



A NIGHT ON CALL

In the Police Academy they told us over and over again to be ready for anything when we show up on a scene. As I am driving around in my patrol car a citizen calls 911 to report an issue in my city. The dispatcher takes the call, talks with the caller, and translates the conversation into a call type and a sentence or two that comes across my computer screen on what I need to respond to and where.

The dispatcher looks and sees the address is in my area and comes over the air to let me know I have a call holding. I acknowledge to her that I am en route to whatever call she has put in my queue. She assigns the amount of officers depending on the call type. A fight situation might need 4 officers whereas a vandalism report usually only needs one officer. The dispatchers have to use their best discretion on translating what is told to them over the phone into how many officers will go to the call. There are about 20 different call types that include traffic accidents, lost kids, property checks, drunk drivers, and welfare checks just to name a few. The dispatchers are awesome and they really watch out for our safety and do a great job.

En route to the call I always think through the scenarios of what might possibly be happening so that I can formulate a plan of action. Sometimes a call comes across where it seems there will be a battle and it turns out to be nothing. Some times a call comes across that seems very small and it turns into a huge deal.

Last night I was dispatched as a single responder to a traffic hazard call.

The caller told dispatch there was a dead dog in the road that was causing a traffic issue. Fortunately it was 11pm on a smaller street and I knew there couldn't be too much of a traffic issue so I was in no hurry. While driving to the call I didn't even give it a second thought. My plan was to get to the scene, move the dog to the side of the road, and let animal control know they needed to pick it up in the morning. I was already finished with the call before I got there and did not even contemplate there could possibly be more to the story.

As I approached the area I turned on my spotlight and easily found the dog as it was a large retriever dog and was right in the middle of a two lane road. I turned on my overheads (blue and red flashing lights) so no one would run me over as I was moving the dog. One truck approached and went around me pausing briefly to look at the dog on the roadway. I was putting on rubber gloves to move the dog when a smaller passenger car approached and came to a stop right next to the dog. As I looked inside I saw a woman in her late 40's open the window and lean out to look at the dog. I was about to tell her to move on as she was blocking the only route around my patrol car. As I approached her she put her head back into her seat, covered her face with her hands, and started uncontrollably sobbing. I was not sure if she really loved dogs or if this was her dog that had been hit. I approached her window and asked her if it was her dog that was on the road. She could only slightly nod her head yes through her tears. I asked her to move over to the side of the road so that other traffic could pass and I would be right there to talk to her.

I moved the dog to the opposite side of the road from where the lady had parked and turned my car around and parked directly behind the lady. I approached the vehicle and gave

her a moment to calm down because I couldn't understand anything she was saying through her sobs. Once she could talk she explained that her son was in the military and had been killed last month. She explained this was his dog, "Charlie" and that it was the best reminder she had of her dead son. She broke down sobbing again as she tried to explain to me that she didn't know how she would tell her two grandchildren that Charlie had been killed such a short time after their father had been killed. At this time I had to take a step back and compose myself and try and be as strong as I could for this poor lady. In the end all I could do was put a hand on her shoulder and tell her I was sorry for her loss.

The lady had a 15 year old son in the car with her. The 15 year old was being very brave himself and trying to comfort his mom as best he could. I asked her if she had any family close by she would like me to call for her and she said she just moved here recently to be by the grand-kids and didn't have family here. The 15 year old did not have a license and could not drive her home like I would have liked. I told her I would follow her home to make sure she got home safe as I was very concerned for her.

Before we left the scene she asked if I would take the collar off Charlie so that she could bury it and remember him. I told her of course I would get the collar for her. I took Charlie's collar off him and placed it in a small brown paper evidence bag. I went to the opposite side of the car and gave the bag to the 15 year old who was quietly sitting in the passenger seat. I explained to the 15 year old as I gave him the bag that he would have to be the man of the house tonight and take extra good care of his mother. He bravely took the bag and placed it under his seat where his mom could not see it and said he would do his best to take care of her.

I followed her to her house which was very close and made sure she made it home safe. I waved goodbye and cleared my call so that I would be available for the next call to come across my

computer screen.

A short while later I ended up transporting a young lady to jail for a probation violation. It is about a 15 minute drive time to the jail from any place in the city and I often talk with my passengers. This young lady began to tell me how rough her month and year had been. I told her the story about the dog in the road that I had just come from and her attitude quickly changed. While still upset she was going to jail she decided some people have much tougher problems.

I signed up for this job because of the adventure and the excitement. You never know what will be at the address you are going to and I love every bit of it.

It will be a while before I go to a traffic hazard call without thinking of Charlie the dog who was a much bigger story than could fit onto two lines of my computer screen.



IT'S ALL IN YOUR STATE OF MIND

I've never talked about this before. Doing so now is a result of my sister Lorraine reminding of these events that happened over 50 years ago.

While running high school track during my sophomore year in the spring of 1955, I pulled up with a pulled hip muscle. The coach said to take it easy, but before long, I could not stand on the right leg. The pain was unbearable.

Down to the ground I went, and the EMTs were called, and a trip to the hospital was in order. The x-ray showed a fracture of the pelvic bone caused by (of all things) the musculature being so tight or strong that the muscles splintered a part of the hip bone.

The prescribed treatment by our family doctor was to lie on my back with a board between the mattress and box spring for a month. No cast or brace was needed; just lie flat and do not move.

When I inquired as to when I would be able to run again, the doctor said I may not be able to run again. With my muscular and skeletal configuration as it was in the hip, running track again could be out of the question.

Needless to say, I was stunned by the doctor's statement, but decided that was not going to happen.

Fast-forward to the fall six months later. It was September, and I had worked my way to the starting halfback position for the high school football team and was ready to run the first play in the first game of the season. My number was called, and 65 yards later, standing in the end zone, I felt that I could put that never-running-again theory to rest. I was fortunate to score 12 TDs and average over 100 yards a

game—all in a seven-game schedule!

Again, fast-forward to age 70, almost three years ago.

Standing on our SUV bumper attempting to throw a piece of luggage up onto the luggage rack, I slipped and fell and broke my hip once again. Another ride to the hospital, three screws in the hip, and a long recovery regimen.

While in the hospital after surgery, my son-in-law Kyle Horga challenged me to be well enough in six months to walk in the Myrtle Beach Half Marathon, a distance of 13.1 miles, which at that time seemed as far away as the moon to me.

However, five months later I walked the half marathon in Myrtle Beach and have walked two additional walks since and plan to do two more this year.

When you reach my age, you will reach the concrete conclusion that human achievement is based solely on the proper state of your mind.



THE BOX OF KISSES

The story goes that some time ago, a man punished his 3-year-old daughter for wasting a roll of gold wrapping paper. Money was tight and he became infuriated when the child tried to decorate a box to put under the Christmas tree.

Nevertheless, the little girl brought the gift to her father the next morning and said, "This is for you, Daddy." He was embarrassed by his earlier overreaction, but his anger flared again when he found the box was empty.

He yelled at her, "Don't you know that when you give someone a present, there's supposed to be something inside it?"

The little girl looked up at him with tears in her eyes and said, "Oh, Daddy, it is not empty. I blew kisses into the box. All for you, Daddy."

The father was crushed. He put his arms around his little girl, and he begged for her forgiveness.

It is told that the man kept that gold box by his bed for years and whenever he was discouraged, he would take out an imaginary kiss and remember the love of the child who had put it there.

In a very real sense, each of us as humans have been given a gold container filled with unconditional love and kisses from our children, friends, family and God. There is no more precious possession anyone could hold.



THE FOLLY OF CLINGING

The little boy walked slowly into the room where his mother was sitting at her desk writing. She glanced down at him and saw that he was carrying a very precious vase that her grandmother had given her. Almost absentmindedly she said to him, "Robert, go put the vase down before you drop it and break it."

"I can't," he replied, "I can't get my hand out."

"Of course you can," she said, "you got it down there."

He said, "I know, mom, but it won't come out." The neck of the vase was very narrow and his hand had fit it neatly inside and it was now up to his wrist. He continued to insist that he could not get it out. Growing a little concerned, his mother called out to his dad.

Dad calmly took control and began gently pulling the arm trying to extract the hand from the vase. He tried loosening it up with soapy water. Still nothing. He then got some vegetable oil from the kitchen and poured it around the wrist and let it seep into the vase. He wiggled it some. It still did not budge.

"I give up," the dad said in desperation. "I'd give a dollar right now to know how to get it out."

"Really?" little Robert exclaimed. Then they heard a clinking sound and his hand slid right out of the vase. They turned the

vase upside down and a penny plopped out. "What's this?" they said in unison.

"Oh, that's the penny I put inside. I wanted to get it out so I was clutching it in my hand. But when I heard Dad say he would give a dollar to have the vase free, I let go."

How often do we cling to things when they are nothing in comparison to what could be ours?



THE CRACKED POT

A water bearer in China had two large pots, each hung on the ends of a pole which he carried across his neck. One of the pots had a crack in it, while the other pot was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water. At the end of the long walk from the stream to the house, the cracked pot arrived only half full.

For a full two years this went on daily, with the bearer delivering only one and a half pots full of water to his house. Of course, the perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments, perfect for which it was made. But the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection, and miserable that it was able to accomplish only half of what it had been made to do.

After two years of what it perceived to be a bitter failure,

it spoke to the water bearer one day by the stream. "I am ashamed of myself, because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your house."

The bearer said to the pot, "Did you notice that there were flowers only on your side of the path, but not on the other pot's side? That's because I have always known about your flaw, and I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day while we walk back, you've watered them. For two years I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate the table. Without you being just the way you are, there would not be this beauty to grace the house."



LOVE STAYS

A nurse took the tired, anxious serviceman to the bedside. "Your son is here," she said to the old man. She had to repeat the words several times before the patient's eyes opened. Heavily sedated because of the pain of his heart attack, he dimly saw the young uniformed marine standing outside the oxygen tent. He reached out his hand. The marine wrapped his toughened fingers around the old man's limp ones, squeezing a message of love and encouragement.

The nurse brought a chair so that the marine could sit beside the bed. All through the night, the young marine sat there in the poorly lighted ward, holding the old man's hand and

offering him words of love and strength. Occasionally, the nurse suggested that the Marine move away and rest awhile. He refused. Whenever the nurse came into the ward, the marine was oblivious of her and of the night noises of the hospital – the clanking of the oxygen tank, the laughter of the night staff members exchanging greetings, the cries and moans of the other patients. Now and then she heard him say a few gentle words. The dying man said nothing, only held tightly to his son all through the night.

Along towards dawn, the old man died. The marine released the now lifeless hand he had been holding and went to tell the nurse. While she did what she had to do, he waited. Finally, she returned. She started to offer words of sympathy, but the Marine interrupted her. "Who was that man?" he asked. The nurse was startled, "He was your father," she answered. "No, he wasn't," the marine replied. "I never saw him before in my life." "Then why didn't you say something when I took you to him?" "I knew right away there had been a mistake, but I also knew he needed his son, and his son just wasn't here. When I realised that he was too sick to tell whether or not I was his son, knowing how much he needed me, I stayed." The next time someone needs you ... just be there. Stay.