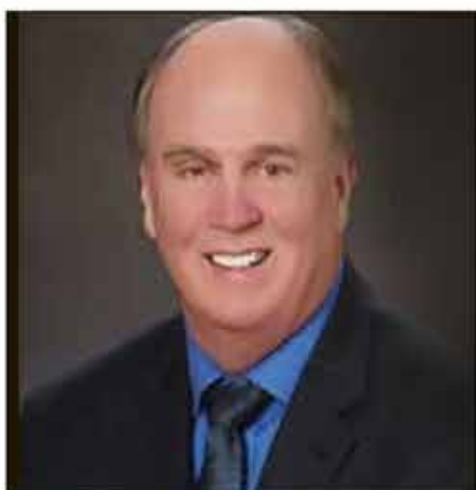
*(Continued on page 33)*

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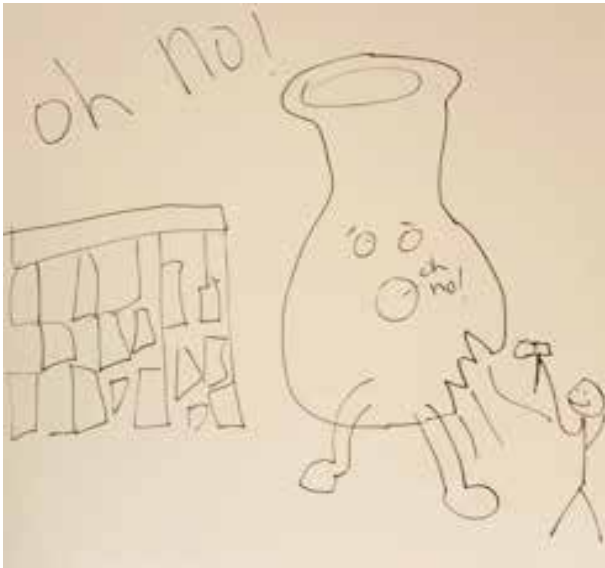
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A short time after I received the first picture, a different teacher in another district sent me another drawing of concern. She also attended one of my training sessions on the topic of interpreting drawings.

This teacher said she saw a young man, high school sophomore, drawing in his notebook and the picture scared her. She took the picture and sent me a photo of it. I responded to the school and met with the student and the principal.

Here is the second drawing:



This drawing depicts a young man with an ax attacking the Kool Aid Guy. The Kool Aid guy is injured, he is bleeding out, and his face shows fear, distress and pain and he says, “Oh No!”. The young man depicted appears to be smiling.

You can see why the teacher was concerned. It is a violent picture.

When I interviewed this young man, he said he drew the picture. When asked what was happening to the Kool Aid guy he said, “That guy is annoying, he breaks through walls yelling ‘Oh Yeah!’ so somebody got sick of it and shut him up.”

I asked him if he was the person with the ax attacking the Kool Aid guy.

The young man smiled and said, “No, man, that’s not me. That’s just some dude who’s sick of his nonsense” After some other conversation and review of the young man’s history, it was clear that this picture, which is disturbing, was not a threat to anyone veiled or otherwise, it was simply a cartoon.

This drawing was not in the first-person, the attacker was not even the drawer, and the injury was not to a person but to a real cartoon character. The attacker was smiling. A cartoon in poor taste, yes, but not a threat.

I spoke to the teacher and thanked her for sending it to me and for paying attention to signs of potential

violence. The takeaway here is similar to the first teacher, with information and knowledge we can get people to report potential problems or threats so we can act.

## **JOURNALING, WRITING AND SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS**

Journaling and writing can also be expressions of our inner thoughts, concerns, angers and joys. Many people of all ages journal to keep a record of their lives or activities. What we look at with young people is the time and place of journaling and writing, the topics and the action that takes place in the writings.

As anyone who deals with children as they grow and mature, we know that they can experience the world in different ways at different ages. Little children can draw things that are scary to them. We know that some abused children will draw horrific pictures of the abuse or how it feels to them. These pictures are often the only way they can express these feelings, since writing might not be a mastered skill yet.

When an investigator or teacher sees these kinds of pictures, they will often set off alarm bells and initiate some kind of an investigation by school personnel, doctors, parents or guardians. This is appropriate because it is information that tells us something is not right.

In little children, drawing a picture of abuse or of sexual organs at ages under 8 or 9 is not the normal thing of childhood. Of course, there can be legitimate reasons that some kids might draw those things and not be victims, but we would investigate none the less because it is out of the ordinary expectations of what young children are experiencing in a normal healthy life experience and it would draw our suspicions.

We also know that around the age of middle school, 11-15 or so, a young person’s understanding of the world around them begins to change and expand. This change comes from heightened awareness of the world around them, increased intelligence, exposure to TV, social media and other outside stimuli of the adult world.

At this age, a young person can understand that family members and friends get sick or die for many reasons, including the modern phenomenon of teen suicide which is on the increase.

When a young person begins to see these kinds of things, they will often reflect that in their writing or journaling. They begin to see the dark side of life and they can internalize that by drawing dark themes or writing stories with dark themes as a way to deal with this new understanding that the whole world is not the safe place of mom and dad’s house. This is normal in most cases where young people journal and write darker themes. But it is here that we can also see signs of potential violence growing.

*(Continued on page 34)*

Stories about killing or hurting people, first-person or otherwise, can be an indicator of a developing problem or potential danger, attack or suicide.

When reviewing the writings, journals and social media posts of anyone, we must look to the essence of what they expressions are about. In some cases, it will be clear such as the journaling and writing of the Columbine Killers.

They left detailed journals describing their anger, hatred and self-doubts as well as their plans to attack and kill their classmates. Several years ago, on Long Island, a young man was journaling about attacking his school and left the journal behind at a fast-food restaurant. It was found and turned over to the police who intervened and thwarted his planned attack.

And recently in the Covenant School shooting in Nashville, we know the killer had a detailed manifesto describing why he was angry and what he wanted to do. Had someone found this document, it could have prevented tragedy.

As for social media posts, many people who harbor feelings of violence will post those feelings as a way of expressing them or threatening those they dislike. The shooter in the Virginia Tech attack created and posted a video manifesto, the Parkland School shooter also posted threats and plans on social media.

The lessons here are this: The need to express these negative feelings, threats and plans is fairly common. We must be aware of them and try not stay ahead of any potentially dangerous act as best we can by looking for leakage and investigating properly.

Using digital assets like “geo fencing” can help. Geo fencing is the use of software that can be focused on social media posts that have keys words about violence or attacks or killing, etc. The geo fencing can be targeted to a school property, a business or an entire town. When the specified key words appear in a post, notifications are sent to whoever set up the geo fencing. This is usually the school district or the local police. In many cases they split the cost. It is a good but underused technology that can help us keep our communities safe.

Monitoring journaling and writing might be harder because they are more private. As law enforcement and school personnel, we should encourage the parents and guardians of our children to review their writings and drawings and provide them with training to recognize the signs to look for.

As I conclude this piece, I want to cover the actual kill list and how it should be investigated by schools and law enforcement. This is an area of action this is often not handled correctly by either group.

First, some problems I see that can lead to improper investigation or reaction by schools and law enforcement. Many people see a kill list as simply an inappropriate activity by a student. Something unpleasant, rude or, scary, but not life threatening. The reaction by this group can be

to destroy the kill list and admonish the student not to do it again. There is no proper follow-up with parents or law enforcement. I have seen this happen in real life too many times, even today with our heightened awareness of the dangers of attacks on schools.

When law enforcement is notified, many officers don't understand the significance and investigative value of getting the kill list before violence happens. I have seen officers take the list and throw it away, leave it with the teacher and not follow up any further. As professionals, we have to train our people to treat the kill list very seriously and do the follow up that is needed to save lives.

How do we do this?

First, create a school policy that requires training for staff to recognize potentially dangerous writings, drawings, journaling or social media posting. Then, include a requirement that any identified writing, drawing, journaling or social media post be preserved and kept by the school. Then include a provision to ensure local law enforcement is called and responds to the school to conduct a follow-up investigation.

Schools should add that any student who creates any potentially violent writings, drawings, journalings or social media post will have their lockers and backpacks searched (Follow local and state law for guidance) for weapons or other evidence of potential violence.

Create a tip line where a student can report dangers anonymously and include how the tips will be followed up. Develop a training program for properly investigating threats.

These steps can help prevent violence. We have seen many incidents where students have come forward to report potentially violent students and this reporting has prevented attacks.

### **FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT:**

Train your officers to take kill lists and other threats very seriously and investigate them properly. A kill list investigation should include parental notification, a police officer visit to the student's home to inquire about weapons, a request for a consent to search the student's room (or a search warrant if probable cause exists), and taking into custody any evidence at the home or from the school.

These may seem like simple things, but they can make a huge difference.

A kill list is an important red flag we must all recognize as such and respond properly. 🚩

*Joseph Pangaro is a 27-year veteran of law enforcement. He retired in 2013 at the rank of Lieutenant and currently serves as the Director of School Safety and Security for a large school district in NJ. He is also the owner of Pangaro Training and Management, a company that provides training to the public and private sector on a host of topics. Email: JPangaro@Yahoo.com*





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# YOU MEAN LAW ENFORCEMENT *is the answer?*

By Lance J. LoRusso, Esq.

I recently completed four interviews on national news sources in fourteen hours prompted, as usual, by the poking of a hornet's nest. In this case, it was the deployment of National Guard members to New York City. I answered their questions, took an opportunity to educate, as always, and expressed the same thoughts I have had and voiced hundreds of times: Law enforcement is not the problem. Societal problems are truly unique. Developing solutions is free, everyone has an opinion. A glaring lack of experience or knowledge does not impair your ability to grab headlines, and the more outlandish your theory, the more press it will get. Consider the "defund the police movement" which I have described as the fastest conceived, implemented and failed social policy in United States history. Perhaps it is wisdom disguised as old age, experience leading to patience, or an ability to float at the 10,000-foot view to gain a different perspective, but with all the nonsense I see on a regular basis, I remain optimistic about law enforcement in the United States.

Optimistic? Does he have a bottle of tequila next to his laptop? No, but what I do have is the perspective of a lawyer who has represented approximately 180 officers in shootings and critical incidents. I also bring the insight of a trainer with thirty years of experience watching amazing candidates increase their skills through dedication and perseverance. Finally, I witness every day the dedication of the men and women in law enforcement who still show up, do the job and put their lives at risk for strangers.

The National Guard stories allowed me to highlight some interesting points. Although the defund movement relies upon a premise that the presence of a uniformed law enforcement officer will deter crime, the National Guard is being brought in as a uniform presence - to deter crime. In a world where activists scream and holler about the militarization of law enforcement and work to remove armored personnel carriers from SWAT teams and prevent officers from wearing outer vest carriers because they look too much like the military, the same activists are supporting the use of actual National Guard soldiers in civilian environments. In a city where activists complained about stop and frisk, those same activists are supporting the use of uniformed soldiers to search every bag, purse and backpack in the name of safety. The reason? Their failed social policies have made their communities more dangerous, in many cases uninhabitable, and they recognize "something" needs to be done. The infamous "something" often to be done by "somebody" in a place known as "somewhere."

Rather than getting angry about these hypocritical stances making headlines, find comfort in the fact that the public knows that law enforcement is not the problem. Some of you may ask, why don't they just bring law enforcement officers back, refund police departments and increase the presence of uniformed officers to deter crime? That answer is simple: That would require the activists to admit they were wrong. Don't hold your breath waiting for that to happen. They own one tool, and it is a shovel.

Like you, I hate watching a steady flow of headlines bashing law enforcement. However, I can tell you without hesitation the public overwhelmingly supports law enforcement. What you are seeing right now is a struggle between the easy side of the equation - namely blaming law enforcement for every societal ill - versus the most difficult side of the equation - actually doing something to fix the problems that cause and perpetuate criminality and victimization.

Holding people accountable when they commit crimes is not only a good idea, it's a basic obligation of government. When elected officials fail to do so, they should be held accountable. Many have asked me what standard we should use to hold those public officials accountable. Let's use the same high ethical standards to which we hold law enforcement, and the public has the ability to do so. Reach out to your friends, family, neighbors, people with whom you attend church, little league games and other events. Encourage them to speak loudly to support law enforcement, and pay attention when they thank you for your service. It is heartfelt, reflecting a mixture of gratitude and fear - that one day your beat will be empty, your patrol car will sit idle, and the politicians condemning you will be nowhere to be found.

Stay safe. 🇺🇸

*Lance LoRusso, Esq. is national thought leader and expert on use of force. As a litigator with a law enforcement background, Lance focuses his practice on cases involving first responders, responds to critical incidents and shootings, and handles catastrophic personal injury and wrongful death cases on behalf of injured first responders & their loved ones. Lance serves as General Counsel to the Georgia Fraternal Order of Police and was named 2021 Attorney of the Year by the National Fraternal Order of Police. Lance is an author of educational books for first responders as well as fiction books inspired by his experiences as a first responder and representing them during some of the most trying times of their lives. His print & audio books are available on [lancelorussobooks.com](http://lancelorussobooks.com). Lance founded the Blue Line Lawyer Institute - a think tank for LEOs and their lawyers - that hosts the annual Force Forum training conference. For more information, visit [lorussolawfirm.com](http://lorussolawfirm.com) or [bluelinelawyer.com](http://bluelinelawyer.com) to sign up for his newsletter and learn more about the upcoming Force Forum May 19-22, 2024 on Jekyll Island, Georgia.*



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# Lessons Learned From My Mental Health Struggles

By Stan Popovich

I struggled with fear and anxiety for over 20 years. During these times, my anxieties and fears were so powerful that I had trouble getting through the week and there were times I felt like giving up. I learned numerous lessons from my struggles, which I will share in this article.

To get through these trying times, the first thing I did was admit that I had a problem. I then took the steps to find a mental health counselor who could help me with my situation. I also made the effort to learn as much as I could in dealing with various anxiety disorders and depression by reading a lot of books and doing a lot of personal research.

I knew that the answers I was looking for were out there and all I had to do was try to find them. Over time, I learned how to deal with fear and anxiety which helped me in the long run.

It was very tough — however, I did not lose hope.

With time, I became better able to conquer my fears and anxieties, and I applied the techniques I learned from professionals and my own research when I encountered such situations. I tried to find out which techniques worked for me. I would then write down this information in a small notebook. When I encountered a similar situation, I could better face my fears by reading these notes. This prevented me from repeating the same mistakes I had made in the past.

Instead of looking at my struggles as a problem, I tried to look at each situation as a learning experience. For example,

I remember when I first learned to ice skate. Initially, I fell all the time, but I kept getting back up even though it was very difficult. Over time, I did not fall as much and eventually I was able to skate without falling.

Whenever I struggled, I made it a habit to take things one day at a time. I tried to not dwell on my fearful thoughts which were telling me that I was not going to make it. I also realized that you just can't predict the future. A person may be 99% correct in predicting the future, but all it takes is that 1% to make a difference. There are factors and circumstances that you can't predict or anticipate that can make a difference in your current situation.

Happiness is not from seeking one joy to the next, and research indicates that happiness involves times of considerable discomfort. Our intrinsic genes, environmental interactions, achievements and social connections all influence how happy we may feel. Therefore, taking small steps to create pleasurable situations, undertaking various tasks or challenges and setting and meeting goals can all increase life satisfaction. The key is to pursue activities which make you happy.

I found it can often be very challenging to remain optimistic when dealing with depression, fear and anxiety. Depression is often associated with overwhelming feelings of loneliness, despair and hopelessness.

Here are a few tips I used in my personal life when I struggled with my mental health:

*You are not alone  
when it comes to your  
mental health  
challenges*

## **1** Socialize With Others

It can be tempting to confine yourself to solitude when you are struggling with depression. Unfortunately, this can simply exacerbate the negative feelings that you are experiencing. Reaching out can go a long way toward supporting you during your more difficult stages. Experiencing depression can certainly make socializing feel exhausting, but there are many benefits to engaging in social activities when you are struggling with depression.

## **2** Exercise Regularly

Physical activity helps to produce hormones, such as  $\beta$ -endorphins, in the body that are great at lifting the mood and fighting feelings of depression. Though improving your health can certainly help with depression, it doesn't require substantial exercise and exertion to provide ample benefits. If you don't exercise regularly, it can be particularly beneficial to simply invest some time in walking around the block. Sunlight, for example, provides many positive benefits to your mental health. It has been shown to boost levels of serotonin, which can substantially improve mood and feelings of well-being.

## **3** Reduce or Avoid Drinking

Alcohol can affect your brain chemistry, increasing the risk of depression. Many people turn to substance abuse as an alternative to facing the extreme negative emotions associated with depression. Though they may provide a numbing effect, they are certainly not helping. If you drink regularly, reducing the amount you drink, or even quitting altogether, can substantially help you handle the struggles of depression.

## **4** Implement a Routine

Those who struggle with depression often find that their sleeping patterns deteriorate and become unhealthy. Sticking to a routine can help to prevent you from falling into these habits. In addition, a routine will help to ensure that you eat regularly and obtain the nutrition that you need to stay healthy and manage your mental health issues.

## **5** Seek Help for Your Mental Health

It is important to seek help when handling mental health issues. Regularly visiting a therapist can go a long way toward providing you with the tools and mental strategies that you need to find happiness while living with mental health issues.

## **6** Practice Meditation

Meditation has been shown to provide a multitude of mental health benefits. When you incorporate meditation into your routine, you can often manage stress more effectively and ensure a more positive mood. In addition, meditative practices can help you to focus on gratitude and positive feelings to minimize your negative emotions.

In summary, the key is not to give up, and to seek help from professionals. You are not alone when it comes to your mental health challenges. There are many support groups where you can get assistance and where you can meet others who can relate to your circumstances. Your situation is not hopeless and by making the right decisions, you will eventually be able to get your life back on track. 🌍

*Stan Popovich is the author of "A Layman's Guide to Managing Fear" [www.managing-fear.com](http://www.managing-fear.com)*



# A FIRST RESPONDER'S RETIREMENT: THE VITAL ROLE OF FRIENDSHIPS

By Kimberly Stratman

Ask most police officers, and they will affirm they have a wealth of friends. They'll often add, "We would die for each other." This is truth and has been proven. The bonds formed between officers are unique, conceived in shared experiences, challenges and victories. These relationships, often as intimate as family ties, are created in critical moments, where reliance on each other can mean life or death. However, as officers transition into retirement, these friendships often evolve, sometimes leading to their end.

During their careers, police officers develop profound connections with their peers. These relationships are established on mutual respect, understanding and an unspoken bond that is rare in other professions. They share the physical risks and the emotional toll of their duties, fostering a camaraderie that becomes an integral part of their identity. In addition, they experience life's significant milestones together — from attending each other's weddings to celebrating the births of their children and mourning the on-duty deaths of colleagues.

Retirement often ushers in a sense of isolation as the structured support system of the workplace disappears. Even with days off and changing shifts, the officers still "worked together." The loss of this close-knit community can be one of the most daunting aspects of retirement. After 20, 30 or even 40 years of working together, officers cannot imagine the connections ending. Thus, the unexpected realization that relationships have waned can be painful and confusing.

Relationships may end or diminish, not due to a lack of effort or desire to maintain them, but rather due to the shift from a shared daily mission to individual pursuits and lifestyles. New hobbies are explored. Family commitments can no longer be brushed aside due to "the job." Retirees might live inconvenient distances from each other.

The end of a career doesn't necessitate the end of these meaningful connections. Retired officers can take active

steps to maintain and adapt their friendships to their new phase of life. Regular meet-ups in various parts of the town, county or metroplex encourage retirees to have coffee or a meal together. Shared hobbies can lead to fun and potential income generation. New or re-energized traditions can help recognize and preserve important bonds. Social media and technology also provide ways to stay in touch, share life updates, and continue offering mutual support. Retirees should never underestimate the value of a simple text or call saying, "hello."

It's equally important for retirees to broaden their social circles beyond their former colleagues. First responders often retire young and have several decades of energy and vitality to enjoy. Engaging in community services, volunteering or joining groups can lead to new friendships with people who have similar interests and values, offering fresh perspectives and enhancing the retirement experience. While learning to be comfortable in non-law enforcement groups can take time and intention, the results can be life changing.

Retirement can and should be a rewarding life chapter for police officers, filled with the joy of old friendships and the excitement of new ones. Witnessing the ongoing life stories of friends and former coworkers can be fulfilling and comforting. With intention and action, the relationships that once defined their careers can evolve to define a vibrant retirement. 🌍

*Kimberly Stratman retired as a Lieutenant from the Dallas Police Department after an exciting and fulfilling 30-year career. She and her husband, an active SWAT officer, have two grown sons and two dogs that get lots of attention. Kimberly is the owner of To the Point Coach, a Certified Retirement Life Coach and Certified Life Coach service that focuses on first responders. Her goal is to ensure our law enforcement community thrives. She can be reached @tothepointcoach.org*





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## A Fateful Night in the Village:

# *The Heroic Story of Marshalik and Pekearo*

By Christian Durante

The night of March 14, 2007, was unseasonably warm to the point where spring, which was fast approaching later that month, had already arrived. It was a Wednesday, which meant, at least for me, a school night. I was in my last year as a 17-year-old senior in Fort Hamilton High School. It was an exciting year for me because I was debating what I wanted to do as a career. It was in that frame of mind that I decided to volunteer and become a NYPD Auxiliary Police Officer a few months earlier. I started a basic training course at my local NYPD 68th Precinct in October 2006 and graduated from the course with the highest grades in March 2007. On March 12th, I was privileged to receive my NYPD Auxiliary Police ID card and shield. It was one of the proudest moments of my life.

On that Wednesday night of March 14th, 2007, I was doing my homework in my bedroom. As was my normal practice, I had my television on tuned into the news. My Aunt Janet came into my bedroom to put away some of my clothes in my closet. Suddenly, a breaking news broadcast came on as the broadcast began with a huge banner across the television screen: **“TWO NYPD AUXILIARY POLICE OFFICERS SHOT IN GREENWICH VILLAGE.”** The news crew started showing aerial footage of the scene in Greenwich Village where the streets were filled with NYPD vehicles with their flashing red lights lighting up the night sky. It was at that moment that my aunt stopped what she was doing and started to sit down on a chair with a concerned look on her face.

While I was doing my homework earlier that evening in Brooklyn, a couple of miles away in

Manhattan, Auxiliary Police Officers Nicholas Pekearo and Eugene Marshalik were on routine foot patrol in the crowded bustling neighborhood of Greenwich Village. The restaurants and bars were packed with crowds of people enjoying the spring-like weather. They were both young men who had struck up a friendship during their volunteering with the NYPD’s 6th Precinct Auxiliary Police Unit. APO Marshalik was in his 13th month of volunteer service while APO Pekearo was in his fourth year of volunteer service. APO Nicholas Pekearo grew up, worked and now also volunteered in Greenwich Village. APO Marshalik was a student at the nearby NYU campus. They both had strong, close connections to the neighborhood.

These young men were in the prime of their lives and felt the need to give back to the community. They both had dreams for the future. Pekearo worked at a local bookstore with his girlfriend and wanted to be an author. Marshalik wanted to be a NYPD officer at first but had recently changed his career goal to that of being a public service prosecutor in a district attorney’s office.

Later that night in Brooklyn, as the news broadcast continued, my aunt and I sat in silence watching the news in disbelief. You could see she was concerned and looked at me with a look of, “What have you gotten yourself involved with”? Amazingly, she never said anything to me. Once the newscast ended, she left my room without saying a word, which was rare for her. Being from Brooklyn, she has been outspoken and never hesitates to voice her opinion. In this instance, her action spoke louder than words.

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"Unless you wore the blue uniform, no one can tell you how it feels to be in a "sea of blue" all around you."

Around 11 p.m., another round of local newscasts followed with footage from the shooting scene in Greenwich Village and both the mayor and NYPD commissioner holding a press conference to a shocked, horrified city. For New York City, where everything is possible in a city that never sleeps, the execution-style killing of two young volunteer NYPD auxiliary police officers shocked even the most hardened New Yorkers who have seen it all. Even 17 years later, Mayor Mike Bloomberg and NYPD Commissioner Raymond Kelly's words during their news conference at Saint Vincent's Hospital in Greenwich Village echo to those who remember that long-ago fateful night:

*"Tonight, was a horrible night for the New York Police Department and for our city. Two auxiliary police officers were killed in the line of duty, two men who volunteered their time to make our city the safest big city in America lost their lives helping to keep it exactly that way."*

*"What this indicates is that this tragedy, as horrific as it was, could have been a lot worse and without the actions of our brave officers, most likely would have been."*

-NYC Mayor Mike Bloomberg



*"The gunman fled down the street where he encountered unarmed volunteer auxiliary police officers Eugene Marshalik, 19 years old, and Nicholas Pekearo, 28 years old, two of the city's unsung heroes who as part of our 4,500 Strong Auxiliary Police Program, serve without compensation, as the eyes & ears of this police department"*

*"The fact that more lives were not lost is due in no small measure to Auxiliary Police Officers Nicholas Pekearo and Eugene Marshalik."*

-NYPD Commissioner Raymond Kelly

The next day, each member of the 68th Precinct Auxiliary Police Unit was called into the precinct stationhouse for a meeting with the commanding officer of the precinct and our auxiliary police coordinator. The NYPD was in shock like the rest of the city, and wanted to make sure all their volunteer auxiliary police officers were safe. To their point, all of us, auxiliaries, at least in the 68th Precinct, were asked if we wanted to stay on the volunteer auxiliary police force. The cold-blooded reality of this noble volunteering on patrol in uniform unarmed was made clear the night before and the NYPD wanted to do everything in their power to avoid a repeat incident. At the end of our auxiliary police unit meeting, not one of our fifty-nine volunteers including myself or my recent graduating auxiliary police class raised our hands to quit. We all decided to stay on to continue to serve the NYPD, our community and our city.

The hardest part of this surreal experience for me was preparing for the NYPD funerals of Marshalik and Pekearo. I never wore my uniform before and now for the first time ever, I was going to wear it at the funerals for two of my fellow NYPD auxiliary police officers including one, Eugene Marshalik, 19 years old, who was only two years older than me. I was getting ready to graduate high school in a few months and start college in the fall. Marshalik was in the midst of his college experience while I was about to start mine.

Although both funerals were tragic to witness, unless you wore the blue uniform, no one can tell you how it feels to be in a "sea of blue" all around you with thousands of officers standing at attention where you can hear only a "pin drop" and helicopters only a few hundred feet above flying in a "missing man formation". It was surreal tribute to a fallen comrade in blue.



Nicholas Todd Pekearo, 28

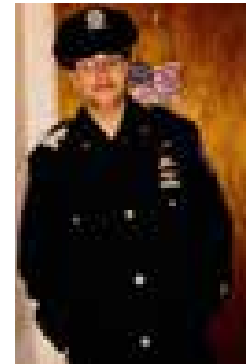


Evgeniy Marshalik, 19

I never regretted volunteering for my community and the NYPD Auxiliary Police. It was a huge part of my life for many years. I “retired” from volunteer policing in 2019 as an Auxiliary Police Sergeant. In those twelve years of volunteer police service, I went from being a naive 17-year-old high schooler to a mature adult who has a federal career and is still volunteering, although for a different agency and volunteer mission these days.

On that fateful night in Greenwich Village, two young men in the prime of their lives, wearing the uniform of New York City auxiliary police officers, unarmed, except for a radio and nightstick, confronted pure evil, their heroism displayed in delaying a mad gunman’s shooting rampage in the crowded streets of Greenwich Village that night. It was a selfless act of heroism that saved many lives but cost them their own. As the 17th anniversary of March 14th, 2007 comes, many of those countless bystanders in the village that night along with the family, friends and colleagues of NYPD Auxiliary Police Officers Eugene Marshalik

and Nicholas Pekearo will pause during a moment in their day to think of two heroes who by fate that spring-like night served as their guardian angels in blue. 🕒



*NYPD Police Officer Christian Durante, 17, wearing his auxiliary police uniform for the first time, for the first of two funerals for his fellow auxiliary police officers.*

*Christian Durante is a retired volunteer NYPD Auxiliary Police Sergeant and is currently a federal employee. An alumni of John Jay College of Criminal Justice who graduated in 2013 with a Bachelors Degree in Police Studies & Minor in Cinema Studies, he continues working full-time & volunteering for his community with the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary.*

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# MONMOUTH COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE AND BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS ESTABLISH MEDSTAR AMID EMS VOLUNTEER SHORTAGE

*By Cynthia Scott, Public Information Officer and Ted Freeman, Executive Undersheriff  
Monmouth County Sheriff's Office*

**O**n February 7, 2024, Monmouth County Sheriff Shaun Golden announced at a news conference that the Monmouth County Sheriff's Office, with the support of the Monmouth County Board of Commissioners, is initiating a county-run emergency medical services operation called MedStar that will assist local agencies in need with emergency medical calls to ensure the most timely and effective emergency medical responses for the residents of Monmouth County, New Jersey.

"Volunteer EMS units play a crucial role in serving Monmouth County's fifty-three municipalities. However, challenges have resulted in staffing shortages that are impacting response time and safety, so we are here to help," said Monmouth County Sheriff Shaun Golden. "This launch of the Monmouth County Sheriff's Office MedStar initiative is a testament to our dedication to public safety and resolve to address the shortage of EMS volunteers head-on. It bridges the gap and will enhance emergency response capabilities in struggling towns that have entered into an agreement with Monmouth County."

During calendar year 2023, there were more than 60,000 calls for service in Monmouth County that required an ambulance. In addition, out of the twenty-one counties in New Jersey, Monmouth County ranked

19th in response times.

The Monmouth County Sheriff's Office MedStar initiative will assist by helping to fill that need and supplement the efforts of existing volunteer EMS squads.

"On behalf of the Monmouth County Board of Commissioners, I want to commend Sheriff Golden and his staff for developing the County MedStar initiative to fill an important need for our residents," said Commission Director Thomas A. Arnone. "Safety is at the cornerstone of everything we do here in Monmouth County, and the Board of County Commissioners is proud to provide financial support for MedStar for this essential service."

"The Monmouth County Sheriff's Office has obtained seven ambulances and two Tahoes, which will be stationed at EMS Central, located at the former site of Fort Monmouth in the building formerly used as a fire station, and is currently being renovated for its new role as EMS Central. Monmouth County MedStar will consist of highly trained, dedicated full- and part-time EMS professionals who will assist and work collaboratively with existing volunteer EMS squads in Tinton Falls and surrounding areas in the central region of Monmouth County.

The process will begin in the Monmouth County



911 Communications Center when an emergency call comes in and an ambulance is requested from the town with which an agreement has been made with the sheriff's office. MedStar will respond, ensuring that the medical services provided are efficient and accessible. The services will be subsidized through insurance.

Michael Bascom, who has been the Monmouth County EMS Coordinator for over 30 years and is the president of the NJEMS Task Force, said, "I appreciate that Sheriff Golden and the Board of County Commissioners have listened to those of us in the EMS community who have been sounding the alarm that help is needed. With call volume continuously growing, volunteer and career staffing difficult to find and the profession failing to receive the level of support needed at the state and federal levels, this new initiative will support local EMS agencies in their efforts to ensure that requests for emergency medical assistance are answered in a timely manner, prioritized by acuity and NOT intended to replace successful local EMS programs, but rather to supplement them and fill gaps where they may exist throughout the county."

Timothy Sidley, Director of EMS Operations, indicated that the Central Monmouth area, encompassing Tinton Falls and Oakhurst, is presently the focus area for MedStar. It is estimated that approximately fifteen calls for service per day will be answered in the coming months. By summer 2024, the renovations to the former Fort Monmouth firehouse should be completed and EMS operations centralized at that location. The average response time for MedStar has been under six minutes.

Monmouth County Sheriff's Office MedStar plans to maintain four ambulances on the road during days with two ambulances during nighttime hours. In addition, two

supervisors will be on the day shift and one on the night shift. A dynamic staffing model will be used to analyze and adjust staffing levels to anticipated needs. Supervisors will have the authority to make decisions based on the volume of requests for service and available resources to cover those needs. The dynamic staffing model provides statistical analysis to project high, medium and low demand and permit scheduling of resources to meet the projected needs indicated.

Requirements for MedStar applicants will be: National and/or NJ EMT or Paramedic Certification, American Heart Association BLS CPR Certification, and a New Jersey Driver's License. Preferred applicants will have the following: 3 years of Emergency Medical Services experience, Haz-Mat Awareness, ICS 100, 200, 300, NIMS 700, 800, CEVO, EVOC or equivalent, and TECC or TCCC.

Andrew Caruso, Director of EMS Training, will be responsible for providing and tracking training for all full- and part-time employees to ensure that all required certifications are met and maintained and conduct continuing education on topics specific to the ever-changing climate of EMS in the community. By the end of March 2024, it is anticipated that there will be twenty-six full-time employees, ten part-time employees and eight supervisors for a total of forty-four employees.

Sheriff Shaun Golden noted, "One of our founding fathers, Benjamin Franklin, said, "If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail." He also said, "Success is the residue of planning." I commend the Monmouth County Board of County Commissioners for their foresight in creating MedStar as we continue to meet the public safety needs of those who live, work and visit Monmouth County." 🌐



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# VOODOO & THE RIVER "RESCUE"

By Dale Gabriel

**J**anuary 7, 1995. I was working midnight shift. This one REALLY sticks out in my mind because I was going to my first Steelers playoff game that day against our biggest rival at the time, the Cleveland Browns.

I was hoping for a nice and easy, quiet, peaceful shift. Maybe I could even sneak out a little early, which would allow me to get home right away, since I was only going to get a couple of hours of sleep before going to the game, if that. One thing those of us in law enforcement know is that you cannot always count on making it home right at the end of your shift. You don't punch a time clock. And of course, another thing we knew was not to plan for anything, because things often don't work out the way you plan. Most people don't realize how difficult law enforcement can be for the families, how many things you are forced to miss out on because you never know what a shift is going to turn into.

Now, back to the story! Right around 0400 hours (That's 4 a.m. for you regular folks!), we got a call about "a body." For those of you NOT in the law enforcement profession, that is about the worst call you can get. The report came in that this particular body was hanging from a high bridge over a local river right at the edge of our patrol area.

This may sound cold and callous, but to be honest, I try to tell these PSP memories as truthfully as I can. On a call like this, your first thought is: "How is it going to affect ME?" As a police officer, you always try to stay one step ahead and prepare for your next move, especially when you want to get out of there as quickly as you can. On the way to the call, I am thinking about everything I would need to do once I got there and assessed the situation.

Who would I need to call? Fire Department? River

Rescue? Coroner? Criminal investigators? I was really dreading it, knowing these types of calls always take time. I was worried I was going to have to miss the Steelers playoff game. Would I be eating my tickets? Could I find someone to call to use them? So many thoughts going through my mind, both professional and personal.

We arrived at the scene. There was a rope tied to the bridge. It was hanging down with a body far below. It was a LONG way down. What exactly did we have? Was this a suicide? Could it be a homicide? We called out to the person, just hoping for a miracle that they would respond. But there was no answer.

Fire Department and River Rescue were already en route. I had my dispatcher contact the on-call criminal investigator and get him on his way. Sometimes, these guys take a while to even get here. This was going to be a bit of a tough one. There were so many thoughts running through my mind. What was the best way to handle this? How were we going to get this body? We could not just cut the rope and let it fall into the river. We could not just pull it up. I couldn't tell from my vantage point just how far it was above the water, if River Rescue would even be able to get to it easily. Would they be able to lower a ladder down to get it? I had no clue. This was the kind of incident where all you can do is stand back and let the other professionals do their job. I kept watching the time, just hoping they could do it quickly so I could make the game. I know bad sounds bad, but it was reality.

The Fire Department and River Rescue arrived on scene. With the help of the firemen, we shut down traffic on the bridge completely. Thank goodness it was early on a Sunday, because the alternate route made people go far out of their way. See, I WAS still thinking of others!

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## "I could not believe they would handle a body that way."

The River Rescue team put a raft into the water. I remember thinking how thankful I was for them. Throughout my career, I always appreciated the other first responders. They did so many things that I did not WANT to do and would never be ABLE to do. I especially would never want to be on the frigid water like they were on this particular night. More often than not, the ones locally are volunteers and do not even get paid. THAT is dedication. Thank you to ALL the volunteer firemen out there!

Anyway, they made their way out to the middle of the water, just below the body. With high visibility spotlights on, it was freaky seeing it hanging there, just above them, like a scene out of a scary movie. I personally focused on the body with spotlight shining directly on it. I was watching from the warm patrol car. I have to admit. At this point, I was thinking mostly about the football game and calculating how late I could get home and still make it, or who I could call, and when, to go in my place.

After a short time, I could see the firemen start to pull the rope up to the bridge. From my perspective, this was really bad news. I could not imagine them pulling the body up in that way, if there were any chance the person was still alive. I guess I knew in the back of my mind there was no way he was alive, anyway, but you always hold out hope till there is no more left. I had my dispatcher contact the coroner to get him rolling.

The end of my shift was quickly approaching. As shameful as it sounds, I was still trying to do what I could to get out of there as quickly as I possible. Our dispatcher told me on the radio that the criminal investigator would be here shortly. A supervisor was called out and was on his way, too. It's not every day we have what could possibly be a homicide. I was still hoping I could pass on all the preliminary information I had and still make it home early. Once the supervisor arrived, along with the criminal investigator and coroner, all they really would need was my preliminary report, and I could get out of there.

As I could see the firemen pulling the body up, it was nearly to the top of the bridge. I fig-

ured it was time for me to make my presence at the scene more obvious, to take control of the crime scene. I got out of my nice toasty patrol car and went to the top the bridge, just as the body was almost there. I was standing back a little, giving the firemen room to do their job. They knew what they were doing. They knew to preserve any evidence as best they could while doing all they can to help the person. Medical personnel were standing by.

Just as they pulled the body over the top, they literally threw it on the road. What the hell? I could not believe they would handle a body that way. None of them started working on the body, even checking for vitals. I was hoping it was cold enough to slow the body functions down, so that there could be some kind of miracle, and he would have survived. Seeing how they were treating it, however, I guess I knew that really was not possible. I took control of the scene and moved in, right to the body, to do my own personal inspection, to gather and subsequently document my own observations and evidence.

OH MY GOD!!! What the hell???? I could not BELIEVE my eyes!! The body was a life-size mannequin dressed in full Vinny Testaverde Cleveland Browns uniform. Game on!!

I quickly canceled the criminal investigator, supervisor and coroner, and I made it to the game in time to watch the Steelers' defense pulverize the REAL Vinny Testeverde.

Maybe it was actually a voodoo doll... Vinnie went 13-31 as the Steelers killed the Browns (well, maybe KILLED is the wrong word!) 🌐

*Dale Gabriel is a retired patrol and community services officer with the Pennsylvania State Police. After 25+ years of service, in retirement, he has been working on a book of his many PSP memories. He also coaches a baseball team in a Miracle League for those with special needs. He holds a communication degree with English minor from Saint Vincent College in Western Pennsylvania.*





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# A HILL TO DIE ON



*By Monica Eaton Crawford*

**O**ne morning driving into work to report to another day of the police academy, I noticed a pain in my chest, in the middle of my sternum. At the time, the drive to work was around 30-40 minutes and I had plenty of time to have my thoughts to myself at 6 a.m. before the sun came up. That dark drive into work, riddled with anxiety, in fear of another day of being in physical pain with the shoulder injury caused by the same academy.

I knew I had the mental toughness to get through whatever bullshit they wanted to throw at our academy class that day, like making up shit to "smoke" us for (extra running, PT and the like), but each day it got harder and harder to keep that mental toughness. Each day, the emotional stress and the physical pain wore on me.

I spent many mornings in the parking lot, being

the first one to arrive, contemplating driving back home and never looking back. I was miserable.

I had zero control over anything going on in my life at the time, other than my sleep. The stress and anxiety limited my appetite and I had the stress shits and night sweats daily. The insane level of physical activity limited my ability to control my own workouts and activity outside work. I did all I could to keep my mental health intact on my off days, but it just wasn't enough down time to recover during those 6 months of hell. But that was only the beginning.

Fast forward to five years later and my mind and body are still paying the price for the chronic stress I endured over a three-and-a-half-year span.

If there's one hill I could die on, it would be advocating for self-care and ongoing mental health care.

---

## "Fill your own cup so full you can pour onto others versus draining yourself empty and having nothing left to give."

I can't tell you all how many conversations I've been having lately with others where the topic of chronic stress, toxic work environment, anxiety and panic attacks comes up. I just had another one at the gym this morning with another female who has never been a first responder. Doesn't matter, though, it can exist in any career and in any work environment.

Looking back at that academy, I honestly don't know if there's anything I could have done differently to mitigate the trauma I endured. I think all of us are tough enough to make it through a 6-month academy stint that is less than pleasurable. It's a big part of training in a first responder field and really just what we do.

But I think this story makes a good argument to look inward in times of high stress and doing what we can to prioritize self-care to not only survive during hard seasons, but to tip the scales back into balance so we are not always enduring chronic stress from one event to the next. We can't live that way long-term. It will literally kill us from the inside out.

So I'll keep dying on this hill to always take a step back and en-

courage other first responders to put themselves first. To fill your own cup so full you can pour onto others versus draining yourself empty and having nothing left to give.

Here are a few ideas to help you prioritize your own self-care and mental health:

**1** Schedule 10-15 minutes each day to have to you. This can be first thing in the morning or right before you go to bed. You can find silence and be present in the moment, read a book, or do any other activity you can find some peace in doing.

**2** Journal. Any time of day is great for a mind dump. To get things out on paper that are directly on your mind.

**3** Meditate. Meditation helps to bring you to the present moment without thinking forward or behind. I recommend using the Calm app. It will guide you through how to start. (If you'd like a free trial, respond to this email and I can send one over to you.)

**4** Go for a walk. Getting outside in nature and in the sunlight has so many great

benefits. You're getting in movement, you're getting in vitamins from the sun, and it can be very relaxing.

These are just a few ideas to help get you started. Self-care can look different for everyone, but ultimately it can be anything that relaxes you, gives you joy or gives you peace.

If this resonates with you, I would love to hear from you!

Stay safe out there,  
Coach Monica 🌍

Monica Eaton Crawford is the owner/CEO of Five-0 Fierce and Fit which creates online nutrition and fitness programs designed to help female first responders lose fat, gain strength and take back their confidence in 90 days because "your family depends on you to be fit for duty." Using her six-year Oklahoma law enforcement experience along with her 15-year background in fitness and nutrition she helps female first responders reach their full potential in life and career. Look her up on Instagram @five0.fierce.and.fit.



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# The Journey

By Darci Werner



“Back to normal” is how a recent email read. I chuckled to myself after reading the line. Normal? What is that? Civil servant families do not have “normal” in their day-to-day lives. At least that was my experience as a police family for twenty-two years.

Our journey began on a single day. The day our son was born was the same day my husband tested for a local department. He was already serving as a reserve deputy for the county. That day began a career for him which encompassed the entire family with schedules that constantly rotated. Non-family friendly shifts making relationships a challenge and the hardest one, being on duty 24-7 when you are the police chief of a small community.

We were always on guard; always watching our backs. Is this a friend or foe? Our family encountered many distressing encounters from notes left on the door “to get out of town,” a teenager driving a four-wheeler past our home several times repeatedly to annoy us, our house egged and even a volatile drug addict deciding he could just waltz right into our home because he wanted to talk. One of the most emotionally painful was a dinner at a firehouse to celebrate a holiday. As we sat down at the table, the firefighter couples already seated stood up and all moved to another table.

Due to some of the people’s actions and reactions to an officer in their midst, we were reluctant to hire a babysitter, only eating at trusted restaurants and always careful of any location that would cause someone to destroy our reputation, even when my husband was off duty. There were supporters, too. People that appreciate the duty and mindset involved in keeping them and their own families safe. They were the beacons of light that kept us sane.

Parenting is a full-time job from the onset. Add a police officer parent and the entire mix of emotions, with worries; complications get tumbled into the mix. When an arrested drug addict threatened to harm our son, he was never left alone. Some form of protection device was on hand at all times. My husband carried his concealed weapon and I had a Mace stick that never left my hand. Toward the end of the tour, another threat from an arrested person had me working toward a concealed weapons permit to include in my parenting arsenal. Then the teen years hit, where the complaints from our son included how he was never invited to anyone’s house because his dad is a cop.

Having a father as a cop wasn’t all bad for him. He actually wanted to follow in his footsteps. He grew up having a real

patrol car to pretend play. Due to budget cuts, my husband volunteered to do routine maintenance on the squad cars, therefore, one was always sitting in the garage. He rode alongside him in parades, riding shotgun and handing out D.A.R.E items, or badge stickers.

As the wife, there were many days on my knees praying for safety from storms when no man or beast should have been out. Yet they were! So he had to rescue them from ditches and take them to safety. News of bank robbers and an officer shot are the worst for any law enforcement spouse. Is it him? Pleading for some phone call to confirm or deny the thoughts running through my brain. Then facing the guilt of gratitude that it was someone else, who now has to face this pain among their own family. A constant stream of people coming by or calling and all having a concern that needed immediate attention even when he was off duty. They would become his priority and we would take a backseat.

We were proud of our police family. Even though only one wore a badge, all of us took on the duty of behind-the-scene support. I say “were” because that hat has been hung up, the duty belt disarmed and set aside. The badge and stripes from over the many years are now pinned in a shadow box. Just as this adventure began on a single day, so it also ended. On one day my husband retired, and the very next day our son graduated from college with a criminal justice degree.

It has not been easy to find normal after twenty-two years. It has not been easy to flip the switch and change a mindset that has been a daily process for so long. The job can be negative and therefore distrust slips in from time to time when there really is no need. The mental release of the job is slowly dissipating. Questioning the new purpose in your life when you now focus on yourself instead of others can be challenging. We are still not feeling normal. We are working on it. There are still mental, emotional and physical pounds to shed from the arsenal worn around the hips; the hunched shoulders to straighten from a weighted vest; stress to release from city government leaders or even from within the department. Each day taking a breath and moving one step at a time to find our “back to normal”.

*Darci Werner is a police wife residing in Province, Iowa. She thanks Blue Magazine for providing alternative topics for all who support law enforcement and is honored to share police family life stories.*



# A SAD TRAGEDY

By Deon Joseph



**B**efore activists and activated journalists spark flames here, I'm going to give my professional opinion on the shooting of a 15-year-old autistic teen.

My first thought is to offer my deepest condolences to his family. In their grief, I know there are no right answers anyone can give.

But for the rest of us, the facts based on what we have seen are important.

Contrary to many people's indoctrinations about cops, the vast majority of police contacts with the mentally ill, even violent ones, do not result in killings. I'm pretty much an expert on this. I work in the mental health capital of the world and dealt with thousands of people with mental illness in varied stages of crisis.

For those wondering why the officers didn't "De-escalate" and why mental health experts were not called instead:

In fairness to these officers, the individual did not appear to give them time to assess him. He just went on the attack. That's a key factor. If it were two mental health clinicians he charged at, they would run and call the police, because the situation was dangerous. They will not approach most people on the spectrum of mental illness when in a volatile state.

Even at mental health facilities, they have security and/or hospital police. Also, there is minimal access to potential weapons someone in crisis can harm others with.

I know many will be caught up in the emotionalism of the reporting.

"He's 15," "He's autistic" so automatically it's the cops' fault, right? That's your process, right? The truth is in this rare occurrence, the officers had no time to assess this as

they do in many others.

The truth is, officers responded to a call of a disturbance because someone was in fear for their safety. When they arrived, they were immediately charged by a male with a weapon that could cause injury or death.

It was later discovered that he was autistic. But based on the immediacy of his actions, the officers had no time to assess this. They had to act.

Whether the shooting was justified or not will be determined by experts. If the weapon used had the potential to seriously injure or kill anyone, that shooting could very well be justified, even though we all wish it never came to that.

Before you jump to conclusions, before Ben Crump and others exploit this young man and his family, think a bit more critically before you judge.

No, the young man wasn't a bad person. No, the officers were not trigger-happy and untrained. It was just a situation that got out of control before the officers could even make an attempt at de-escalation. A sad tragedy. 🌐

*Deon Joseph is a 28 year veteran of law enforcement in Southern California - 24 of those years working in the homeless community to create an environment conducive to change for those in recovery, as a Lead Officer. He's been recognized for his work locally and nationally, and news stories and documentaries surrounding his work in crime fighting and community relations, featured him. [www.deonjoseph.org](http://www.deonjoseph.org).*





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# In a Blink of an Eye

By Marty Katz

There is a term used in police work — in a blink of an eye — which often refers to how danger happens. For example, “Anything can happen in a blink of an eye,” or “That accident occurred in a blink of an eye.” To drive a point home, I’ve used this term many times in classes I’ve taught. It is a term that has instance recognition. Rookies need to hear about the dangers of their new profession, and the veterans must hear it to remind them not to become complacent.

After a 34-year law enforcement career, the term blink of an eye has taken on a new meaning. There is some truth to the fact that the moments are long, but the years are short. In a blink of an eye, I went from the interview process to get hired into law enforcement to my retirement party. Where did the time go?

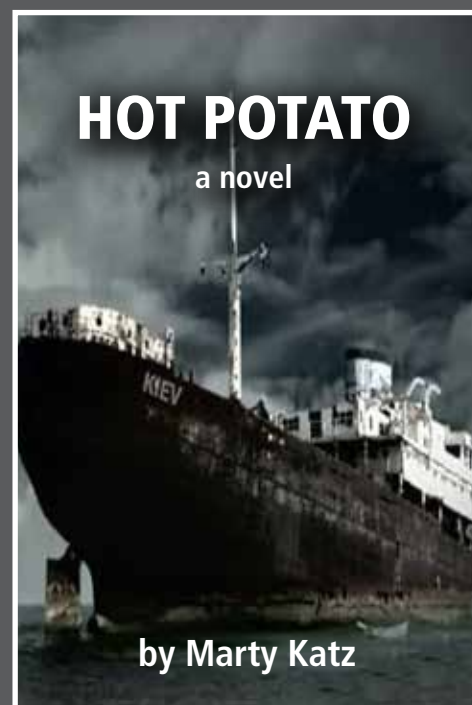
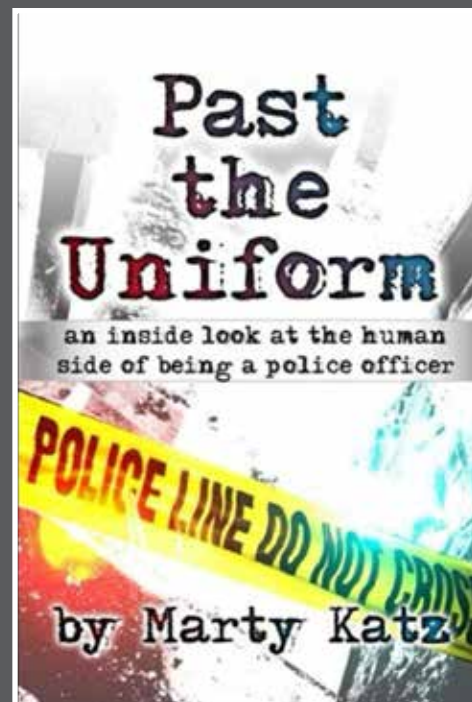
From the moment I decided that I would like a career as a police officer, everything I did seemed to take forever. During the hiring process of completing the application, waiting for the testing date, taking the written test, waiting for the results and then waiting for the physical testing date, nothing was ever quick. After the physical test, there was the polygraph test,

followed by a psychological one, followed by more interviews with a lot of waiting between each step of the process. Finally, I was hired and had to wait for the next academy class.

The academy took months, 720 hours of classes, testing mental and physical abilities, and waiting for that graduation day. I began my career walking a beat. My shift was eight hours of walking, talking, and handling calls and mounds of paperwork. Every shift seemed to last about a week. I walked in the snow, ran between the raindrops and sweated in the summer heat. I had to wait until there was an opening in a patrol car.

When I finally got a seat in a patrol car, I had to wait for the hot calls. Sometimes, I would find exciting things to fill the time, but for the most part, in the beginning, it was waiting until I was called.

When I decided to relocate to Florida from New Jersey, the entire process started again. The hiring process was a bit shorter but still took weeks. There was endless testing, but luckily, I only had to attend a shorter version of the police academy. As fate would have it, I had to wait until the class was scheduled.



---

## "The entire career is made up of periods of waiting for this or waiting for that."

As I gained experience — which, by the way, takes time — I wanted to transfer to other assignments. Some of my assignments were Field Training Officer, property crimes detective, SWAT, undercover narcotics detective and academy instructor — each came with its own brand of waiting. Waiting for the opening, waiting for someone to retire or taking the required classes was always some form of waiting.

Of course, there was also waiting for court — constantly waiting for court. In Florida, every case appears to be tried three times. First, there is the deposition, the defense's search to find out what you know and what you did. Second, there is the motion to suppress. Did you have all elements of the crime, and was everything obtained legally? Third is the trial itself. At each level, you are subpoenaed, and once you arrive, the waiting begins.

Each waiting period seems like it will never end, like standing in the rain at an accident scene. The hours just seem to hang in midair, in slow motion. For all those classes, a break every 50 minutes, standing around waiting for your turn at the firearms range, if it pertains to police work, then waiting is always included.

For some, there was the occasional disciplinary wait. Time goes slow when you are waiting to see the command staff, knowing it will not end well for you. Even minor meetings take their toll in the minutes running into hours, especially the waiting days before the meetings.

Then there is the dead time of investigations and stakeouts — long hours of doing nothing but waiting. Have you ever been assigned to a wire tape? That is like a slow motion moving slower. In other words, it appears that if it is related to this job, the minutes tick by slowly. Well, not if you are involved in a chase or a critical incident. That has the tendency to move quickly until the moment it is over, and then the endless paperwork, court, explanations or things even worse, such as getting injured on the job, which now creates a super-slow day. Usually, the wait at the hospital is not very long, not as long as others have to wait. The actual wait comes as the required paperwork must be completed before you finish your shift.

There is the wait for a promotional exam and then the wait for the list to be posted. The wait as the department moves until you finally get the nod.

Unfortunately, the ultimate wait is that of the funeral procession. I have attended far too many, and the wait for the pain to ease never really seems to end.

So, as you can see, the entire career is made up of periods of waiting for this or waiting for that.

The strange thing about all of this waiting is that it seems like I began this career just yesterday. It seems like yesterday I was excited about the upcoming entry test. It was like yesterday that I'd been nervous about completing that first application. Now, looking back, I wondered where the time went. It seems to have flown by,

and the years all melted together. I don't remember the change from being a 21-year-old man pinning on the badge for the first time to a 55-year-old man thanking everyone for attending my retirement party.

It seems like just the other day, I was learning how to shoot my handgun, write a report and shine my shoes. Now, I'm writing about all my memories since that day.

Take a moment to stop and think about each moment. No matter what you are doing — responding to calls, writing a report, cooling your heels outside the courtroom or waiting to get your ass chewed by the captain — at the time, it might seem forever, but at the retirement party, you will wish you had just a few more minutes of those times. 🌍

*Marty Katz is a retired sergeant with the Broward Florida Sheriff's Office. During his 34-year career, his assignments included FTO, SWAT, narcotics, crime suppression, and supervisor of recruitment, investigations, and patrol. Marty is a certified instructor, expert witness for Use of Force issues, and past Florida Chapter Director for the International Association of Ethics Trainers. In addition, Marty has trained with the Tokyo Metropolitan Riot Police and is a martial arts instructor. He is the owner of Crimewave Solutions, a training company for officer survival and common sense self-defense and the author of the books *Past the Uniform*, and *Hot Potato*.*





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# WAITING FOR THE OTHER SHOE TO DROP

By Chris Amos

Recently, videos went viral of two of NYPD's finest being assaulted by a large group of illegal aliens. The suspects were arrested and immediately released from custody. The firestorm that ensued resulted in the re-arrest of several of the suspects. They are currently in jail, pending their trials. That is unless they have been released a second time. Am I confident that justice will be served in this case? Not hardly.

I always thought the blindfold on Lady Justice represented an unbiased justice system in which, in theory, justice was to be served regardless of race, sex, nationality, religion, etc. I'm beginning to think I was wrong. It appears in recent years the purpose for the blindfold has become more of a kind of see nothing, hear nothing, say nothing, do nothing system of justice in which crimes can be caught on camera, smoking guns can be recovered and even confessions given, and yet little, if any, price is to be paid by the guilty. As one entrusted with the dangerous, ugly, at times messy work of enforcing the law, such a system can break an officer's or deputy's spirit, rendering him or her absolutely indifferent to "protecting and serving".

I'd like to share an observation and then two Biblical truths that I hope will bring a level of sanity and hope to you, the men and women on the front lines in this battle for justice.

First, an observation. I am amazed by your sense of duty, honor and service, or maybe it's just your need for a steady



paycheck, but whatever the reason, you continue to show up, stand up, and put up day after day, night after night, shift after shift. You show up at your respective department or agency despite the current state of insanity sweeping much of the country. You stand up for what's right, and just, and true despite the concerted effort to completely re-define what is right, just, and true. And you put up with all the garbage previously mentioned, day after day, night after night, shift after shift. Amazing, absolutely, unbelievably, mind-blowingly, amazing that you continue to do what you do!

As a pastor and retired police officer, let me try now to give you a Biblical perspective that I hope will bring a little sanity, peace, even encouragement as you strive do the impossible, under the most challenging of circumstances. Take hope in knowing God has the final say. He is not impressed nor persuaded by money, elections, special interests, politicians, district attorneys, or their woke policies.

As a young police officer, back in the late 1980s and '90s, I would get so angry as suspects would skate with a slap on the wrist, while their victims were left struggling to pick up the pieces and move on with their lives. All of that changed after I accepted Jesus Christ as my personal

Savior and Lord. God opened my eyes and mind to two great Biblical truths. The first filled me with tremendous gratitude, appreciation and humility. The second gave me a much-needed dose of peace.

What were these truths? First, and hear me on this friends, the Bible makes it clear that we have all sinned or broken God's law and as such we are all guilty. In other words, in God's eyes, we are in the same boat, spiritually speaking, as most of the knuckleheads we arrest as guilty and deserving of condemnation and punishment. The great news is God loves us so much He sent His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to pay the penalty of our sins [John 3:16] that we might experience the unearned, undeserved, gift of forgiveness and eternal life in Heaven. Simply put, Jesus jumped on the proverbial hand grenade intended for you and me. He died that we might live. That kind of unconditional love continues to blow my mind, 37 years later. One can't help but be filled with gratitude, appreciation and humility in light of God's love for us.

The second great truth is simply this: God is the final judge, and His judgment is holy, righteous, just and true. Though our current justice system is inundated with injustices and miscarriages of justice, this second truth assures us every wrong will be made right. I don't care who they are or how well-connected they may be, everyone will stand before God and give an account for his or her actions. Criminals may be able to evade justice

in New York City, Chicago, San Francisco, Austin, or a thousand other places but trust me, their victory over the justice system will be short-lived. The other boot will drop soon enough and when it does, they will find themselves answering for their actions; no exceptions. They will stand before the Lord of lords and King of kings, and might I add Judge of judges. Justice will be achieved.

So friends, keep doing that which is right, just, and true. God sees. God knows, and with God we can rest assured that righteousness, justice, and truth will have the final say, if not on this side of eternity, then most assuredly on the next.

See you at the finish line! 🏃

*Chris Amos is a retired officer and former spokesperson for the Norfolk Virginia Police Department. He is currently the pastor at Chr1st Fellowship Church in Norfolk. He is married for over 30 years and is the proud father of three children, two of whom are police officers. He serves as the volunteer Chaplain for Norfolk Police Dept. and Norfolk Sheriff's Office.*



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By Joel E. Gordon

**W**e have lost one of our own. Frequent BLUE Magazine contributing writer Wesley Wise passed away peacefully early on the morning of January 19, 2024. He was a wonderful husband to Margaret, father, grandfather, great-grandfather and friend to so many. He was a published author, and a well-respected law enforcement professional, earning the rank of Major within the Baltimore City Police Department. He was a coach and mentor to so many during his career of 36 years.

Wes retired in 2006 as the Police Commander of the city's 911 System. While recovering from a stroke in 2014, he wrote three books, all of which are available on Amazon.com:

- A Blue and White Life: Policing Baltimore in the 1970s & 1980s
- A Life in Blue
- Wise Musings: A collection of Essays

Wes also assisted in the self-publishing of fourteen books for other writers.

He was a prolific writer of books, articles and Facebook posts and was never one to mince words. He was a master of the art of writing, expressing his thoughts succinctly and devoid of double meaning. His teachings and opinions were always well thought out with logical thought behind them. Who would have known that his final published article in the BLUE Magazine would be titled IN THE END, where Wes reflected on a life well-lived while encouraging us all to live life to its fullest. But that was Wes, on-point and timely.

A life well-lived and an impactful legacy that will be remembered serving as an example to all. His written words left behind will be everlasting. He is missed. May he rest in eternal peace. 🌊

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