

CORRECTIONAL OASIS

A PUBLICATION OF

DESERT WATERS CORRECTIONAL OUTREACH

A NONPROFIT FOR THE WELL-BEING OF PUBLIC SAFETY STAFF AND THEIR FAMILIES

VOLUME 13, ISSUE 3

March 2016

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Families Under Siege	1
Down Time	4
"Staying Well" 2nd Edition	5
Shoe-eating and Other	6
"Police Wife"	7
CF2F T4T Fall 2016 Dates	7
Emotional Intimacy	8
In Memoriam	10
Quote of the Month	10
Many Thanks	10



Families Under Siege

© 2004, 2016 Caterina Spinaris, Ph.D.

A study of correctional officers, which was reported in 2014 by Sam Houston University's [Correctional Management Institute of Texas](#), concluded that work-related demands and tensions were among factors that adversely affected the officers' work-home life balance.

When the emotional fallout of work-related tensions follows corrections staff home, and when that happens often, staff are likely to react to their loved ones in destructive ways.

What might such negative behaviors look like? They may run the gamut from minor irritability to physical violence. They can manifest as impatience; agitation; overreacting to even minor frustrations; a "short fuse;" angry outbursts (when there has been little or no provocation); rudeness; verbal put-downs; intolerance of others' opinions, preferences, or wants; or social withdrawal and stonewalling—isolating and not communicating. In more serious cases, the behaviors of chronically "stressed out" staff may escalate to verbal aggression, such as threats of physical harm, and/or actual physical violence toward people, animals or objects. Heavy substance use or substance abuse can make such behaviors worse.

It is not hard to imagine that when these behaviors occur, especially when they occur repeatedly, staff's family lives are strained—at times to a breaking point. That is why even at the slightest sign of verbal or physical aggression toward loved ones, staff need to seek help for themselves, to nip such behaviors in the bud, not allowing them to become part of their lives.

The following is an actual encounter I had years ago that describes parts of a correctional family's journey in dealing with family violence.

Have you ever had the sense that someone behind you is studying you? I had that experience the other day at the grocery store. Instinctively I turned around to see who was looking at me and "caught" a woman in her forties watching me intently. I half-smiled and pushed my cart down the next aisle wondering absentmindedly about what might be on her mind.

Suddenly she was right next to me again. "Are you the one who reaches out to corrections officers?" she asked sheepishly. "You know, Desert Waters?" I lit up. "Yes, I am."

(Continued on page 2)

DWCO Services





© Audrey Boag, 2016

She went on. "I recognized you from a photo in an old newspaper that a friend gave me." "Do you work in corrections?" I asked. "No, I don't, but my husband does. He's been at it nine years now." She hesitated for a brief second, and then her eyes filled with tears.

Seeing that, I motioned her to follow me to a quieter area of the store. After regaining her composure, she whispered, "What you've been writing about is SO true. We've been through SO much as a family over the years." She then stopped like she was weighing what to say next, took a deep breath, and then threw open the floodgates. "It's much better now. But just a year ago I wasn't sure we were going to make it as a family."

"I'm very glad things are better now," I replied. "And I feel for you, for all you've been through." Then I asked, "Where does your husband work?"

She gave me the name of a facility where I had heard that incidents of violence were an all-too-common occurrence. (I remembered a correctional staff member telling me that working in that type of environment for even just a few years could change a person to the core—and not for the better.) I felt my heart ache for this couple. "Corrections!" I thought to myself. "We need the prisons and the jails, yet what a toll they can take on staff and families alike!" I then repeated, "I'm glad things are better now at home."

She smiled and nodded. I could tell that she was once again weighing whether to open up some more or not. Then she took the plunge. "My husband became so mean after a few years on the job. He'd fly off the handle over ridiculous things. He'd put me down over nothing. He didn't want to be around people. He had never been like that before. His goal became to work nights. He quit doing things with us as a family. I felt abandoned, like a widow." She paused again as if impacted by her own words. I found myself almost holding my breath. The moment felt sacred. One human being making true heart-to-heart contact with another without even exchanging names.

The woman looked me in the eyes ever so seriously. "My husband is a good man. We've been married 16 years. I did not know what to make of it when he started becoming violent. He'd throw things. He'd break things. He even hauled off and hit me once. I just couldn't believe it! Up to that point he had never done anything like that." Her tears were flowing now. And my eyes were misty too. "I did not call the cops. Don't ask me why not." She looked away, seeming embarrassed. "I could tell he felt bad afterwards for what he'd done. And the kids were terrified. They were in the next room and heard it all. After that, we all walked on eggshells around him. No noise, no requests, no complaints. Did not want to set him off. And we didn't even know what might set him off! After a while I knew I couldn't go on living like that. I told him we had to get help, or we were history. He kept refusing until the day he hauled off to hit me again, caught himself at the last second, and put a hole in the wall instead. A week later we started counseling."

She smiled and I smiled back. "Thank you for trusting me and sharing this with me," I said. "And I'm so glad you took action and that he agreed." "You know, I finally realized that I had to do something for our family," she replied. "I refused to go on living in fear and worry. I refused to have the kids' lives ruined. And it's been better. We talk more. He is more respectful. There are still things he is working on. His occasional yelling. His talking to the kids like a drill sergeant. Treating us like inmates sometimes, ordering us around. But on the whole our home life is so much better. He does back off when I ask him to. We're growing close again one day at a time." We both sighed a sigh of relief.

(Continued on page 3)

"I know the kids will need more help," she added wistfully, as if talking to herself. "We're thinking about what would be the best way to do that. I can tell that at times they're still scared of their dad, and mad at him, too. He's apologized to them, but they need more. In our counseling we talk about ways he can rebuild bridges not only with me, but also with them. The other day I sat our children down and told them that sometimes daddy's work is very tough, and that he's still all revved up when he gets home. I told them that we're getting help." "You're doing a wonderful job," I said, admiring her courage. "Last week I caught my son putting his sister down just like his dad used to treat me. I got on him right away. Told him that I was not going to tolerate disrespect in our home. I made him apologize to her. It felt so good!"

We both smiled again. "Yay for mom!" I cheered. She changed tone. "Thank you for listening. Thank you for caring." "You're welcome," I answered. "Meeting you made my day. When you can, visit our website and see about getting on our mailing list." "Will do. Keep praying for us in corrections!" she said as we parted ways to continue our shopping.

Afterward I kept thinking about our call to come alongside corrections folks and share the burden with them. What a privilege it is to have the opportunity of such encounters—whether groups in training or one person at a time! And I also thought of you all who support our mission through your giving. Thank you.

And going back to the Sam Houston University study, the Correctional Management Institute developed a brochure for correctional officers to recognize signs of stress and for ways to address them. Here are some of the suggestions:

- ⇒ Exercise regularly
- ⇒ Maintain proper nutrition
- ⇒ Get enough sleep
- ⇒ Reach out to co-workers, friends and family
- ⇒ Do something enjoyable every day
- ⇒ Use meditation and other relaxation techniques as part of your daily schedule
- ⇒ Avoid drugs and alcohol
- ⇒ Use your employer's confidential Employee Assistance Program

And if you have suffered intimate partner violence, please get help for yourself. Resources for victims of violence are many, both in local communities and nationally. Here's a start: <http://www.apa.org/topics/violence/partner.aspx>; and <http://www.womenshealth.gov/violence-against-women/types-of-violence/domestic-intimate-partner-vi>.

You can also call the National [Domestic Violence Hotline](#) at 800-799-7233 or TTY 800-787-3224.

And in case you've crossed the line, and became physically violent with a loved one, PLEASE get specialized professional help right away. Your most important support system is at risk.

MUCH is at stake.



Down Time The Old Screw

Since this issue covers topics related to the home life of public safety staff, we are re-printing an all-time favorite by the Old Screw.

There are two words in corrections that are very critical but not understood by most families and even new Staff—**DOWN TIME.**

The need for down time can be the cause of a lot of misunderstanding and arguments among Officers and their spouses. The spouses usually have difficulty grasping why the Officers need space when they get home from work, why they need to read a book, watch TV, exercise, or work on something instead of talking with their partners. The need for down time can also cause a lot of hurt and anger from children who do not comprehend why daddy or mommy wants to be left alone for a little while after getting home from work.

Some staff will argue that they can leave work and step right into family life—that they feel no stress from their work, that “there’s nothing to it.” Only God knows how many times this was said before the divorce. (I know. I am on my second marriage.) Anytime we put our life on the line day after day, no matter what type of facility we work in, the thought that someday we may not come home is always in the back of our minds. We fear (here’s the forbidden word!) that someday that lovely wife or husband or small children might not see us again.

Male Officers have a real problem with their emotions. They think it makes them less of a man to admit to being stressed, and so they try to hide these feelings. In my opinion it takes a braver man to admit to the stress.

The truth is that in our line of work the adrenaline starts pumping sometimes even before we get to work. Just thinking about what happened there the day before, or what we have to deal with once we get there, can get us going. And the adrenaline surge doesn’t stop just because we’re heading home at the end of our shift. It continues to circulate in our body when we walk in the door.

That’s why we need the down time. We need the time and space to shift from the stress-filled work world to family life.

Some staff think that a few beers or other drinks after work with fellow Officers are the way to relax, and that they even deserve that kind of break. Many an affair started during this kind of “choir practice.”

Affairs also happen because an Officer thinks that only another Officer will understand them. Officers can come to believe this when their spouses don’t accept and respect their need for down time.

It seems at times like getting a divorce is a requirement for the job. Many of the problems may start with the unmet need for down time.



© Audrey Boag, 2015

For those of you married to an Officer, it is rough when your spouse comes home from work and doesn't want to talk or do anything with you for a while. You may think, "What did I do wrong?" The answer usually is, "Nothing." It's just that **your spouse needs Down Time!** Officers don't like to bring their work home. Some of the things that happen in our profession are very crude or downright sick. By not talking about them, they think they are protecting you. Even when both spouses work in corrections it is sometimes hard to relate. Yes, even these families need down time.

The best solution is when the spouses are open and explain things to each other. This can be hard to do, but the reward is a more stable marriage and better understanding of one another.

So, when your spouse who works in corrections seems to be withdrawn and quiet, give them breathing space. Take the kids and go for a ride, or do something that your spouse can join in on later, when he or she is ready.

I am not a counselor or psychologist, but I will try to explain corrections to any family member who wants to ask. To me, we are all brothers and sisters, and I will try to help in any way I can. I neither know all the answers nor claim to, but I come from over three decades of working in corrections and know very well the need for down time.

I am proud of the fine men and women that I have worked with over the years. No matter what anyone says about corrections, be proud of who you are and what you do. Not everyone will walk among killers and rapists—and sometimes worse—**with only a pen** to help control the people milling around them.

Take care,

The Old Screw

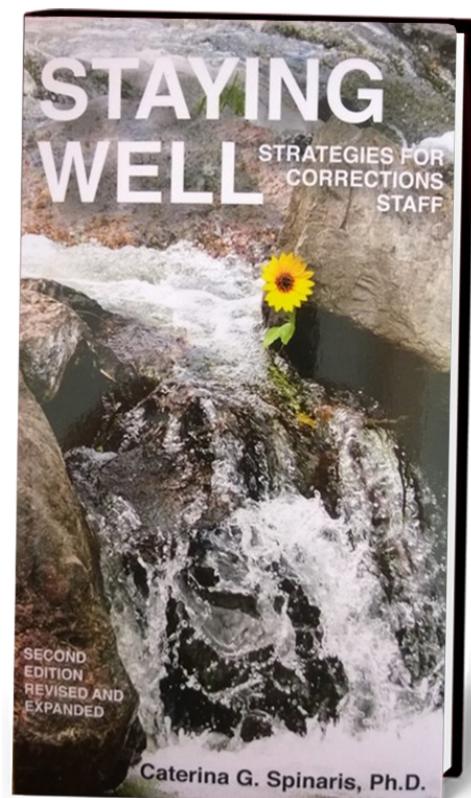
Staying Well: Strategies for Corrections Staff

By Caterina Spinaris

**Second Edition
Revised and expanded**

**Special Introductory Offer
\$3.99 per copy plus \$&H**

**Any quantity
Through May 31, 2016**



Shoe-eating and Other Oddities

By CO Wife

A CO wife's view of the profession, on the light side. Reprinted from the October 2009 issue of the Correctional Oasis.

"He ate his shoes," was what my husband mumbled over and over one evening during his first couple of months on the job in the prison system. What sort of job had he found himself in, and what sort of people would eat their shoes? Thus began his life as a corrections officer, dealing with not only shoe-eaters, but also with inmates that would do just about anything. Corrections is a field that is unrecognized, underappreciated and rarely thought about, other than those working in it or who have family that spend their days or nights working in this environment. But without the folks working behind the walls, the rest of us would be in a world of hurt.

As the wife of a corrections officer, I know I don't hear even half of what goes on during his workday. But I have sure picked up a whole new lingo, which is required if you want to keep up with a day in the life. Bang-in, hack, shank, SHU, Boss, shake-down, hooch, tat, kite, bubble, sally-port, grill, lockdown, cop-out, chit, body alarm. Is there such a thing as a prison lingo translator? Wonder how much it would pay?

Then you have the fact that the corrections employees don't know their fellow workers first names! Going to a work sponsored event or bumping into coworkers out in the world is always interesting when getting introduced. Everyone is either just their last name ... Thomas, Rodriguez, Hughes, Miller, or they are their title ... Warden, Captain, Lt. Or someone says, "I'm sorry, I don't know your first name." First names are rarely used on the job, and so they remain a mystery to most.

Dental coverage should be handled in the same way as a uniform allowance for those in the corrections field. With the stresses of the job, grinding of one's teeth while sleeping can sometimes be heard throughout the house, keeping all awake—other than the officer, that is, who has finally managed to shut his or her mind off long enough to fall asleep. And all that grinding takes a toll on the teeth, thus the need for good dental insurance.

Restaurants need to spend a little more time thinking about how to decorate their walls since many an officer tends to sit with their back to the wall, leaving the others at the table facing the wall. Without some lively decorations, the view can get old real fast, even as the officer keeps his or her eyes on the move, watching for shady characters, weapons, and anything else out of the ordinary that might be cause for alarm.

Remember the saying that hair makes a man? One of the reasons I fell for my man was his hair. In the world of Corrections, hair can kill a man. Having hair on your head in any length over an inch gives the inmate something to grab hold of. Regular haircuts at home become part of the routine. The good news is that this also becomes a way to help the environment, by leaving the pile of hair outside for the birds to use in their nests.

Spending your day (or night) inside the walls can be a dark place, and you never know what the day will bring. But where else can a person get the idea for a limerick such as this:

*There once was an inmate who knew
He'd get protein by eating his shoe
Canvas, laces and soles
He didn't need any bowls
Though he bit off more than he could chew.*

THANK YOU to all those working in the Corrections field. You are a special group of people, and your willingness to spend your days and nights in this environment, risking your lives, is much appreciated!

“Police Wife: The Secret Epidemic of Police Domestic Violence”

The book *Police Wife: The Secret Epidemic of Police Domestic Violence*, by Susanna Hope & Alex Roslin, was published in 2015 by Golden Inkwell Books. The book is offered in both print (hard copy) and electronic formats. It is a painstakingly documented compilation of facts surrounding cases of police intimate partner violence in Canada, the U.S., and elsewhere. The first author, Susanna Hope, (not her real name) is a survivor of police domestic violence.

Some of the material presented makes for extremely disturbing reading. Yet, it is critical to document domestic violence cases and related investigations if the issue is to receive the attention it deserves, so that the occurrence of police family violence will become a thing of the past.

Part 1 of the book is Susanna’s story, written by Susanna Hope. Part 2 presents Alex Roslin’s research and documentation of family violence in police families in several countries. Appendices that follow include opinions of law enforcement officials; suggestions as to what one can do if they are in an abusive relationship with a police officer; resources/bibliography; advice for family and friends; and recommendations for police, governments, the general public, advocates, the media and academics.

Here are some of the statistics presented in the book:

- Domestic abuse may occur in a staggering 40% of police households.
- Police officers commit up to 15 times more domestic violence than the public.
- One study found that only 6% (six per cent) of police departments normally terminated an officer after a sustained domestic violence complaint.
- In one large police force, an abusive male officer may have as little as a one-in-6,500 chance of ever being charged.

And here are some of the endorsements offered for *Police Wife*:

“Roslin and Hope have done an excellent job.... *Police Wife* is an important read.” ~ *Detective Albert Seng, PhD, Retired, Tucson Police Department, Arizona*

“This is a book that should be given to the wife or girlfriend of every single male police officer.... These women have no place to turn.... It is very apparent that neither the police nor the courts are willing to deal with the problem.” ~ *Sergeant Amy Ramsay, PhD, Ontario, Senior Police Policy Analyst*

“All of us associated with this profession must make it clear that domestic violence will not be tolerated in our ranks.” ~ *Deputy Chief Dottie Davis, Retired, Fort Wayne Police Department, Indiana*

[Upcoming CF2F Instructor Training—Florence, CO](#)

9/27-30/2016

Five Customized Versions Available: For staff in **corrections facilities, probation and/or parole offices, juvenile facilities, juvenile community corrections, and basic training/orientation/new recruits.**

For more information, click [HERE](#).

Emotional Intimacy Tom Olschner, Ph.D.

I'm grumpy! I've had a full week in my counseling practice. I've volunteered in my church the last five nights teaching kids. I'm exhausted and longing for my weekend. But I've put off writing this blog for two weeks in a row. So I really should write this "I#%&* blog" before I relax this evening. I'm grouching about some little matter and Robin asks me how I'm doing. I tell her the above. She says, "It's OK that you're grumpy."

She said more than that, but I don't remember the rest. I remember her accepting my feelings because that's what went into my heart. "Suffering shared is suffering divided. Joy shared is joy multiplied." I just had my suffering divided by this experience of emotional intimacy with my wife.

It is hard to write briefly on the topic of emotional intimacy because an entire encyclopedia could be written on the topic. You probably already know what it is: closeness that comes from two people sharing their emotional lives with each other. So you ask, "Why is emotional intimacy so hard to accomplish?"

That may not be the right question. The better question is, "Why is emotional intimacy so hard to **sustain**?" You see, every couple that falls in love accomplishes a deep emotional intimacy. It is common for me to hear distressed couples describe that early in their relationship they "could talk for hours." As they fell in love, they took emotional risks to be known by the other. The acceptance they received invited them into still-deeper levels of emotional intimacy. (OK. Some couples only get as far as "emotional intensity," but most couples really do accomplish a deep emotional intimacy early in their relationship.)

So why doesn't the couple **sustain** that emotional intimacy? It is because, "shit happens." Each person's bad interpersonal habits, each person's "ghosts" from their dysfunctional family growing up (yes, all of us had dysfunctional families growing up), each person's traumas (small and large), gum up the works of the couple relationship until the relationship devolves into "pursue-withdraw" or "blame-blame" or whatever merry-go-round you create as a couple.

Now the real work begins: to **develop habits of sharing our emotional lives with each other** that aren't fueled by "being in love," but are **fueled by a desire to create a mature, mutually-supportive relationship**.

It is crucial to understand that at the heart of emotional intimacy is love. It isn't enough to know that you understand what I'm feeling or even that you validate that what I'm feeling is reasonable (though both of those things are extremely important). **I need to know that you CARE.** Does my emotional experience **matter** to you? If so, then I not only feel understood, I feel supported. I experience that you have some skin in the game. I have a partner in my struggle of life. And all of us struggle. And all of us need our partners in that struggle to be with us.

OK. So this is what you really want with your partner. Right? So let's talk about some specific things you can do to grow your emotional intimacy to the next level.

A. Commit to having one month of weekly "heart dates."

This could be over a dinner out or even sharing a glass of wine on the back patio after the kids have gone to bed. At each "heart date" ask your partner four questions:

1. "This week, what has made you glad?"
2. "This week, what has made you sad?"
3. "As you look ahead to the coming week, what makes you uptight (or anxious)?"
4. "As you look ahead to the coming week, what makes you feel excited?"

B. Have a “chick-flick feeling pick.”

Google “feeling word list image” and print off one of the lists of feeling words.

Have one partner choose a favorite “chick flick” to watch together.

Pause the movie at several spots, pick a feeling word from the list that describes what the character is probably feeling at the time, and then share a time in your life when you’ve experienced that feeling.

C. Daily debrief.

Find a place with no distractions: perhaps the living room couch or your back porch. Tell the kids, “no interrupting unless the house is on fire.” Set the kitchen timer or cell phone timer for 10 minutes for each of you.

Ask your partner: “Tell me about your day.” Don’t try to fix your partner’s problem (or worse yet, try to fix your partner). Just show emotional support and caring for what your partner is going through. Then commit to doing this daily for two weeks.

D. “Healing the heart” exercise.

Tell your partner: “I would like to give you the gift of showing up for you around one hurt you are still carrying in your heart.”

Each person writes one paragraph:

- My memory of something hurtful that happened to me.
- How I feel (e.g., hurt, sad, disappointed, etc.) about what happened.
- My choice to forgive the person who caused the hurt.

1. The first person reads the paragraph.
2. The partner then expresses: “I feel sad (sorry, regretful, concerned, etc.) that you felt hurt.”
3. (And if the hurt refers to you): “I apologize for anything I did to contribute to your hurt. I want you to feel loved and cared about.”

There probably is nothing that will spark love better than creating these heart connections with your partner.

<http://theintimacycenter.biz/>



Desert Waters

Correctional Outreach



*a non-profit organization
for the well-being of correctional
staff and their families*

Caterina Spinaris, Ph.D.
Executive Director
431 E. Main Street, P.O. Box 355
Florence, CO 81226
(719) 784-4727

<http://desertwaters.com>

Your gifts are tax-deductible.

IN MEMORIAM

Laurie Lee Crawford
March 12, 2016
Wyoming Women's Center

Quote of the Month

"This life is for loving, sharing, learning, smiling, caring, forgiving, laughing, hugging, helping, dancing, wondering, healing, and even more loving." ~ Steve Maraboli

Many Thanks!

**Support the mission of Desert Waters
with your tax-deductible contributions.**

Individual donors: Anonymous donors; TC & Joellen Brown; Jeff & Connie Mueller; Kevin & Robin Rivard

Business donors: Janice Graham & Company, P.C.

Organization donors: Association of Oregon Correctional Employees

Special thanks also go to: Bret Anderson, Audrey Boag, Maureen Buell, Brenda Crawford, Sonja Dordal, Janice Graham, Susan Jones, Brandon Kelly, Josh Klimek, Leslie LeMaster, Amanda McCarthy, Gregory Morton, Jeff Mueller, Lettie Prell, Patti Schniedwind, Rachel Shelver, Trish Signor, Eleni Spinari, Dave Stephens.

DWCO Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in the *Correctional Oasis* are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect or represent the views and opinions held by DWCO Board members, staff, and/or volunteers.

DWCO is not responsible for accuracy of statements made by authors. If you have a complaint about something you have read in the *Correctional Oasis*, please [contact](#) us.

DWCO Mission

To promote the occupational, personal and family well-being of the public safety workforce through the provision of support, resources and customized data-driven solutions.