

**GASTON COUNTY SILVER ARTS**

**Literary Arts Entry**

**TITLE**

**THE LIGHTER SIDE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT**

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## THE LIGHTER SIDE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT

### *DISCLAIMER*

*There is a popular misconception that law enforcement officers are born with a citation book in one hand and a coffee cup in the other. Obviously that is not quite correct as it would be rather difficult to write a citation with one hand while holding a hot cup of coffee in the other one!!*

*Now before anyone breaks out the tar and feathers, this writing is in no way meant to be disparaging of any law enforcement agency or personnel. Times change and law enforcement must evolve and adapt to the requirements of an ever changing world. However, one thing still holds true. A little humor injected at the right time and right place can sometimes deescalate a situation, even if it only changes the mind set of an individual, thus allowing him or her to view things from a slightly different perspective.*

To say that people become involved with law enforcement in many different ways and for many different reasons would be quite an understatement. Take my family for example.

Historically speaking, quite a few members of my family have or had been involved with law enforcement in one capacity or the other spanning several generations. At one time we actually did have some more distant relations who resided rather deep within the hills and backwoods of both Tennessee and Kentucky. Now this was long before my time and I have no actual knowledge of same, however it was rumored that they had, in one capacity or the other, provided job security for law enforcement officers from both states for a good many years.

Moving ahead a few generations, my father was a full time minister as well as a deputy sheriff and, on occasion, hired out as a personal body guard. He only stood about 5' 7" and weighed about 165 pounds but, make no mistake about it, Pop loved to fight and he could be hell on wheels if the situation called for it. I can recall a time when ..... well ... perhaps I should save that one for a later date.

*Regardless of how green or mature an officer is, he or she needs to be very careful before jumping into a situation with guns blazing (used in the metaphorical sense here). No two calls are ever exactly alike, just as no two people are exactly alike and officers have to remain flexible and open minded.*

Nothing in law enforcement is one hundred percent predictable. However, over the years I was able to determine that most people will fall into one of the three general categories. Being able to deduce which category an individual will fit into quite frequently gave some insight as to how a given situation should be handled.

1. Those that realize the need for, and appreciate the roll that law enforcement officers play.
2. Those that realize the need for law enforcement officers but would prefer not to have one for a neighbor.
3. The final, but not necessarily the smallest nor least vocal of the three, would be the one composed of individuals who were greatly concerned about officer welfare and felt that all law enforcement officers should forthwith and in aggregate be relocated to an area with a MUCH warmer climate.

*As a reader, I despise having to wade through long boring biographies. However, to the best of my knowledge, no one is born carrying a law book and wearing a badge and side arm (Imagine if they were...?!?) so the remainder of this writing will be devoted to the metamorphoses of an average Joe (my self) into a law enforcement officer and I will try to make it as less painful on my readers (assuming that I have any) as possible.*

As previously stated, I was the late bloomer on the family tree as far as law enforcement was concerned. In fact I was in my early thirties before I had even thought about it as an occupation. As far back as I can remember my goal in life had been to play professional baseball, hopefully pitching for the Detroit Tigers. However, as some believe, all humans have a predetermined path to follow and, no matter

how convoluted the route, it will eventually lead us to where we are supposed to be. As it turned out, my fast ball peaked well below the sonic level and my curve ball frequently didn't, so the only glimpse I ever had of Tiger Stadium was the infrequent times Detroit home games were televised in our broadcast area.

Following that I tried my hand at soldering but a short vacation over in the 'Nam pretty much removed the military from my short list. After that I tried working in a cotton mill (too dusty), selling shoes (no sale, no commission), service advisor for an automobile dealership (dealership went out of business), machine shop (long on hours but short on pay).

Somewhere amidst all of this I even decided to try my hand at motocross racing. (Managed to "win" one broken collar bone, three broken ribs and one fourth place trophy).

Following this I tried my hand at truck driving for a few years, which surprisingly turned out to be a fairly decent job which provided a few perks. I hired on as a short haul driver and was guaranteed forty hours pay per week whether the truck rolled or not and the pay was decent. Once in awhile I would have to make a long haul with a delivery deadline which required being away from home for a day or three. Not exactly a perk but at time and a half for over 40, the extra pay always came in handy. Additionally, with all expenses being paid and my having been a K\*C junkie at the time, more than a few chicken bones found themselves flying out the window during those long hauls.

Unfortunately, all good things do come to an end and as business slacked so did my runs along with the accompanying pay check and it wasn't long before I once again found myself in the unemployment line. However it was quite different this time. Besides being a happily married family man, I also had a first and second mortgage along with all the other "perks" a marriage brings to the table.

Reality can be quite harsh at times!

*Now I have never held much stock in the theory of predestination. However, with my family's historical involvement with law enforcement .....*

As was previously stated, my father was a deputy sheriff who was known and well respected by most of the local police departments and was actually on a first name speaking basis with the home town Chief of Police. Call it fate or simply a full blown case of conspiracy, (never was able to locate that particular statute in any of the law books) it was about this time when the Chief and my father decided that I needed to find a new and more permanent form of employment. Call it fate, or simply coincidence, the Chief just happened to have an opening for a third shift dispatcher and the two of them figured I would make a good fit for that position. A few months later, the department had an opening for a field officer and it came as no great surprise when the Chief said that my father thought I would be a good candidate for the position. (I never did find that confounded statute!)

Shortly after that I found myself enrolled in the Basic Law Enforcement Training program or B.L.E.T. as it is more commonly known.

Looking back, it is my qualified opinion that potential B.L.E.T. candidates should be screened for masochistic tendencies and, should said candidates be found lacking, he or she should be immediately disqualified. Additionally, a few new courses should be added to the curriculum, starting with Psychiatry, followed by Marriage Counseling, Conflict Resolution, Baby Sitting, Shape Shifting, Mind Reading, and ending with the Ability To Determine Just How Deeply He or She Has Stepped Into "IT" based on the shade of red in a supervisors face.

Now, I AM NOT one to brag on himself (except when a realistically new opportunity presents itself of course) and, seeing as I do feel this to be one of my greater accomplishments in life, I feel that it is my sworn duty and obligation to take this opportunity to reveal the fact that I did finish at the very top of my B.L.E.T. class.

I will not elaborate in depth on this particular incident because it was not one of my finer moments. However it is a pertinent stage in my development so I will touch on it briefly.

On this particular date and time I was riding with the Lieutenant when we responded to a possible domestic violence call which ended up turning violent almost instantly. Upon entering the residence the Lieutenant was immediately attacked by an irate male subject and truthfully, I had no idea how to respond as the scuffle was confined to an area too small for a third person to enter. It was about this time that the female subject who had originally placed the call came walking into the room brandishing a hand gun, at which time I heroically responded,

**“LIEUTENANT, SHE’S GOT A GUN!”**

The Lieutenant, still engaged in what appeared to be mortal combat, irately responded,

**“WELL GET IT!”**

Not too long after that incident I was given my first solo, a suspicious vehicle call. It went a little better than the first call in that there were no fisticuffs nor firearms involved. I was able to locate the vehicle shortly after the call came in and my only mistake on this call was, in my excitement after making the stop, I had not engaged the parking brake nor had I taken the vehicle out of gear. However, once again the fates intervened and I was able to leap back into the patrol car, just barely avoiding a rear end collision with the suspect vehicle – which as it turned out, and I kid you not – was occupied by two elderly ladies going door to door trying to sell magazines.

Suffice it to say that, while there were other such painful incidents during the acclimation period, they do not need telling in this narrative so I will fast forward a few years to a later chapter in my development.

*Back in the day, law enforcement was much like the military in that everything was done pretty much by the manual and officers did not have much leeway. A slight divergence from protocol brought a reprimand and, well ... suffice it to say that almost everything WAS done by the book ..... except when it wasn't.....*

Stress will always be a by product of the profession and officers that make a career out of law enforcement will sometimes come up with some very odd ways of coping with it which, by coincidence, I have chosen to include in this narrative..

Imagine if you will, during the early AM hours you have stopped by the station for a few minutes.

After checking in with the dispatcher and downing a cup of coffee (or two) you are ready to hit the streets again. You reach for the door handle then quickly let go of it, uttering a few choice words that should never be repeated in church as you wipe the sticky goo from your fingers.

***Vasalined Again!***

Regardless of how diligent an officer is, sometimes switching from days to nights can be a real problem and lack of sleep will take its toll. Imagine if you will, it is around 5:00 AM and you have made a half dozen trips around town. No calls have come in and there are no vehicles in sight when you pull up to a red light. Inadvertently you have closed your eyes for just a second. Upon opening them you see that the light has turned green and a glance in the rear view reveals four or five other vehicles sitting behind you.

What do you do? You do the obvious. Hit the blue light, make a quick left turn then disappear around the first corner you come to!

Not all incidents are that easily resolved however and there is one thing an officer has to always keep in mind. While there is no way you can remember every person that you encounter in the line of duty, you can bet your sweet abdominal posterior region that the vast majority of those encountered will never forget you.

With that having been said, we will move ahead to another early morning encounter with a slightly different outcome. Again you are out on late night patrol when you notice a vehicle being operated somewhat erratically. Suspecting that the driver may be impaired you pull the vehicle over and upon approaching same, you smell a slight odor of alcohol at which time, you ask the driver to step out of the vehicle. Unfortunately, it has been a long night and your coordination is slightly reduced. As you are attempting to demonstrate how the suspect should walk the white line, you stumble slightly, stepping off of the line before you can regain your balance. The suspect suddenly laughs out loud and quips,

**“Hell man, you’re drunker than I am!”**

Discretion being the better part of valor you do the obvious. To insure that said suspect arrives home safely, you follow him to his residence which is only some fifty odd yards from where you made the stop.

A few days later, while working foot patrol on main street, you encounter the driver again. This time he has obviously already spotted you and stands waiting as you approach. You take a few more steps and come to an abrupt halt, not knowing what to expect as he steps out in front of you.

“Sir, I just saw you and wanted to thank you for giving me a break the other night. I promise you won’t have to worry about me again.”

Not much left to say, he shakes your hand and walks away, leaving you to realize just how different such an encounter could have turned out.

A few years later I had made Sergeant and was working the night shift with two other officers when I received a call from one of the officers saying saying that he had something to show me. We agreed on a meeting place and a third officer showed up shortly afterwards.

As the first officer approached me, I saw that he had a trap door wooden box under his arm.

Now I had seen something fairly similar to this before and a pretty good idea of what was coming so I played along as he kept coming closer. When he was about an arms length from me he asked if I had ever seen a mongoose before?

I replied in the negative at which time he sprung the trap door and I was struck in the chest by some sort of stuffed furry critter traveling slightly under the speed of sound. Having correctly guessed what was coming, I sprung **MY** trap by falling back against the hood of my vehicle, groaning and clutching my chest as I rolled to the ground at which time the perpetrator turned a chalky shade of white as he grabbed me by the shoulders while shouting,

“Sarge!”, “Sarge!” “Hey man it was just a joke!!”

I let the scene play out to the point where I thought he was getting ready to start administering CPR, at which time I could not hold it back any longer and came up off the ground grinning from ear to ear. It was about this time that the third officer rolled up on the “crime” scene and the three of us had another good laugh.



Dark humor? Absolutely! Against Regulations? Probably! But make no mistake about it, we finished the remainder of the shift with no one even thinking about taking a nap.

*Space is somewhat limited here but no article on law enforcement would be complete without the inclusion of at least one actual "Dark and Stormy Night" incident. I have chosen this particular one as my way of expressing a heart felt "Thanks for everything!" to all personnel who work in essential, but seldom recognized law enforcement positions. That goes double for the Dispatchers who work hand in hand with those of us who have been, are, or someday will be crazy enough to want to be law enforcement officers.*

Now if you will, try to see this through the eyes of a replacement dispatcher who has been called in because the regular night shift dispatcher had to leave due to an unrelated emergency. After signing in and having checked on all officers she heads back to the Sergeant's office to pick up some paperwork.

Upon opening the door and entering the office, she suddenly finds herself face to beak with a huge, extremely irate hawk that is standing on top of the typewriter, wings spread wide apart, very loudly expressing his displeasure in no uncertain terms!

As it was, the hawk had been wounded earlier in the day and a rescuer had brought it to the police department in a box. Unfortunately, no one had told it was going to be the next morning before anyone from Wildlife could come by. In the interim, guess who had inherited the hawk?!?

