

Officer Involved Spouse
*Sharing experiences to reach the heart of
your law enforcement marriage*

By Linda Seitz, retired LEO

Transcribed interview with husband,
Brian Seitz, retired
Captain - 31 years on the job

WEEK 6
The Police Culture

*“People sleep peaceably in their beds at night only because rough men
stand ready to do violence on their behalf.”*
— George Orwell

An Investigation of My Own

This chapter was the culmination of an “interview” I had with Brian. I really wanted some verbiage that came from his point of view. Of course, this was the perfect opportunity for him to speak about the academy, the life of the brotherhood, family and marriage, the importance of mentoring and the impact of the support units in a police department. Enjoy...

Academy Training

Before I entered the police academy, I had no concept of what it would be like. I knew it would be physical, but I really didn't think it would be that big of a deal. I was young and figured it would be sort of like a formal business environment where I knew I would get yelled at a little bit, but I just didn't think about it too deeply at the time.

Police academies are all different. Some are high stress, some are no stress, some have a business-like environment and some have a college-like environment. The Los Angeles Police Academy, where I attended in 1987, is now more like a college environment, but long ago when I was there, it was a high-stress academy.

This type of high-stress academy really sets you up to fail, but I mean that in a good way. I know it may sound a little sadistic, but every single person in that type of academy class, on multiple occasions is going to get caught doing something wrong and failing, even if the instructors have to make that happen. They will punish you either individually and sometimes collectively so that you feel everything from peer pressure to shame. The instructor's job is to get you ready for what they know the streets will be like and how you'll be treated as a new officer.

The academy prepares you physically and academically, but there are some surprises along the way. Even if you go in as a marathon runner, the fastest in your class, you're still going to fail some running component as part of the process. Even if you're the smartest person in the world, they will manipulate it so that you fail in some small way to see how you deal with it. They want you to learn through failure.

You will always come out of the academy with a better perspective on a lot of things. You're with classmates who come from different backgrounds and have different worldviews. Some people have never left the neighborhood they grew up in and some may have traveled extensively, so the instructors must teach to all levels to encourage the growth of all recruits.

For me, the academy was definitely eye opening, but really the learning begins when you get out of the academy. Its like that Dwight D. Eisenhower quote, "In preparing for battle I have always found that plans are useless, but planning is indispensable." The academy just lays out a plan so you have training to fall back on when you are in a dire situation.

It is necessary for the academy to prepare you to survive. You learn the will to survive because they drill that into you. The message is, "No matter what you have to do to live, you do it." Even to the extent that if the situation is dire enough you end up taking a pencil out of your pocket to gouge out an eye to win the fight, you do it. You win. Every time, you need to win.

Sometimes you'll survive physically through tactics, sometimes you survive mentally through the uniformity they've built into the academy program. When you graduate from the academy, many of those recruits have the same body shape because of the uniformity of the work outs and the lack of time to eat junk. You wear the same sweats in the academy and eventually you wear the same uniform. They create and build you physically and mentally to be a uniformed officer because uniformity, when done well, is intimidating to a certain segment of society and that is good. Some parts of society need to have that respect for police officers, and the uniformity breeds that type of authority.

You're being molded into a police officer, that's it. You're not being molded into a police officer that can be a great dad or an awesome husband - because that wouldn't serve the need.

You adapt to survive. You tactically survive. You learn to avoid difficult situations on the street by recognizing commonly dangerous scenarios and avoiding them.

The confusion occurs when you get into the political arena of police work and all of a sudden they're telling you that you can't "make your own choice" to survive. Administration and society both begin to agree that it wouldn't be in your best interest if you pulled out the pencil to gouge an eye, even if your life did depend upon it. This becomes confusing when you've been wired to survive, yet also wired to respect your chain of command and to serve the citizens. There are some mixed messages when you begin police work. But, in the long run, the academy is really training you to use your own intelligence. They are building you up to be the person they can trust to do the job of an officer and to recognize how and when to make decisions that help you survive.

My academy class was made up of so many different personality types, and you had to learn how to get along with all of them. Some were slightly officious, some obnoxious and others were more easy going or even shy. This same personality type seems to follow them into the job. You see these guys in all different stages of their career, and some of them can really stand out as being "badge heavy". This job is set up for that. You're in your mid-twenties and all of a sudden you're an all powerful officer, dealing with people twice your age and telling them how to handle their affairs, how to raise their children and how to be a better husband

when you haven't yet experienced those things yourself. You take short cuts and come off gruff as a young officer, when really you should be setting your sights on gaining wisdom. This same experience can be seen at home as well. Gruff at first, then learning the fine art of easing up.

Family Life

As far as family life is concerned. I wasn't that deep of a thinker when I went through the academy. I was 22 years old at the time and had just proposed to Linda when I graduated. I had a dad who was a police officer while I was growing up, so I kind of watched how he handled himself with my mom and my brother and I. I mostly imitated how he was as a family man.

What my dad and I both did, that is not really recommended, is that we kept many of the work stories at work. We didn't share a whole lot and for whatever reason, I thought it would be a good choice to continue that pattern. I learned not too much later that it harmed our marriage a bit, Linda was never fully aware of the stuff I had been dealing with at work because I chose to only share with the guys. For the most part, I feel like I was successful - and looking at the 31 year marriage we have to date, we eventually learned how to communicate through it all. I began to share some stories periodically and she agreed not to be offended, scared or upset by it all. We each had to work on our own way of listening and speaking in order for this type of agreement to settle well for both of us.

In speaking about the family life of an officer, marriages and families do face an incredible challenge. We always say the toughest family lives are those of preachers, teachers and cops. All of those careers nudge you into caring for other people more than you care for your own family. These careers take you away from home more often and when you are at home, you bring the work home with you - tangibly or in your thoughts. This doesn't allow you to fully focus on your family, and they end up suffering because of it.

Specifically, police marriages are up against a few things. Culture tells people to get married for the wrong reasons (mostly physical) and then the only acceptable plan that culture will offer when things go sideways is that of a divorce. The very clear message is that you should focus on "making yourself happy" again. Unfortunately, it's too easy to break the ties of marriage and family when you don't have any kind of accountability in place. The police departments are not set up or even conducive to working on family or marriage relationships or helping to create the tight bonds that encourage you to stay together.

Another issue is that there is so much training required of the officers that they don't have time to hardly be cops anymore and it's very frustrating. This is dependent upon the state in which you are working, but in California there are many demands to complete extensive certificated training. When you consider how much time you are away for schools and how much time is spent at work, it is apparent that not much time is left for nurturing the family. As a cop, if you're not at work, you're sleeping, working out, eating or getting ready. This doesn't leave room for making your marriage stronger. Which is a bummer, because you need a strong marriage to get through this type of career with the understanding, flexibility and trust that is required.

Then, there is that independence. This job has a certain amount of independence that breeds resentment on the home front. I can remember eating out almost every meal and not wanting to share that fact with Linda because she usually ate the remainder of the peanut butter and jelly sandwich or the last of the mac and cheese that the kids left behind. I had a freedom that

she didn't have. I could have never done her job as a stay-at-home parent, though, never in a million years. I was not built to change diapers and wipe noses all day and she willingly did all of that and more, and I appreciated that so much.

But, seriously, cops aren't home many nights and depending upon the area you work, you could come across either the dregs of society or be interacting with someone who is happy to engage you into conduct that can be unaccounted for. Morally ambiguous people who love the uniform and a cop with tons of freedom. It's so easily accessible, kind of like leaving candy on the bottom shelf for a little kid. Most officers are masters of self control and manage their lives well but a good number struggle. Many have a theory that cops are adrenaline junkies and crave that fix. One way to get that fix is to go after the opposite sex. They may also get their adrenaline fix with a lifestyle that would include risky sports, fast cars, spending sprees, gambling and substance abuse - just to name a few.

It is during these tempting times that keeping a marriage together gets dicey. You feel alienated from your family because they don't understand you and end up feeling isolated or lonely at home, so you head toward a fix - and these temptations are so easy to engage in. Hey, society tells you to be happy, go get your thrills for a bit, so why not? The brotherhood of cops will surely cover for you so it's no big deal.

It's not a career that generally breeds good moral conduct as far as family is concerned. Many jobs follow the flow of culture. The career of an officer is no different, it flows downstream from culture, too. Let's take the sense of humor, for example. Cops develop a weird sense of humor at work for the sheer need of survival. Sometimes, when they bring that sense of humor home, it's inappropriate and their family just doesn't "get it" or doesn't want to respond to it - hoping it will just go away. The worst part about this is when the officer recognizes that nobody understands him at home. Not being understood creates the action of turning inward. He wants to be with people who understand, and generally those people are at work.

I also had my dad mentor me through the trials and tribulations of police work. He was an LAPD officer beginning back in 1968 and continued on into the mid 1990's, so he could school me on being a husband and a dad, but also speak into my life as an officer. I could joke with him and he understood. I could run things by him and he would either say I was right on track with my thinking, or would check me and let me know my choices were off.

Back to the Brotherhood

An easy analogy for this "police brotherhood" is to compare it to a sports team. You've got a coach and they bring the team together. You participate in practice and training together. You experience ups and downs together and become like your own little family. Police work is like a family, but even stronger sometimes. You are placed in situations where you're literally saving your partner's life or vice versa and that creates a stronger bond than most people have ever experienced. This bond encompasses all of the cops you work with, but then goes further and even extends to the boys in blue that you don't even know just by the fact that they're wearing the uniform and are willing to sacrifice themselves for you. That's what cops do, they would sacrifice their life for you - even if you're a total stranger. They all have the same mentality and the same mission, and that equals a very strong and almost unbreakable bond.

Unfortunately, this can breed some protectiveness that can get to an unhealthy level. I mean, if an officer is numbing with the bottle, cheating on his wife, or leading his life in a risky manner, other officers will most likely cover for him. You have empathy for one another. You know what they've been through. This by no means is recommended, but it happens. It happens all over

society as well, but officers are willing to do more for each other because of that strong bond. This protectiveness can be a sort of security blanket that the officer would rather turn to instead of turning to their own family. Unfortunately, this breeds bitterness and resentment at home and I believe it is why you see so many divorces within the police force.

The level of care for your fellow officer swells to an almost unhealthy level. You care immensely for your fellow officer and there are tangible reasons for this. When they arrive at a bad call, you're there. You wait to see their resilience level.

Some officers get crushed right away by what they've seen, heard, smelled, touched. But, some can go their whole careers and not be affected much. Either way, if you've been an officer for more than five minutes, you've had an experience that has shocked or surprised you, and you've had a fellow officer there for you. You may have had an experience that has left you with a perception of being out of control and you can only let your guard down with those who were with you on scene. Control is the cornerstone of being on the police force, as you've been taught from the time you were in the academy to dominate and control, manage the scene, fix it and move on to the next call. Conversely, losing control is not acceptable, and you feel personally protective regarding how you've acted and reacted. You don't feel like your family would understand any of this, and this is where the "blue bond" becomes stronger than glue.

Choosing a Mentor

I think being a healthy officer really depends upon whether or not they have the ability to process their trauma with someone. This is why a "Trauma Support Unit" or "Peer Support Unit" in a department is so very crucial. When a traumatic call or incident occurs, some cops display a "machismo" sort of attitude - talking to their buddies over a beer and making light of it. They just kind of bury the trauma and they don't give themselves a chance to "undo" it. You know what they say when you bury something that's still alive? It just starts smelling really bad. That built up trauma can haunt them. They really need to be educated in the realm of PTSD and the fact that it hangs on sometimes causes continued personal harm.

This is why those support units are so important. If you don't have one in your department, then seek out a mentor. I don't mean someone with the same level of maturity as you. Seek out an older guy. Someone who displays the kind of life you respect and admire.

There's always that older officer. It's funny - that older guy is the one that the younger officers respect because he handles his calls and gets the job done, but management occasionally tears him down because he doesn't produce as much as he did when he was younger. There's such a mixed message. Management thinks he's a slug, but the younger officers know that his presence brings a positive impact to the department.

Appreciate that older officer. Appreciate his maturity, admire his family and ask him questions. Welcome him on your squad. Having a mix of ages on your squad can help to mature the younger officers. They watch and learn how he handles people with his verbiage and how he can manipulate situations to extinguish a fight and so on.

Management might be weary of this older officer because they are concerned about the data and response time. They want more stops and more arrests, which can reduce crime, but they don't consider there may be something more this officer is bringing. There is, unfortunately,

no way to measure the fact that this officer can just go into a neighborhood and handle situations with a simple chin shake and some eye contact. These simple gestures are what community police work is all about. These older officers should be respected for their experience, and sought out for their knowledge. They can be a deep well of wisdom for you.

Officer Support

Some departments are really dry in this area. Twenty years ago, nobody talked about what trauma can do to a cop. Nobody was there to help you walk through a marriage crisis. If you were involved in a traumatic incident, they would tell you to go talk to your wife or someone who can identify with you. If you were in a marriage crisis, they may tell you to seek out a friend that you trust. That's difficult to do, because when you're mentally traumatized, you don't likely seek out wise counsel on your own.

There is a Trauma Support Unit in the department I came from. I spent the last twenty years creating and tweaking it in order to better serve the officers. I have worked with two prominent police psychologists along the way who have both been an integral piece to making it run properly. I thank Dr. Larry Blum and Dr. Gina Gallivan for their care and service to officers and their hearts to continue the pace that we asked of them.

We've expected much from them, but in turn they, and other police psychologists, have been an integral part of normalizing counseling for cops and working in the beginning stages of taking away the stigma that is often attached to an officer receiving this type of help. I believe we are finally turning a corner nationwide in safely debriefing an officer after a traumatic event because of these caring individuals.

Trauma/Peer Support

The Trauma Support Unit at our department was developed and overseen by police psychologists. The men and women that are chosen to work on the Trauma Support Team are usually those that have experienced traumatic incidents themselves, in the line of duty. With every critical incident, the officer(s) are voluntarily debriefed and interviewed for the purpose of identifying whether or not trauma has set in. We also make them aware of the signs and symptoms they should be aware of as they move forward into the next few days. If necessary, those officers are referred to the police psychologist for a more personal interview and assessment before returning to work.

Spousal Support

The Support of Officers' Spouses (SOS) group in my city (Huntington Beach, CA) was formed by my wife, Linda Seitz and another officer's wife, Kirsten Knorr. It came into existence a few weeks after the Dallas, Texas shootings in 2016.

Many of the younger officers' wives were afraid because the news media made it seem like all officers were now targets. They didn't want their officer's to go to work, and I immediately recognized that this could be a problem for our department. I called Dr. Gina Gallivan and invited her to lead a meeting for the officers and family members from our department. We met

and welcomed many people into that meeting where Dr. Gallivan gave the statistics of how the job of an officer was statistically safe compared to some other, more dangerous jobs.

The statistics were lost on the people in attendance that day, though, as the wide-eyed and shell-shocked family members were just replaying the events on the news and fearful that something would happen to their beloved officer. As the meeting came to an end, Linda and her co-leader were already planning for an official meeting of the S.O.S group, and this is when the Support of Officers' Spouses group was formed. They began meeting monthly to cover many topics that addressed the needs of law enforcement marriage and family.

These types of groups, when done well, offer the support of fellow spouses that is helpful for the family in every stage of the officer's career. Meetings can consist of sharing topics from finances to PTSD and everything in between. Whether meeting together in person, having online group meetings or creating a private social media page to share information regarding concerns, current events or officer safety status in the event of a critical incident. No matter how you run a spousal or family support group, the benefit is huge for the comfort of the officer's loved ones.

Weekly Review

We covered many topics during this chapter, as we will with each chapter. Please see below and rate the areas that may be causing conflict in your marriage. Also, be aware that these questions are for you to answer regarding yourself. A good marriage requires two healthy individuals, so now is the time to take a look at yourself. This prevents you from looking solely upon your spouse as the problem of the marriage.

What we focus on grows, so if you only focus on the negative emotions tied to your marriage - that is what will grow in your mind. We want you to take this opportunity to grow yourself and find out what you can change to help the marriage get healthy again.

On a scale from 1-10, is this topic creating a problem in your marriage?
(Measurement: 1=not a problem at all, 10=yes, this is a big problem)

OFFICER ONLY:

I've never discussed the intricacies of the police academy with my spouse _____

I'm a different person now than I was before the academy _____

My unit needs me, so I will drop everything to help them _____

I have more freedom at work than I do at home _____

I've never sought out counseling or trauma support after an incident _____

It would make me uncomfortable if my wife was in a spouse/family support group _____

SPOUSE ONLY:

I have an interest in the details of the academy_____

My officer's behavioral transition from civilian to sworn has been a struggle_____

We can talk openly about family vs work priorities_____

I am jealous regarding my officer's daily freedoms_____

I would like to be involved in a spouse/family support group_____

Take a look at anything marked "5" or above. These are things you should be concerned about and maybe even set up a meeting with your spouse to talk about how to make some changes for the health of your marriage. We realize that communication may not be great right now, so proceed with caution.

TIP: When discussing these answers with your spouse, use words like, "I believe I need to be aware of, or I need to work on this or that..." in order to alleviate the temptation of defending oneself and creating a fight. Or, create a new rhythm by stating, "I'm frustrated, but I do agree we need to talk about this or that, how about we schedule a meeting in 30 minutes?"

Both of these acknowledge that there is a problem, and both ways of speaking allow the anxiety, fear and anger to subside a bit before communicating.

Words of Wisdom

If your department does not have a **Trauma or Peer Support Unit**, it would be a great first step to seek out information and present it to your administration for further review.

www.helpforpolice.com
Trauma Support Team Training
Dr. Gina Gallivan, Ph.D.

www.calibrepress.com
Helpful articles on peer/trauma support and information
on debriefing critical incidents.

www.policeone.com
Many resources and multiple topics
regarding the support of the police officer's job,
home and family

If your department does not have a **Spousal Support Group or Family Unit**, it would be beneficial to the health of your officers' home lives to begin a group like this. It really takes just a few spouses with a matched passion regarding the health and wellness of the officer's marriages and families to get this started. You will find more information on these topics by searching these links:

www.theiacp.org
New publication titled,
“How to Start a Law Enforcement Family Support Group”
Helpful insights and considerations regarding new groups.

www.peaksandvalleys.life
We offer many PDF’s to print out the easy step-by-step process for
spousal support groups, an informative blog and
additional workbooks for marriage growth and support.

www.lawenforcementfamilysupport.org
Helpful support links for officer family life.

www.copsalive.com
Police Wellness Project

Homework

Study yourself, your marriage, your family and your department. If any of the above groups would serve your police community and family well, take steps to deliver information to those who can make these types of decisions.

Use the resources listed to gain knowledge and help in beginning some type of support within your department. These groups start small and grow slowly, but they are a welcomed support in time of concern.

****ADDITIONAL NOTE:****

(09/05/20) This chapter is given to you with the freedom of using it for your personal and marital growth as a Law Enforcement couple. It would give me great pleasure if you purchased the book in it’s entirety so that you may read, study and walk through the seven week process together to nurture and heal your LEO marriage. You can order this directly from our website, www.PeaksAndValleys.life which will give you the ability for an immediate download or an option to purchase through Amazon. Either way, I would appreciate a review on the Amazon page so that this type of information can get noticed as a healthy, counseling-driven, solid publication to refer other LEO marriages to so that the bank of resources can continue to grow!

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