

In The Line of Fire

A Police Officer's Story...

Officer James Michael Taylor's day started out the same as any other. Going through the normal routine of getting dressed (although his dress was a little different than your average person). He put on a bulletproof vest, a duty belt that includes: a Glock 40 handgun, mace, flashlight, baton and handcuffs. That normal day turned out to be a near fatal one.

Officer Taylor was assigned to the COPS/Task Force in Zone 1. On patrol, he encountered individuals he thought looked suspicious in the block of W. 7th Street. He called dispatch to give details of his intentions and approached the individuals. While checking I.D.'s for any warrants, he received a call from Officer C.R. Cusatti asking his location so he could assist if needed.

Both Officer Taylor and Officer Cusatti spoke to the individuals and at one point, one of them said they were there "hitting pipes" (smoking crack or dope). He asked

where the drugs came from and they replied, Pop's house. Both officers were familiar with Pop's. They had visited the house at least ten to fifteen times in regards to drug transactions and many complaints.

They decided to break contact with the individuals and pay Pop's a visit. Walking to the residence and entering the gate to the home, Officer Cusatti knocked on the front door. Pop's opened the door, letting the officers in. At that time, Officer Taylor observed a man approaching the house. He asked, "can I help you?" and the man replied, "I'm here to see Pop's." Officer Taylor asked for his driver's license. After checking it out, the man started breathing harder and at that point he knocked the license out of the Officer's hand and ran.

Officer Taylor gave chase and yelled out, "got one running"! Officer Cusatti, inside the residence, did not hear his cry. As the Officer reached Laura Street, he was able to radio that he was in a foot chase with an

individual. Broadcasting his location to dispatch, he was able to catch up with the suspect. As Officer Taylor went through a fence and rounded into an alleyway, the suspect turned around and was reaching into his waistline with his right hand. At that instant, Officer Taylor saw the gun and tried to find cover, but there was none. They were about ten to fifteen feet away from each other when the suspect shot the Officer, hitting him under his left



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No Place to Stay...

The Oermann's Opened Their Hearts and Home

Pastor Erv Oermann was working in his study at Grace Lutheran Church when he received a phone call from Travelers Aid. (Travelers Aid was aware of the fact that Grace had a "pastor's pantry" for homeless people).

He was told that a young couple from Tennessee, who claimed to be "Lutheran", had arrived at the Greyhound Bus Station. They had 2 small children, ages 1-1/2 and 3 weeks old, had only a few dollars between them with no place to stay.

Pastor Oermann went to the bus station to see how he could help them. They introduced themselves as Grover and Denise Niznik. He took them to his church, giving them bags of groceries, and put them up in a motel.

That evening he told his wife, Betty Lou, about the couple, and her response was nothing but concern about the young mother not having her 6 week check-up. She suggested that they could stay in one of their spare bedrooms. The following day he brought the family to his home where they stayed for 2 weeks until Christmas Day when the Pastor and his wife were to leave on vacation. Betty Lou offered the young couple the use of her car while they were gone so Grover could look for employment.

Someone in the congregation volunteered to let them stay in their garage apartment. Later, people in the church found a more permanent and private home for them in a trailer park about a mile from the Pastor's home and paid for the winter's supply of fuel. Also, the church continued to help them financially and with gifts.

Betty Lou continued to let Grover use her car to go to work across town. After a month, it became too much of a burden for the Oermanns to share one car. Every Sunday morning Betty Lou would pick up Grover's wife and children, bringing them to her home to do laundry, taking them to the grocery store, and to church, where they received church bulletins, which indicated the Pastor's schedule.

On February 27, after Pastor Oermann taught a weekly class at church and had a counseling session, he returned home to find his dear wife of 35 years on the floor. She had been beaten, tied up, robbed, raped and

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Slowing Down the Revolving Door

By: David Stevens, FOP President

The "revolving door" of the criminal justice system has slowed in recent years, especially

in Jacksonville. In 1997, there were 47,000 bookings into the Pretrial Detention facility and of those thousands of arrests, 42% of them were repeat offenders. When you consider that it costs approximately \$2,000 to fingerprint, photograph and medically process an individual into the jail system, the cost of repeat

offenders to the tax payer is substantial.

Former Director of Corrections, John Rutherford, saw the "revolving door as an opportunity" not just in cutting expenses, but in making positive changes in people's lives. He first tackled the problem by addressing the mental health issue. He created the Corrections Mental Health Network which reduced incarcerations of the mentally ill by 50%. This program got the mentally ill into a facility that would treat their illness rather than just house them.

Another cause for recidivism is addictions. Addicts, if left untreated, will continue their destructive path which often includes criminal acts to fund their addiction. Rutherford and his officers sought to

place these individuals into programs that would help them overcome their demons and become productive members of society.

After implementing programs such as those mentioned above, the recidivism rate fell from 42% to 37% in 2000. Arrests dropped from 47,000 to 40,000 during that time period with a savings to tax payers of around 10 million dollars. The cost savings alone is incentive enough to continue these programs, but let's look a little further into the issue.

As I listened to candidate for Sheriff, John Rutherford, on the campaign trail, I heard him speak of an individual who strained the criminal justice system to the max. Rodney was arrested twenty-seven times in

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