



BRUSH OUT

*A book
about law
enforcement
suicide,
coping skills
and career
survival!*

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FOREWORD

My brother James Perkins and I grew up in Arizona and hunted and hung out together. Jim joined the Border Patrol in 1996 and convinced me to join and I did so in 1998. Jim and I often spoke about how awesome it would be if we both could transfer to Montana (MT) and hunt and fish and hang out together. Jim was stationed in Brownfield, CA and I in Brownsville, TX. In 2003 we both put in for and were transferred to MT. Jim went to the Whitefish station and I to Shelby.

On March 23, 2012 I was working at my desk at home when I received a phone call from my niece, Chandelle. Chandelle asked me if I had spoken to her dad that morning and I replied that I had not. She then stated that she and her sisters and mom had just received a weird text from James and were concerned. Knowing that my brother was a prankster and joker I assumed he was just being normal. I asked her to forward me the text and she hung up. I read the text and then put my phone down to start to type when the words in that text hit me. "Girls, please take care of your mother and forgive me for what I am about to do, as I know that God will not."

At that moment, I knew my brother was either dead or was going to attempt to take his life. Even though I knew my brother was not suicidal and we had spoken concerning suicide after a friend had committed suicide, I knew this was serious. I tried calling him at home and on his cell several times with no answer. I immediately packed a bag and rushed out the door to drive the three hours over to Jim's home. My other niece Jamee, had arrived home early that day and surprised her dad. He questioned her as to her reason for being home then rushed out the door and walked away from the house and their property. Jamee was unconcerned as this was normal for Jim. Jamee was outside when she received a text and a call from her sister and then heard a single gunshot. I was exactly halfway to his home when I received a call from a fellow agent advising me that they had found Jim's body and he was deceased. Jim and I had an agreement and oath that if one of us died, the other would notify the family and speak at the funeral service. I asked the agent if they could hold off notification until I arrived. The Coroner was on scene and advised that he could not wait for an hour and a half, I therefore called the home and spoke with my sister-in-law Colleen, advising her that Jim's body had been found and he was deceased.

Although I had known of several agents whom had committed suicide and others whom had been killed in the line of duty or died due to incidents, accidents or illness, this was the first death in my family, and the impact was and is as painful as anything that I had ever endured before.

April 15, 2013, I was a newly elected national VP of the National Border Patrol Council (NBPC) and I was working at my desk at home, when I received a call from my eldest son and fellow Border Patrol agent, Brett Perkins. Brett told me that my other son, Brandon whom was living with him, was missing. Brett stated that the Navy recruiter had shown up at the house due to Brandon's failure to report for duty to the navy. This was Brandon's EOD into the Navy. The recruiter told Brett that Brandon had called him and

made some sort of comment to the effect that he may hurt himself and was not going to show up. Brett checked his safe and found that a single pistol was missing, the pistol that I had given to Brandon. I told Brett to call the police and start a search for Brandon. A short while later I received a call from Brett advising that he had found Brandon in his back yard dead from a single self-inflicted gunshot wound. It was snowing, cold and blowing outside. I was dressed for indoors and simply walked out the front door and headed for my wife's work, to advise my wife. I walked the quarter mile and on the way called and spoke on the phone to NBPC President Brandon Judd, to advise him of the situation and that I would be traveling to Arizona to retrieve my son's body or ashes. I had my wife brought into a private office at her work, knelt down on one knee and told her that her son Brandon had just taken his own life.

Since that date I have lost several acquaintances and local Border Patrol personnel to suicides.

I tell you all this now, so that when you read this book about suicide awareness, PTSD and alcohol or drug abuse. You all now know someone whom has been directly impacted by suicide. We are all brothers and sisters in green and a family, whether or not you are impacted directly or indirectly, these issues must be addressed and since the agency does such a poor job at it, we, the UNION have made a conscious decision to address these issues for your benefit.

Jonathan Perkins

About the Author

My name is Terence L. Shigg. I am a Marriage and Family Therapist and a Border Patrol Agent. I have been a practicing Therapist since 2004 and a Law Enforcement Officer since 1992. I have worked with military, Law enforcement and first responders in my practice and as a Border Patrol Agent. I give you my resume not to impress you but to give you an idea of where I am coming from. I have been dissatisfied with the responses and programs of most law enforcement agencies and their response to suicide awareness and prevention. In what I see as efforts blinded by fear and ignorance, many departments have taken a minimalists approach to these topics. Most are of the opinion that there is nothing more they can do, and suicide is just part of the business. Don't get me wrong it has improved over the year. Many departments have staff psychologists and conduct debriefing after traumatic events. These are all helpful, but more can be done and more needs to be done. This book is my attempt to not only do more but to get the ball rolling so that more resources and awareness are made available.

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to the men and women of the United States Border Patrol and their families. The Border Patrol is a family and as a family we have suffered from the pain and confusion that comes with loss. These losses were not what we were prepared for. All Border Patrol Agents and their families understand the dangers of the job and the possibility that we may have to make the ultimate sacrifice for our country. Agents take the job not only knowing this possibility but accepting it willingly and proudly. Although no one explains to us before, during or after we have signed up that we are more likely to die by our own hand than that of a “bad guy.”

So, I dedicate this book to all the men and women in green. All of my brothers and sisters that go out there and do a job most people don't want to do, don't understand and don't want to witness being done. It's thankless but necessary and you understand that. I love each and every one of you. I hope and pray that this book will open up the eyes of all who read it to realize more can and should be done to ensure everything possible is being done to prevent suicides amongst border patrol agents.

Brush Out

“Sometimes the only reason you can recognize a brush out is because you’ve been down that road before!”

“I got a running W, an oval in the heel and a Nike swoosh.”

This was my introduction to tracking on my first detail to El Centro back in the early 2000’s when it was really busy. How busy was it? Well my partner and I caught 100 bodies in one midnight shift, is how busy it was.

A brush out to those of you that do not know is when people who have crossed the border attempt to hide their footprints (sign) by taking something and wiping out the footprints. Sometimes they get pretty ingenious. They have tried walking across the border with foam tied to their shoes or carpet so that you can distinguish the sign. One of the more interesting techniques is a group of people will walk backwards across the border road to make you think they were going south into Mexico instead of north into the United States.

What does this have to do with anything? Well, it has a lot to do with the reasons Border Patrol Agents are dying by their own hand at a higher rate that they are being killed by assailants. It is because rather than prepare and deal with the psychological toll this job takes on us we try to brush it out thinking no one else will notice!

I have been a Border Patrol Agent since 1996. I started my federal career with the Bureau of Prisons in Los Angeles, California in 1992. I grew up (as far as my career) in the prison. My job before the prison was as a counselor in a group home for teenage girls. It was quite a culture shock working into a prison. If you have never worked in one let me give you a picture. Imagine the most negative environment you can. The men and women are locked inside a building and you are locked inside with them. You work alone for the most part. It is you and up to 110 inmates. It is your job to make sure the program gets ran and nobody dies on your watch, especially you! I was subject to panic attacks already and now I was thrown into an intensely stressful job. I remember one instance in particular in which there was a fight on a housing unit. The fight was over the phone list. Each night a phone list was put out for the next day in which the inmates lined up to sign up for a time to use the phone. Your place in line determined how much of a choice you had as far as phone times. I always found it interesting that most jail fights were over Food, Phones, mail and visits. So, somebody cut in front of someone else or something to that effect and it was on. Two inmates started fighting which turned into 3 then 4 then a straight rumble. The Correctional Officer on the unit hit his body alarm (a button on his radio that signals the control room he needs assistance) and we all came running to the unit. We get there and get everybody separated and locked in their cells. Now, right after

the fight it is imperative to get witness statements (which usually consist of “I ain’t seen S****”). So, me being the rookie at the time I get assigned to go out on the recreation deck with about 15 inmates and conduct interviews of them all. My adrenaline is still pumping because we just broke up a major melee in my book. I go outside with my little green government notebook. I am so nervous my hands and legs are shaking and I can’t write (at least not legibly). So, I fake it. I am asking names and inmate numbers and pretending to write down “I ain’t seen S****!” over and over. This was the life of a correctional officer. I never told anyone about my panic attacks. Instead we did what most Law enforcement officers do. We got off shift and went out and got drunk and made jokes about the fight!

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As I said I pretty much grew up in the prison. This is where I learned how to deal with stressful work situations. Now, don’t get me wrong it wasn’t as if I didn’t drink before I became a correctional officer. That is what I am trying to get across to you though. This line of work will test the coping skills you have and force you to develop new ones. The new ones you develop could be good ones or they could be bad ones, it’s up to you. So, let’s continue with my story. I get married and have two beautiful children. I have gotten the hang of this correctional officer thing. I was promoted and now I was working in the segregation unit. This is what most people commonly refer to as “The Hole.” It is an unnatural thing for a human being to be locked in a box 23 hours a day. It takes a toll on the watcher and the watched. By this time I was a pro though. We finished our shift got, off work and laughed and got drunk. The psychological toll had already begun for me, but I was coping the best I knew how. We tend to do the best we can with the tools we have. The problem is we need to keep upgrading those tools because sooner or later a situation will come up that will test those outdated tools of ours. One of the situations for me was while working in the segregation unit. It was a time when the district attorney began using the RICO act for gang members. The RICO Act, short for Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act. Prison gang members were no exception. As with any other criminal the gangs began to use the trials as a means to communicate with gang members from other institutions. So, at one time in the Los Angeles prison we were housing about 10 high ranking members of one of the prisons most deadliest gangs. When the district attorney would charge one of these gang members the gang member would have his attorney subpoena other gang members from across the country as witnesses on his behalf and then they could have meetings. Now, we never put them in the same room, but convicts have many methods of communicating once they are in the same place. The run kites (letters they pass from room to room), talk through the plumbing and arrange for legal visits to name a few. In “The Hole” the correctional officers are responsible for feeding, transporting, getting supplies, mail and arranging law library time for the inmates. I should explain terminology to you first these gang members were not inmates they were convicts. An inmate is someone new to the prison system and they tend to whine a lot. They test the rules because they are trying to make a name for themselves or just adjust to the prison life. A convict is different. A convict knows the rules better than most officers and will only test you to see what he can get away with because he believes he can get away with it. Convicts don’t complain much

because as we say in the prison they know what “they got coming.” If they don’t have it coming most time they don’t ask. But watch out if it is something they do have coming and they don’t get it, then you have a problem. It’s a dangerous game that is played every day in every jail and prison across the country. Convicts have rules and officers have rules. Sometimes they are the same and sometimes they are drastically different. I heard a psychologist say once “there is a fine line between a crook and a cop.” I believe that is because we see the worse of society and learn to “brush out.” Anyway my incident occurred one day when I went to move one of the convicts to the law library. You developed a rapport with these convicts based on your reputation. If you were hard they were hard if you were soft they were hard. If you were fair, they were hard with respect! I had a reputation for being fair. That saved me a lot of grief. I take the convict to the law library and think nothing of it. I go back to get him to take him back to his cell and he refuses to “cuff up.” This is a serious battle of wills and is usually only settled by force. After about 15 minutes of discussion he finally tells me he can’t go back to his cell because he was supposed to kill his roommate last night and if he goes back he will have to kill him today. Now as far as I knew, this guys cellmate was his best friends. Needless to say I didn’t put him back in the cell. Did I tell anyone that situation seriously messed with my head! How one day you could be asked and expected to kill you best friend because someone told you to. Oh, but I did go out and get drunk and joke with my co-workers about it.

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These are just two examples of work situations that took a toll on me and I did not tell anyone else about it. Personal events also played a role and were handled with the same efficient coping skills. I finally got out of the prison and was hired with the Border Patrol. That meant a four month academy, away from my wife and two children. Another stressful situation in which the panic attacks came back. Can you imagine how difficult it is to qualify when your legs are shaking? It wasn’t easy. The academy was a mixed blessing for me. It gave me more confidence because it was a challenge and therefore I had to develop more coping skills because I obviously could not get drunk every day and keep up with the studies and the physical training. The physical training helped. Remember earlier I told you my two go to stress relievers were (sex and alcohol). Seriously stressful times I went to my go to’s. Here the problem what happens when your stress relievers conflict with your morals? They cause more stress and the cycle begins. As I stated earlier I was married and my wife was in California and I was in Georgia so, you guessed it I was not having sex with my wife. So, although this was my stress relieving technique it caused more stress now I was being unfaithful. You see where this is going. Again, did I tell anybody about my stress or my internal conflicts, Nope!

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Do you detect a pattern? I did and I do. I want you to know that if you are not careful you can get into this same trap that I fell into of trying to deal with issues by hiding them from everyone and hoping no one notices. Throughout my federal service I have been through lots of stressful situations. I went through a separation, a divorce, my father passing away, being separated from my children, going back to school, licensing exams,

getting remarried and the birth of a new child. Some of these situations are good stress and some are bad but I have learned not to hide them. I have learned not to brush them out. I pray that by me telling these stories it allows you to come clean and recognize you are not alone. As I said at the beginning I recognize it because I have been down that road. When you say your “fine” and I know you are separated from your kids and going through a divorce. I know it’s not fine and you are brushing out. I know when you tried to save that alien in the water and you did everything you could but you couldn’t save him. I know that bothered you. I know that incident where you had to shoot that alien who was throwing rocks at you bothers you. I know not being selected for that detail or promotion was not fair and it is not right.

Don’t brush it out, deal with it. I will give you some ideas in this book of ways to improve your coping skills and add to your tool box. Ultimately there is no one size fits all, you have to figure out what works for you. Just remember you don’t have to do it alone. My number is in the back of this book and you are free to call me if you ever need to talk!

Breaking the STIGMA!

The stigma associated with getting mental health assistance is killing us and I mean that literally. Recently there have been several dramatic life threatening issues that have occurred involving our employees. We have had two suicides in January of 2012 and an incident of work place violence in Long Beach. One of the suicides was an Agent with a gambling addiction who felt he had betrayed the trust of his brothers so much that he sentenced himself to death and committed suicide. In the workplace violence incident an agent was upset with his supervisor and pulled out his service weapon and shot him. The Agent was subsequently killed by another agent who came to the aide of the first. I simplify these stories for the sake of brevity but these are truly multifaceted and complex situations. These sound like Hollywood screenplays but they are not, they are actual recent events. These are real stories of real people. The lives of the family members and friends left behind are devastated. We are devastated because we sit and wonder “what could I have done?” First thing I want to say is each man and woman is responsible for the decisions that they make. Now I want to get to the next part which is what causes these types of situations and what can be done.

A focus on a healthier you will provide some protection against these types of break downs. Mental health is the key component in recognizing the true gravity of a situation in the real scheme of things. Mental health allows you to realize that the words on a piece of paper do not define you, they are only the opinion of one man or woman. Never give someone else the power to define who you are (just a personal side note). Mental health allows you to set your own standards and live up to them because they are yours and for no other reason.

So, what am I saying? I am saying that each and every one of us will experience emotional problems. Be it divorce, parenting issues, special need children, alcohol abuse, pain killer addiction, marital/relationship problems, caring for an elderly parent issues, financial problems, work stress, or just plain burnout (did I miss anyone), it is going to happen. That is not to mention the suicidal ideation, depression and Post Traumatic Stress. I am not saying if it happens, I am saying it is going to happen to you! If you don't deal with these issues they will manifest in your life in negative ways. It could be risky behavior, poor decision making, driving drunk, being overly aggressive, irritable, road rage or drug and alcohol abuse. Ultimately it could manifest in suicide or homicide!

I have experience financial problems, parenting problems, marital problems, alcohol abuse, depression and divorce. I have sought counseling on numerous occasions. Counseling has given me the ability to recognize the many options always available in any problem situation. Counseling has allowed me to better understand myself and strengthened my faith. I believe my faith has brought me through all of these issues to be here today to make sure you know you are not alone and help is out there.

I have talked to agents who have been troubled and instead of going and asking for help were more concerned about what others would say or think. Some have a more valid

concern and that is, will they lose their job? If you take the steps I am talking about it will give you the best chance of preventing that from happening. Getting a mental health check up is an exercise in self preservation. It will allow you to learn to deal with problems before they get to they point where they would endanger your job or your life for that matter. You cannot take care of others if you aren't taking care of yourself.

Take the self-surveys (appendix). If you score below 28 on the first survey go in for a mental health check up. Bring the form with you as it will help with the therapeutic process.

Take the second survey. If you score above 15 then go get a mental health check-up. Bring the form with you to therapy as it will assist with the therapeutic process.

Going in for a mental health check-up does not mean you are "crazy." It just means you are not living to your fullest potential and talking to a professional can help you improve your quality of life. Nothing is preventing you from getting a mental health check up even if you did not fall in the category for the surveys. The point of this article is the fact that we all can benefit from a mental health check-up no matter what our situation. It will only benefit you in the long run if you do.

There are many ways to find a therapist. You can go through your insurance or EAP. Do your research and find a therapist that fits with you. Not all therapists are the same. I repeat not all therapists are the same. It is perfectly acceptable to call and ask your therapist a few questions. For instance: Have they had any experience working with Law Enforcement or specifically with Border Patrol Agents? Do they have a website with their education and biography on it so you can learn a little about them? What is their confidentiality policy? These are just a few questions to base your decision on. Ultimately it is making sure you feel comfortable with whomever you decide to see.

Recently I visited with the widow of one of our agents who had committed suicide. It was a brief encounter but something that was said stuck with me. The mother made the statement when we first met that "You are our new family too." I don't know if that is the exact wording but you get the meaning. In a later letter written by the widow she stated that it was unfortunate that her husband did not realize how much support and family he had. We are a family and as a family we must take care of each other as well as ourselves. Get a mental health check up. It could save your life!

A Harsh Journey

When I last saw my brother
he was in the hands of another.
I saw his limp body upon that gurney,
his soul gone on its final eternal journey.
His body laid there at rest,
I could barely catch my own breath.
Death is harsh and cold,
I expected it, but not until we had both grown old.
The stench of death in the air hung,
the pain and grief will outlive the air in my lungs.
I can still see his hands, all old and wrinkly,
that worked so hard daily and weekly.
His face had the appearance of contentment,
inside me, the anger grew with resentment.
Today I look back with sorrow,
wondering if this pain will subside tomorrow.
When I try to recall the times we had,
I remember them and then grow sad.
As my mind plays back a fond memory,
the picture, returns, of him lying on the gurney,
breathless, limp, still and cold,
as kissed him on his forehead, he looked old.
I asked God to take good care of him,
Oh God, do I miss my brother, Jim.

Jonathan M. Perkins

A Conversation about Suicide

“We can’t solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.”

Albert Einstein

As I said earlier in 1992 I began my career with the federal government as a correctional officer at Metropolitan Detention Center (MDC) in Los Angeles, California. This federal prison housed inmates from all groups of society. The prison is set in the middle of downtown Los Angeles catacorner from the train station (Union Station). Most people don’t even realize it is a prison. It looks more like a museum. It is a high rise building that just blends into the skyline. The only way you would know it is a prison is by the small signs and the windows. On a side note, when you see a building in a metropolitan downtown that has vertical slits for windows, it’s a jail.

During my second or third year working at the prison, I worked with a lieutenant who had recently been promoted and transferred from Texas. On his trip from Texas to California, he had his trailer stolen. Unfortunately in the trailer was sensitive information about his former institution. The Lieutenant arrived at my institution with a cloud over his head and his career. This cloud and his experience working for the government gave him a unique perspective as a supervisor. The Lieutenant and I had many a choir practice discussing the ins and outs of corrections and the politics. Most of our conversations ended up being about the politics. It is from Lt I learned early not to depend on “The Job” and to not put “The Job” before family and your overall happiness and well-being. It took me many a while to totally get this concept implanted in my mind. The Lieutenant or “L” “T” as we referred to him was a gung ho Correctional Officer (CO). He was on the Special Operations Response Team (SORT) team which is like the SWAT team for the Bureau of Prisons. The SORT team was responsible for responding to critical incidents within the prison. Anytime of riots or major disturbances were the purview of the SORT team. Well on day during training the lieutenant got injured. He blew out his knees. He was homebound for 6 months. One of the things he remembers and he shared with me was the fact that after his injury his wife had to help him walk to the bathroom and get up from the toilet. That was what made him realize that “The Job” was not “The Job” but “A Job.” Now don’t get me wrong I am not here to blame our woes on the service. Not my style. I do want you to realize and share with your co-workers the fact of the matter is our job on the scale of things is pretty damn important BUT so is your family, your faith, your health and your happiness. In my practice I have seen all kinds of clients from those who just need a boost to those who feel lost and hopeless. The idea and what I want you to realize if nothing else after reading this book is that you have a choice in how you feel, react and view this job and the world.

I want you to understand that you will have to change the way you think in order to inoculate yourselves against all the things that contribute to suicide in general and specifically for Border Patrol Agents.

I pray that this book will help whoever reads it to understand why someone would commit suicide (including themselves) and give them the information to combat this tragedy that is silently killing way too many Agents.

Suicide is almost a dirty word in our society. It conjures up all sorts of reactions depending on the audience and the victim. A young girl who is the victim of bullying commits suicide to escape the embarrassment and pain she faced on a daily basis. A father of two and a husband commits suicide because he has slipped into a deep and dark depression that has made him feel isolated and lost. Two of the many possible scenarios yet they evoke different and similar emotions. You feel sorry for the young girl and anger at her tormentors. You feel sad for the man's children and angry at his "selfishness". Both situations are a loss to society of the endless possibilities these two humans could have provided to the world they could no longer endure. For this reason it is always a tragedy when someone commits suicide. It is an all too frequent tragedy.

In 2011 there were 147 documented Law Enforcement Officers that committed suicide. In 2012 there were 126 documented Law Enforcement suicides. These numbers are generally low because not all Law Enforcement suicides are recorded as suicides and there is no national directory that requires reporting.

In the United States the rate of suicide for the general population is 12 per 100,000 people. For the Law Enforcement community it is about 18 per 100,000. As of November 2012 it was 28 per 100,000 for United States Border Patrol employees.

Statistics for Suicides among Law Enforcement Officers

35-44 years old	48%
10-20 years experience	39%
Below the rank of Sgt.	88%
With a Gun	96%
Alcohol involved	90%

Statistics for suicides among Border Patrol Agents

Average age 36 years old
Average length of service 7yrs 7mo's
Majority below the rank of supervisor
Majority Male

Date of suicide by fiscal quarter 8,7,8,7

By sector

6 EPT, 4TCA, 4SDC, 3YUM, 3DRT, 3LRT, 3DTM, 2RGV, 1HVM, 1 SPW

I have been asked by numerous agents, civilians and reporters “what is the cause of the high rate of suicide?”

An honest answer would be hopelessness, helplessness and I don’t know. The Border Patrol in recent history has had 32 suicides. That is from February of 2008 to December of 2013.

These numbers are alarming in and of themselves. If you look deeper and realize that as a Law enforcement Officer you are more likely to die by your own hand than that of an assailant it makes this fact even more disturbing.

As agents we are constantly reminded of the dangers we face daily. We are given a bullet proof vest, a gun, Taser and a collapsible baton to name a few. Agents are given these tools to assist them in the performance of their duties and for self-preservation. Agents train regularly on how to use these tools. They are told to stay “vigilante”, “be sharp” and “stay safe.” I have a ritual that I go through with my wife that is indicative of this programming. It is often that I work different hours than my wife. As a Border Patrol Agent we frequently work varied shifts. When I leave the house my wife likes to say to me “Be Safe.” “Be Safe” is a common saying amongst the law enforcement community. I am reminded of the television show Hill Street Blues. It was a cop drama. In the show they would show a shift briefing. That is a meeting at the beginning of shift where the supervisors take roll and inform the oncoming officers about anything that happened on the last shift they should know or general things to look out for during the upcoming shift. After each one of these briefings on the show the sergeant would tell his officers as they were going out on patrol “be careful out there.” Well my little ritual evolved over the years. Anytime someone would say be careful I would say “I can’t promise to be careful, but I’ll always be safe.” It was my way of reminding me that careful isn’t always possible in this line of work. We are trained to run towards situations most people naturally (and rightfully so) run away from. So, anytime someone says “be safe” my response is “Always.” My wife knows this and when I leave her she is sure to say to me “be safe” and I have to answer “always.” It is automatic for me to say this response but sometimes I am distracted or just not in that mindset due to working in an office and being out of the field for some time. When I am inattentive and not responding she repeats “be safe” until I remember to say “always.” It is my way of staying alert and remembering to stay vigilante when I walk out of that house because it is important that I make it back to the ones I love and that love me.

As I stated earlier, I worked for the Federal Bureau of Prisons before becoming a Border Patrol Agent. The corrections version of this ritual is “Everybody goes home at the end of the shift.” This was our way of reminding ourselves to stay alert.

So, how could someone who dedicates his life to saving the lives of others get into a mindset that would allow him to take his/her own life? I will try to simplify this complicated pattern of thinking.

As Law enforcement officers we understand the concept of Means, Intent and Opportunity. We are trained in this concept from the academy and throughout our career. It is what we use to assess a threat. Does the individual we are dealing with have the Means to harm us? Meaning do they have a weapon, are they physically fit? All the foregoing questions factor into what we term Means. The next step in the assessment process is Intent. Does the individual have the intent to harm us? This can be evidenced by the person pointing a gun at us or verbally saying something to indicate their negative intentions towards us. Step three is opportunity. Can the individual actually harm us? If they have a knife are they close enough to stab us?

A good way to give you an example of this is an incident that happened while I was working in the prison. I worked in the segregation unit for the last year of my career with the Bureau of Prisons. Most people would refer to this section as "The Hole." It is the prison within the prison. Whenever someone breaks a rule in the prison or needs protection in the prison they are placed in segregation. It is exactly what it sounds like, segregated or separated from the other prisoners. The prisoners are locked in their rooms twenty-three hours a day. They only come out of their rooms for showers, visits and to be moved into another cell. As a correctional officer on this unit it is your responsibility to make sure all of this happens personally. No one moves on the unit unless he is in restraints (cuffs at a minimum) and escorted by one to three officers depending on the prisoner. Sometimes prisoners do not want to go with the program and they will verbally let you know this. One day I am in charge of moving prisoners from their current cell to a new cell. This was done for security reasons. This day the inmate I had to move was refusing to allow me to put restraints on him because he did not want to change cells. So, let's go through our assessment. Did he have the means to assault me? Sure, he could use his fists and since he was refusing to be restrained I could not be sure there was no homemade weapon in the cell. Next, did he have the intent to harm me? According to him, yes. His statements were to the effect that if I opened that door he would harm me physically. Third, did he have the opportunity? Actually no, he was in a locked cell. There wasn't much he could do to me as long as I left him in the cell. That's how we assess threats as Law Enforcement Officers. On a side note, I opened the door and the prisoners decided it was in his best interest to allow me to put restraints on him and move him. Totally out of policy, but I had a schedule to keep and didn't have time to play with this guy.

Now that you have an idea of Means, Intent Opportunity, I want you to think about something. Every day as a Law Enforcement Officer you have the Means and Opportunity to commit suicide. You just don't have the Intent. You don't have the intent and it doesn't make sense for you to commit suicide. You have other things that keep you grounded and moving forward. Those things could be anything from work, family and hobbies to faith, friends and a retirement plan.

What would cause such a drastic change so a rational person would go against one of the strongest rules of nature, which is self-preservation and harm themselves. When it is laid out like this you realize how much pain (psychological or physical) a person must be in, in order to even consider suicide.

We know from studies and interviews that contributing factors that influence that intent are Depression, PTSD, Relationship issues, Chronic pain, Law Enforcement mentality and access to firearms. We will discuss these issues independently in a separate chapter.

Statistics show that as a law enforcement officer you are more likely to die by your own hand than an assailant and we are given all these tools and training to protect ourselves from that possibility, where is the training to protect ourselves from ourselves? In this area unfortunately the law enforcement community and leadership is failing. I am not saying all, but the majority of law enforcement agencies do not prepare their employees for the mental struggles and battles they will go through from this profession. It is part of the culture of law enforcement. We are trained to believe that we are invincible. It is a necessary mindset at times. We have to be able to disassociate from rational and common sense in order to perform certain aspects of this job. Unfortunately this same mindset that gives us the ability to perform under duress and in situations that most people could not even imagine is killing us!

This ain't normal and you ain't crazy

“There is no hunting like the hunting of man, and those who have hunted arm men long enough and liked it, never care for anything else thereafter.”

Ernest Hemingway

It was early morning or late for a midnight shift (about 5am), depending on how you wanted to call it. My partner and I sat on “Perch” watching the cars wiz by on the I-5 freeway. It was customary when the checkpoint was down that we would sit in our marked Border Patrol vehicles and watch traffic drive by in order to pick out smuggling loads as they drove up the highway in an attempt to get by the checkpoint when it was not fully operational with Agents standing on the highway. The smugglers know our routine and would seize just such opportunities. Therefore we would “Perch” Agents on the highway.

We were having a strange conversation about whether or not Elmo could take Big Bird. This is the typical type of conversation late into an overnight shift. The body is not supposed to stay up all night and I think the mind rebels after a while and the result is conversations about topics even stoners would think were crazy. In the process of this debate we both stopped at the same time as we noticed a white late model suburban pass our position. My partner put the car into gear and I grabbed the radio to let dispatch know we were following a suspected load vehicle.

“Dispatch this is Kilo 117, can I get a plate check on a white suburban license plate 7 Whiskey Charlie Tango 552?”

As we continued to follow the suburban we could only see two people in the vehicle. There were no seats in the rear of the vehicle. We continue to follow and just for a split second you could see a head pop up from in back of the vehicle. Then another, then another. Now there were about 5-7 heads visible all looking back at our vehicle. I flicked the toggle to turn on the lights and sirens. This had the usual effect on a smuggler. Instead of pulling over he started to go faster and the number of heads visible doubled.

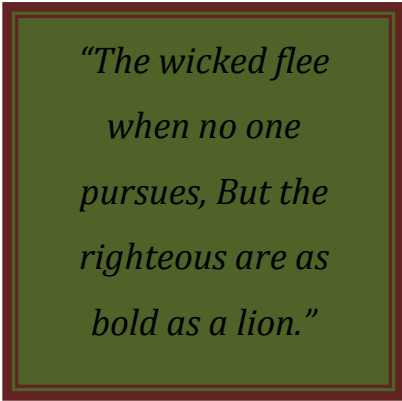
“Dispatch Kilo 117 we have an F-T-Y northbound on I-5 passing Basilone exit”

I updated dispatch so they could notify local authorities as we did not know if the vehicles driver was looking for a place to pull over or “bail out.” Our guess was he was looking for a place to bail out. Many times when a smuggling load is stopped the occupants will jump out of the car and run in several different directions. Knowing just by sheer numbers some will get away because most times it is one to two agents versus 15- 20 aliens. So we continued the pursuit for another 5 miles. During this time we were joined by a highway patrol car. The smuggler finally found a good place to “bail out.” He stopped the vehicle in the far right lane of traffic and people proceeded to jump out of the car and run into the field east of the freeway. It makes no common sense to run into a

field when you have absolutely no idea where you are. But aliens do it regularly. It makes even less sense when the field you are running into is the property of the US government. Namely the US Marine Corp. They don't take lightly to uninvited guests. We stop our patrol car behind their vehicle and my partner and I get out of the vehicle and run to the vehicle to try and plug the leak of human bodies pouring out of the vehicle before all of them get out. This is a practice that as far as I know Border Patrol is the only law enforcement agency teaches. To prove this point the Highway patrol officer did stop and was there but he was behind his car door with his gun drawn and pointing at the vehicle.

As Border Patrol Agent we have a job that requires us to do things that are not normal even for law enforcement. This could well have been an armed suspect that we would have been more prudent of us to do as our highway patrol counterpart so expertly did and stay behind the door and draw our weapons. But experience has shown Border Patrol Agents that if you do, that you lose all of your aliens, the smuggler and the guide.

Being a Law Enforcement Officer is not a normal job. Being a Border Patrol Agent is even more of an anomaly. It is not politically correct but the truth is as Hemingway's quote describes, we hunt humans. Our job, whether the bureaucrats will say it or not is to track and arrest human beings who have broken the laws of our sovereign nation by illegally entering the United States. I know that is not politically correct, but it is a fact of life. I think the fact that our leadership dances around what we do and makes excuses to the public for what we do contributes to the psychological toll this jobs takes on it's Agents.



*"The wicked flee
when no one
pursues, But the
righteous are as
bold as a lion."*

One of the things I want you to realize is the fact that this job will take a psychological toll on you. It is not a maybe or can, it will! All of the evidence says this as well as my personal experience from talking to others and what I have gone through.

When I went for my physical I was disqualified. The doctor believed I had a heart murmur. The reason he believed that was because when he was examining me I was so nervous I had an anxiety attack. One of the things that would happen to me when I had these attacks is that I would shake. It would be kind of like a mild tremor. I had these anxiety attacks for many years before this incident. The doctor never asked me that question but assumed the shaking was a heart murmur as he listened to my heart beat. I had to go to a second doctor and have him re-examine me and determine if I was fit for the job. This underlying condition of panic attacks got worse the more stress I was under. I was always able to control it the more comfortable I became with certain situations. So, the academy was a struggle for me not because of the mental or physical part but from a stress and psychological part.

I tell that story so that you understand. The part of the job that you are going to have to be the most careful of is not the physical or legal parts of the job. It will be the stress and the psychological toll.

Most people don't need to go to work with a badge and a gun. Most people don't work under the accepted condition that at any moment someone could try to kill them. Most people don't go to work accepting that they may have to sacrifice or risk their lives for someone else (be it a co-worker or a stranger). Most people don't go to work and open their email to see reports concerning decapitated bodies or murders. This is our daily acceptable routine. It does not come without a price.

I was reading a report that discusses how over the years a law enforcement officer changes. When we are hired we are assertive, self-assured, empathetic, sound minded and we have a need for autonomous achievement.

Autonomous achievement means we simply do things independently in order to accomplish tasks. This is a good thing but it can get in the way sometimes. I have a good friend who is a former marine. I have to make sure I say that correctly. In case you do not know this there is no such thing as an x-marine. They are inactive or former but never 'X.' Anyway, my friend who at the time was a Border Patrol Agent trainee (t) and had been an airplane mechanic in the marines was given the task of filling up the fuel truck. This was a simple enough task you would think, but it was slightly more complicated than it sounds. This truck had a large tank in the bed of the truck. That tank was used to fuel our generated at the station. Generators are typically used to fuel moveable lighting systems. My friend goes to the gas station and fuels up the tank in the back which takes diesel fuel. When you go to the gas station diesel fuel is the one with the green handle. He completes the task and being an independent go getter he decides to fuel the gas tank for the vehicle too. He goes to put the diesel nozzle in the truck and it does not fit. The go getter that he is, he is not deterred. He decides to overcome, adapt and improvise. He goes inside gets a funnel from the attendant and proceeds to funnel diesel fuel into the gas tank of the truck. For those of you that have not realized what is going on here let me explain. The diesel nozzle is not only green but it is a different size. It is made this way so that people don't mistakenly put diesel fuel into cars that run on regular unleaded fuel. Now do you see what my overachieving compadre was doing? Yes, he filled up a truck that runs on unleaded fuel with diesel gasoline. He left the gas station very proud of himself only to realize about five miles down the road the truck was not running very well. This is when it dawned on him that he had made an error. I don't know about your station or wherever you work but this is the type of story that never gets forgotten. Case in point this was over ten years ago and I am telling it to you now. Well he managed to get the truck back to the station. His job for the rest of the shift was to drop the gas tank and get all of that fuel out of the truck. His training as an airplane mechanic served him well. He got it done. This is a great example of our attitude when we are first hired. We get it done. You give us a task and we figure it out. That is why they select us.

This same study showed that after several years (I say 5-7), we change a bit. We become distrustful of outsiders, cynical, resistant to change, pessimistic, biased and we lean more towards the logical than the abstract.

My evidence for this is a saying that you can ask any Border Patrol Agent (and probably and police officer). The question is “how do you know when a detainee (suspect) is lying?” The answer most will give you is “His/ Her lips are moving.”

By the time you have 5-7 years in most of your friends are law enforcement officers and you think anybody that isn't in law enforcement is a liberal tree hugging cry-baby. You have to realize that your perspective has been warped. Not in an instant, but over time. I don't say this to make you think that something is wrong with you either. I just want you to realize the toll this job has taken on you. It is your job to see the worse in people and deal with it. My wife and I have a saying, when we do something nice for each other we will say “there's a fee.” Usually the fee is simply a kiss or an embrace but a fee none the less. In order to do this job and to do it effectively ladies and gentlemen “There's a fee!”

There is a great story a more experienced agent told me when I was a trainee. The story goes something like this. (I also don't know where the story originates from so I can't give credit to whoever made it up).

Once upon a time there was a man named Joseph who was hired by the United States government to work in the desert. Joe was very excited to be working for US government. Joe made sure he got to work early the first day bright eyed and bushy tailed. Joe's first day on the job he was given a tour of the office and introduced to his mentor a Mr. Adam Henry. Adam Henry was an older guy who had been with the government over 20 years. Adam and Joe went out to the desert on the second day. Adam told Joe on the first day his assignment would be to find blue rocks in the desert. Joe thought this was a strange job but it was a challenge, outdoors, it paid well and he was pretty much his own boss, so he really didn't care. Adam sat in the car with the air conditioner on while Joe looked for blue rocks. It was challenging at first but Joe got better and better at it. Joe realized that the blue rocks were always found in certain area. So, there were clues or signs that would lead him to areas where there were blue rocks. After a while Joe was finding blue rocks left and right it was easy. He would get out of the car and he would find some sign and go right to them. After a while his mentor pulled him aside and told him how great he was doing. Matter a fact Joe had done so well the government didn't need any more blue rocks. Now they needed red rocks. OK Joe thought he figured out how to find the blue ones and it had taken him a few years to get so good at it that they didn't need any more, he was sure he could do the same with this assignment to find red rocks. So the next day Adam and Joe went out into the desert. Adam sat in the car and Joe started looking for red rocks. Again it was a challenge but past experience made the learning curve faster. It only took about a year before Joe figured out the signs that would lead him to red rocks. Joe got really good at finding red rocks. Matter a fact he got so good that Adam pulled him aside one day and congratulated him. The government had thought Joe had done such a great job they gave him an award. Joe was very proud and even more excited to get out there and do his job to the best of

his ability. The next day Adam pulled Joe aside and said “The government doesn’t need any more red rocks or blue rocks now the government wants you to find yellow rocks.” Joe knew the drill and began the process all over again. He found some yellow rocks and then looked for the signs that indicate where yellow rocks could be found. Just like before Joe got really good at finding yellow rocks. Until one day Adam came by and told Joe how great of a job he was doing. Joe was pretty sure he knew what was coming next because every time he got really good at doing what he was told to do they changed the rules on him. Adam looked at Joe and said with a smile “you have done so good at finding yellow rocks, the government doesn’t need any more yellow rocks now we want you to find green rocks.”

Does this sound familiar? The laws don’t change much but how we enforce them, and the process changes over and over again. Many agents have never even heard of a “rem-proc.” (pronounced rim-prahc) or a pre-cant. How many agents are allowed to or even know what I.P. is? That’s Interior Patrol. The agency has and continues to change. My hopes in writing this book is not only to save lives but also to provide a record of some of the culture in the stories I tell. You cannot allow the rules that govern this agency to define you or your job performance.

In order to not only survive your career but to survive after your career you will need to be resilient. That means knowing what you do is not who you are, but who you are is evident in what you do.

Ray Lewis was a middle linebacker for the Baltimore Ravens. He retired after playing 17 years for the same team and winning two superbowls. Lewis was selected to 12 pro-bowls and was named defensive player of the year twice in his career. His attitude has always been “We do what we do!” Meaning it doesn’t matter what the other team says or does we are prepared and we do what we do no matter what. That is the type of attitude you need to have to survive this career choice. It is not about laws, policies and what supervisors say.

Lewis is considered by some to be one of the greatest to ever play the position of middle linebacker. If you listen to interviews or speeches by Lewis the first thing that strikes you is his presence.

“EFFORT IS BETWEEN YOU AND YOU.”

RAY LEWIS

Mr. Lewis is 6’ 1” and 240 lbs of muscle, but that’s not what I mean. There are certain people in this world that have charisma that goes beyond their appearance. It is in their being, their essence I would say. Lewis has a saying I like it is “Presence and essence determine respect.” Lewis humbly describes his career by admitting he was not the best but that one thing he would not allow and that was for someone to “outwork” him. He discusses how in 17 years of football no one on his team has consistently hustled to the football more than him. This is the nature of resilience. It is not dependent on anyone else’s opinion. Lewis says “Effort is between you and you.” That is a resilient attitude and is totally within your control. How well you do your job is up to you and can only be judged by you. It should not depend on whether you get acknowledge, what the public thinks or if someone else gets an award. It should be judged by yourself and for yourself,

that's it! You can control certain things and those are the things you should focus on. You control your integrity, your professionalism, your effort.

*"Success is peace of mind, which is a direct result of self-satisfaction in knowing you made the effort to do your best to become the best that you are capable of becoming."
John Wooden*

This ain't normal and you ain't crazy
The life you live is kinda hazy.
Desert, darkness, death and politics.
No one understands.
No one stands,
with you.
You feel alone.
Left and betrayed.
This is the life you chose.
You put your life on the line.
To hold a line!
Day and night.
To stop careful strangers.
From their plight.
Plight to live a life that they can choose.
A life not dictated by the mood.
They'll hump the desert,
Like a mule.
Carrying drugs or leading bodies,
In their minds they have nothing to lose.
The life left behind was not life at all.
The journey can be a death march,
a nightmare lived while sleep walking.

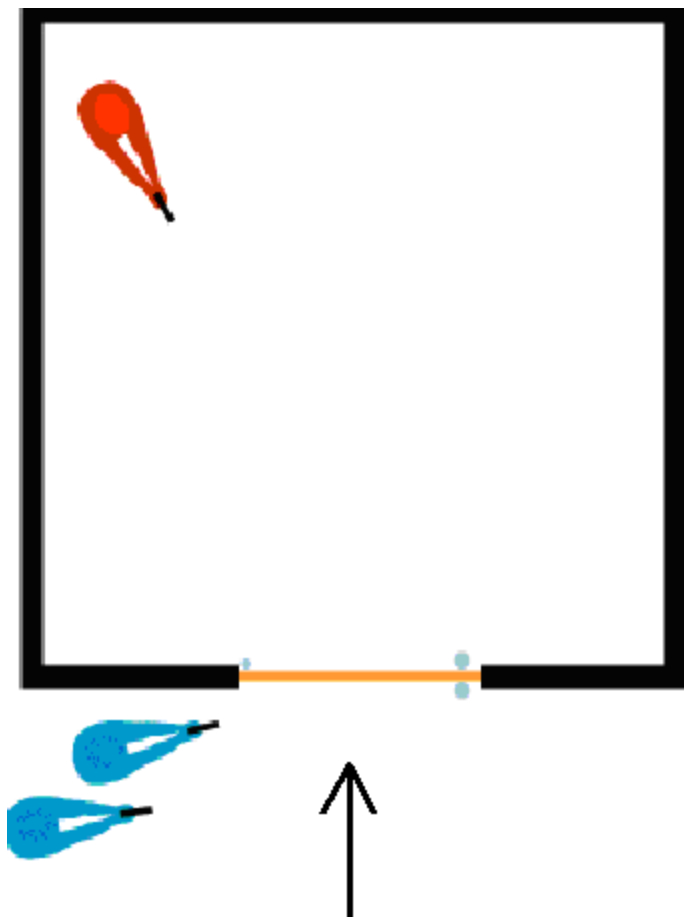
You choose to risk your life to protect the rest.
To protect the people who lie sleep in their beds.
With pictures of sugarplums dancing in their heads.
Hump the mountains.
Stand the wall, Guard the highways.
Duty calls!
It's crazy, it's normal, it's what we do.
It's something I'm not asking anyone else to do.
Just stay out of my way so I don't get killed.

My mind races with pictures of protectors.
Yet the bureaucrats treat me like a defector.
Like I am defective because I want to do the job.
Do the job I'm paid to do by good old O'Bahm.

No one wants to hear that I cry in my sleep.
That my wife left me.
My kids weep.
No one wants to say this job takes a toll.
No one wants to know why it pushes us to the edge of the bowl.
I sit here on the edge and wonder how.
How did I get here?
With one way down.
It's like a tunnel that's too narrow to turn around.
One way in and one direction to go,
That's down.
No brakes, no cushion just mangled death below.
That pain is less than the hurt in my soul.
I want it to stop.
I don't know how.
It won't stop.
Can't stop.
But why,
But how,
The pain is real,
Imagined and true.
It comes from a place that is seen by few.
Stop it I must!
Tell you I can't!
This is the mindset of an Agent off safe.
It can be stopped by you,
You must take a hand.
Close your eyes and listen to my plan.
Walk don't run!
Look but don't see!
Trust me theirs help!
The pain isn't from me!
The pain will stop.
Just not as fast as you like.
The pain will go away.
Then you can see the real light.
The moment you can breathe,
Without wincing inside.
The moment you realize.
You don't have to be ashamed.
Is the moment you reach back,
And pull someone else,
Back from the edge,
The edge of a broken shelf!

Fatal Funnel

Close combat training prepares us to clear rooms and search for dangerous suspects. The fatal funnel is a choke point and area where we are most vulnerable to the bad guys (see picture below).



The fatal funnel is most commonly referred to in reference to clearing houses or rooms. It is the area of an entryway or exit. It could be a doorway, a window or a hatch door. It is a point that is limited and can only be entered by one to two persons at a time. It is a common training fact. You are trained that you must try to stay out of the fatal funnel. If you must go through the fatal funnel then it is imperative that you spend as little time within that location as possible. This makes perfect tactical sense. You do not want to give the “bad guy” a tactical advantage and if you must, you want to shorten that time period as much as possible.

I believe that same concept can be applied to your overall wellbeing. I base this on a principle stated by Peggy A. Thoits that is quoted in Dr. Violanti’s book *Police Suicide* “The more social identities a person has, the less potential that person will have for depression or psychological stress.”

Social identities can be anything from being a father/mother to a friend. It includes hobbies and activities and well as time spent with family. All of these things contribute to our overall well being as a person. It allows us to handle whatever situations life throws at us (and life will throw situations at you). These are the things that form our support system and allows us to move on or put things in their proper perspective. I am a Border Patrol Agent and a Therapist. I have been reading and researching information on police suicide. I have spoken to many law enforcement officers and mental health professionals. Many of these conversations revolved around the topics of law enforcement mentality being different than that of the general public. If you don't think you see things a little differently go to a restaurant and sit with your back to the door then come back and finish reading this article. We as law enforcement officers have been trained to hold things in and keep them close to our vest (no pun intended). We don't want others to know we have problems because we believe they will think we are weak. We definitely don't talk to therapist because they just want to take our guns and credentials away from us.

As I thought about our mentality and the multi-faceted dynamics of suicide I began to think. How do we not only explain this phenomenon but explain it in a way that the solution is evident in the explanation. After reading, praying and reading some more divine intervention gave me some insight.

The fatal funnel we train to avoid in tactical situations is something we are driven to in our personal situations.

When we first begin working in law enforcement we have various interests, a large diverse group of interests and friends, we are in contact with our family and we are health conscious. If I were to make a simple representation of that it would look like the list below.

WORK

FRIENDS

FAMILY

HEALTH

HOBBIES

We get on the job and we are striving to adjust our lives to the new demands so we cut down on the hobbies because "we don't have time for that." As we settle into the job maybe we get a special assignment or a promotion and then the adjustment begins again and we let go of our exercise routine because we don't have time to get to the gym. So now our list looks like this.

WORK

FRIENDS

FAMILY

Things aren't going so well at home and we are doing an important job. We are risking out lives every single day and we don't believe it is appreciated at home or we don't want them to worry about us so we exclude them from the circle of information in regards to work. So our list looks like this now.

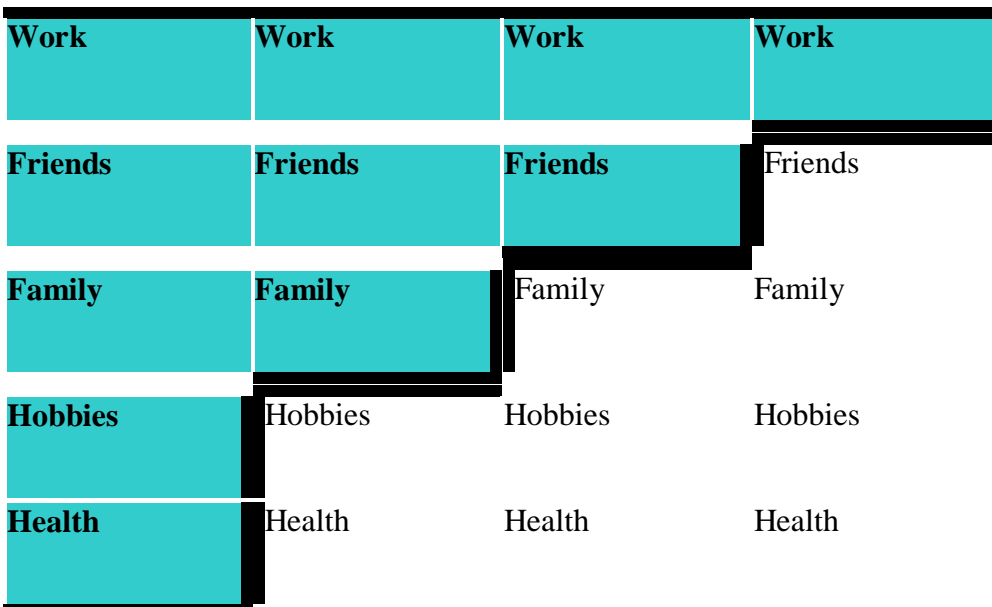
WORK

FRIENDS

Now things are really getting crazy at work you are up for a promotion or you are involved in a specialty unit or maybe a union steward. You are taking your job seriously and focusing on making things better for the agency and your co-workers. Now your list looks like this.

WORK.

An overall diagram of this progression would look like this.



Now, something happens at work. You get injured and you can't work. You get an allegation and you are placed on administrative leave. You get pulled off your detail. Your are about to be terminated from your job.

What do you do? You have no support system. You put all of your time and energy into work and now they have betrayed you!

Can you see how someone could commit suicide now. I talked to a lot of people and they always say “I would never do that” or I don’t understand how he/she could do that.” It’s the Fatal Funnel. They have ignored all of their others identities for so long they have focus of one identity. They do not even realize all those other things are still there. They just can’t see them. The gym didn’t go anywhere, you just don’t go. Your family is still there, you just don’t talk to them. Your friends and family still care about you, you just don’t see it because you have shut them out for so long. You are still capable of doing all the hobbies and activities you once enjoyed. If not the same ones then you could develop new ones. This is the single focus mindset you have to avoid and get out of as soon as possible if you find yourself in it. It is deadly and it will kill you.

The insidious thing about this is it doesn’t have to be work in the last part of the funnel. The funnel doesn’t care. It would work the same way with a relationship or family. If that is your only focus and then all of a sudden your spouse tells you they want to get a divorce. The same thing happens. You are so focused on that identity being destroyed you don’t see all the possibilities and support around you. Same thing could happen with your health or your friends. What if you believed you had done something so heinous that all your friends would shun you or you would have to go to jail. Identity destroyed, you believe suicide is the answer. That’s the only reason it doesn’t make sense to us it’s because we are not in the fatal funnel. The funnel could have two things in it and be effected just as bad. For instance work and family. Then you get a divorce get drunk get arrested and now face the possibility of losing your job. See what I mean. The problem is you have to get out of the funnel and look around you to really see the picture for what it is and know that all your support is still there.

The solution is simple and in the explanation. Pay attention and stay involved with as many identities as you can. Even when you don’t want to go to the gym make sure you are going a couple days a week. Plan time with family and friends where you don’t talk about work. Time where you can be an average Joe citizen. You still don’t have to sit with your back to the door, but enjoy the activities and explore new activities with the people close to you. This enables you to stay out of the fatal funnel and you never know you may pull a friend or two out of their fatal funnel at the same time.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) V, describes PTSD as the following:

A. Exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence in one (or more) of the following ways:

1. Directly experiencing the traumatic event(s).
2. Witnessing, in person, the event(s) as it occurred to others.
3. Learning that the traumatic event(s) occurred to a close family member or close friend. In cases of actual or threatened death of a family member or friend, the event(s) must have been violent or accidental.
4. Experiencing repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of the traumatic event(s) (e.g., first responders collecting human remains; police officers repeatedly exposed to details of child abuse).

Note: Criterion A4 does not apply to exposure through electronic media, television, movies, or pictures, unless this exposure is work related.

B. Presence of one (or more) of the following intrusive symptoms associated with the traumatic event(s), beginning after the traumatic event(s) occurred:

1. Recurrent, involuntary, and intrusive distressing memories of the traumatic event(s).
2. Recurrent distressing dreams in which the content and/or affect of the dream are related to the traumatic event(s).
3. Dissociative reactions (e.g. flashbacks) in which the individual feels or acts as if the traumatic event(s) were recurring. (Such reactions may occur on a continuum, with the most extreme expression being a complete loss of awareness of present surroundings.)
4. Intense or prolonged psychological distress at exposure to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event(s).
5. Marked physiological reactions to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble and aspect of traumatic event(s).

C. Persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the traumatic event(s), beginning after the traumatic event(s) occurred, as evidenced by one or more of the following:

1. Avoidance of or efforts to avoid distressing memories, thoughts or feelings, about or closely associated with the traumatic event(s).
2. Avoidance of or efforts to avoid external reminders (people, places, conversations, activities, objects, situations) that arouse distressing memories, thoughts or feelings, about or closely associated with the traumatic event(s).

D. Negative alterations in cognitions and mood associated with the traumatic event(s), beginning or worsening after the traumatic event(s) occurred, as evidenced by two ((or more) of the following:

1. Inability to remember an important aspect of the traumatic event(s)(typically due to dissociative amnesia and not to other factors such as head injury, alcohol or drugs).
 2. Persistent and exaggerated negative beliefs or expectations about oneself, others, or the world (e.g., “I am bad,” “no one can be trusted,” “The world is completely dangerous.” “My whole nervous system is permanently ruined”).
 3. Persistent, distorted cognitions about the cause or consequences of the traumatic event(s) that lead the individual to blame himself/herself or others.
 4. Persistent negative emotional state (e.g. fear, horror, guilt, or shame).
 5. Markedly diminished interest or participation in significant activities.
 6. Feelings of detachment or estrangement from others.
 7. Persistent inability to experience positive emotions (e.g. inability to experience happiness, satisfaction, or loving feelings).
- E. Marked alterations in arousal and reactivity associated with the traumatic event(s), beginning or worsening after the traumatic event(s) occurred, as evidenced by two (or more) of the following:
1. Irritable behavior and angry outbursts (with little or no provocation) typically expressed as verbal or physical aggression towards people or objects.
 2. Reckless or self-destructive behavior.
 3. Hypervigilance.
 4. Exaggerated startle response.
 5. Problems with concentration.
 6. Sleep disturbance (e.g. difficulty falling or staying asleep or restless sleep).
- F. Duration of the disturbance (Criteria B, C, D, and E) is more than 1 month.
- G. The disturbance causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.
- H. The disturbance is not attributable to the psychological effects of a substance (e.g., medication, alcohol) or another medical condition.

I will give you a chance to play amateur psychologist. The following information is from an actual event that happened to a Border Patrol Agent.

On XXX at approximately 2100hrs, Agents working X miles west of Brownsville, Texas in Zone X requested assistance in the rescue of a drowning subject. The agents were attempting to rescue two subjects by tossing a rescue to the subjects. The subjects were unable to grab the rescue line. Agent XXX went into the river and rescued one of the drowning subjects. Agent XXX returned to the river in an attempt to rescue the second subject. Agent XXX reached the second subject and was unable to rescue him as he went underwater. Agent XXX swam back to the U. S. river bank and entangled himself in the hydrilla and had trouble staying afloat. At that point Agent 2 entered the water in an attempt to rescue Agent 1. Agent 2 was unable to reach Agent 1 due to the density of the vegetation in the water. Agent 2 tossed agent 1 an empty water jug which helped agent 1 stay afloat a little longer. Seconds later Agent 3 (MRT unit) arrived on scene and assessed the situation. He acquired Agent 1’s location and observed him going underwater. Agent 3 tossed agent 1 the rescue line but agent 1 appeared to be too exhausted to reach for the line. Observing this, Agent 3 jumped into the water and

muscled his way through the heavy vegetation. Agent 3 reached Agent 1 and pulled him over his back and made his way back to the U.S. river bank with agent 1 in tow. Agent 1 did ingest river water and felt faint. Agent 3 was exhausted but stable. Agent 2 also returned to the U.S. river bank on his own power and was helped out of the water by agents at the scene.

Emergency Medical Services were summoned to the scene. Agent 1, 2 and one of the subjects were taken to the hospital for medical treatment.

Some additional information that does not appear in the report is the fact that the second subject drowned. Agent 1 vividly remembers the subject telling him it was ok to let him go. The subject knew Agent 1 could not hold him and save himself. Now, part of traumatic events can be skewed. So, whether the drowning subject ever actually said that to agent 1 is irrelevant, it is what agent 1 remembers. It is something to think. Why would he remember that if it did not happen? The mind is an amazing thing. It provides information we need sometimes even if the information is false. Do you think it makes it a little easier to deal with this event with the memory of the subject saying "it's ok." Yes, it does. Again, I am not saying it did not happen but it is something to remember. If you are in a traumatic event your memory may be skewed or incorrect in some aspects.

Also Agent 1 did have dreams about this scenario over and over again for a period of time.

So, now you get to play amateur psychologist. Does this agent meet the criteria for PTSD?

He was "Exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury."

He did have "intrusive symptoms associated with the traumatic event."

He did have "Persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the traumatic event."
(Eventually he transferred to another station away from southern border).

Let's say he also experienced "Negative alterations in cognitions and mood associated with the traumatic event." (He possibly felt guilty because he could not save the subject and detached from friends and family).

Let's also say he had a "Marked alterations in arousal and reactivity associated with the traumatic event." (He was irritable and had difficulty sleeping).

This is an actual event that could cause PTSD. I say could cause PTSD because two people can experience the same event and one could suffer from PTSD and one could not. How is that? I believe it is due in part to the fact that your personal resilience and health play a factor in how these things affect you. It is as if there are several factors that come into play. These factors are unique to each individual and therefore no one can predict how any particular scenario will affect an individual. It depends on the individuals

experience, genetics and overall mental and physical health I believe. As well as coping skills and support systems the individual has in place. Meaning you are exposed to a virus and you get infected, it gives us some clarity on how can strengthen our ability to prevent and/or lessen the effects of traumatic events.

This is good news. This means we can prepare ourselves prior to anything traumatic happening to us. It is my belief that most law enforcement officers who have been on the job for more than 3 years will have an incident occur that could lead to PTSD. It is the nature of our business.

Although all of the particulars of PTSD are not known, it is known that it affects the nervous system. It is as though the nervous system has been overwhelmed and has not been able to reset. So how do we prepare for the inevitable? There are several really good treatments for PTSD if you have had an incident already. I will go into some of them a little bit later in the chapter. First, I want to discuss the treatment options.

One treatment method is called EMDR. EMDR stands for Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing. It is the concept that traumatic events are stored in your mind in such a way that is causing you to continually experience them at a distressing level. This process allows your brain to reprocess the memories and decrease the emotion connected to that particular experience and learn new coping skills. It is important to find a practitioner who is experienced with this treatment and trauma. I would even prefer someone experienced with law enforcement or at least first responders.

Another treatment option is called Neuro-linguistic programming (NLP). In a sense NLP works very similar to EMDR. It is a way to reprogram the memories in your mind so as to decrease the amount of stress they are causing.

I will give you a brief example of the process. Look at the picture on the next page.



As I am sure you are aware, this is an image from September 11, 2001. It was a significant event for most of Americans. I can prove that by simply asking “where were you when you heard about this attack?” I was at home sleeping and hung over. My brother who was livin with me at the time woke me up and told me something was going on. I got up and saw the news. I was horrified and angry. I wanted to do something. I remember waiting for a call from the station, because I was sure we would be place on high alert and called into work to defend our country. No call, so I finally called worked and was told it was “business as usual for us.” So, I sat back down and watched the news all day. Frustrated, angry and insulted my agency apparently did not think it was important enough to bring all of us into work to at least disseminate information. I wish our agency would have at least made the appearance that we were preparing to do something. I think like many other Border Patrol Agents we just wanted to help.

How does it feel to think about this event? I am sure it still stirs up some negative emotions. Here is a way to decrease that. Look at the pictures on the next five pages for 15 seconds each. For added results think of happy or silly music playing while you look at the pictures (I use circus music but whatever works for you as long as it is happy).











Now, I want you to think of the most beautiful thing you can imagine! If you don't have something readily available I can help. Turn the page and look at this picture for 30 seconds.



In case you are wondering, this is not a random Baby it is my daughter Kyra and to me she is the most beautiful thing I can Imagine!

You should notice the negative feelings you had associated with the photos from 911 have decreased. You can even go back and look at the photos and it should have less of an effect on you.

By making the photo of the negative event smaller and smaller you move the event farther and farther away from you this decreases the emotional weight of the photo. You can do this with events as well. Visualize the event and make it smaller and smaller in your mind and then swap that small picture with something significantly pleasant.

Now, there are also ways to sort of immunize yourself from traumatic events. It is not a guarantee but it will lessen the effects. Those things are having a good support system. That includes positive and supportive family, friends, pastors, counselors, mentors. Anybody that you feel comfortable sharing your difficulties with. Another good way is to journal your daily activities (accomplishments and trials). I have been journaling since I was in high school and if nothing else it is interesting to go back in time and see what was so important at the time (good and bad). I believe there is something therapeutic in writing out the things in our heads. It is like we are giving our minds permission to let go because it is saved somewhere else, if that makes any sense.

In this chapter I only touched on PTSD but mental health is important and as law enforcement officers we are susceptible to all of the same mental disorders as the general population. Therefore I believe it is imperative that we all get a mental health check-up at least once a year. That means finding a good mental health practitioner and sitting down for a few sessions a year just to get a fresh perspective on what's going on in your life. This also gives you the opportunity to interview prospective therapists when nothing significant is going on. This way you find someone you are comfortable with and then when something does happen you already have a go to therapist you can feel comfortable with.

Drug and Alcohol abuse

I met the devil and Jeffrey Dahmer at a craps table in Las Vegas and they tried to kick me out of the casino. You will have to wait until the end of the chapter to hear that story.

It is the nature of our business and we have been trained to gather and associate around alcohol. We are so good at it we take other coping skills and add alcohol. WE have Softball tournaments and add alcohol. We have get together (choir practice) and add alcohol. So, alcohol is an ingrained part of our culture. It is what we celebrate with and it is what we commiserate with.

I found it interesting that one of the large police departments did an informal study of the drinking habit of its' officers and found that their drinking habits were most similar too male college freshmen.

According to the Agencies numbers:

1. The average age of agents arrested for alcohol-related offenses in 2013 was 20-39 years of age.
2. The average time in service for agents arrested for alcohol related offenses is 2013 is 5 years.
3. FY 2010 there were 95 Alcohol related arrests of agents.
4. FY 2011 there were 81 Alcohol related arrests of agents.
5. FY 2012 there were 106 Alcohol related arrests of agents.
6. FY 2013 there were 79 Alcohol related arrests of agents.

If anything the thing I want you to realize is this is a small number of agents comparatively speaking. It is also significant to realize we need to target our new hires as the numbers show the majority of arrests were within the first five years of service. Another important fact to remember is that most agents don't abuse alcohol. Yet most agencies that do have alcohol awareness programs use techniques geared towards those who have abuse alcohol or are alcoholics. The Border Patrol specifically has no policy geared towards assisting agents who want to get help. I know the agency will not like seeing that in writing but it is a fact. I will say there are some exceptional supervisors out there who on an individual basis will go out of their way to assist agents in need. Their programs are use fear tactics to try and scare agents into compliance. It is the mafia method. Punish one to teach the masses. This method does not work with Border Patrol Agents and first responders in general. It does not work because we are trained to ignore scare tactics. We have to in order to perform our duties. We are trained to run towards things most people run away from. Remember that disassociation thing I discussed before. This is where it hurts us. We are not susceptible to the same marketing or "teaching" techniques as the general masses because we are different and rightly so!

One sector has touched on doing something along the lines of taking advantage of the social norm, which is the fact that most agents don't get arrested or abuse alcohol regularly or become alcoholics. That sector is El Centro. The local union and management got together and created a program called "PARASE." The program is not

expensive and is highly reliant on visual marketing. They use stickers and posters to constantly remind agents of their joint goal of Preventing Alcohol Related Events Sensibly Every time (PARASE). PARESE is also the Spanish word for stop. So the message is two-fold. This is a great program that has been successful in reducing alcohol related incidents in their sector. It should be pushed nationwide but the Border Patrol is resistant to doing this. I have asked and will continue to try to get this type of program initiated.

Remember I said we do what works for us. Why are we drawn to alcohol. It was Dr. George Watson who wrote in his book *Nutrition and Your Mind* writes “alcohol is an instant acetate.” This means that alcohol intake actually produces needed energy. The problem as Dr. Watson writes later is “Every drop of alcohol burned in the tissues creates a nutritional demand for carbohydrates and for the many biochemicals that it by itself does not supply, the vitamins and minerals necessary to produce it. Consequently, continued, constant, or frequent use of alcohol can lead to the depletion of cellular nutritional reserves needed for normal metabolism.” In other words it gives you energy but at the same time it depletes your reserves and slows down your metabolism (hence the term beer gut). An interesting fact Dr. Watson discovered was the fact that the more nutritionally healthy you are the less able you are to tolerate alcohol. Truly healthy people cannot tolerate alcohol. So, in our culture where we tend to brag about how much alcohol we are capable of consuming is not a sign of strength but a sign of weakness.

Ok, I guess I have made you wait long enough. Do you ever ask yourself if things are really as fun as they seem when you have been drinking or is it because you have been drinking. I think it is because you have been drinking and my proof is not only in the story I am about to tell you but also in the fact that when you are the sober person in a group of drunk people it is never as fun!

My example takes place at a casino in Las Vegas. It was late at night and I had had a few too many drinks. I am usually a pretty mellow and calm guy. On this occasion I was fired up. Oh, another thing I failed to mention is you can influence your state of mind under the influence if you program yourself to limit your alcohol intake before you go out. You do this by simply telling yourself how much you are going to drink and what type of mood you are going to be in before consuming any alcohol. It should be noted that what you have been reading or working on will influence your thoughts when you are under the influence. Mel Gibson is a perfect example of that as well as this incident. I am an avid reader. During this time I was into books by John Douglas. John Douglas was a profiler for the FBI's Behavioral Science Unit. He wrote several books on serial killers and I read them all. I also had just finished a book on Jeffery Dahmer. Ok, so now back to the craps table. It is my turn I get the dice and look up and see a Caucasian guy wearing a plaid suit. It might have even been wool. He looked like he had stepped out of the 80's. For some reason that jacket reminded me of a picture in one of the books of Jefferey Dahmer. I held it together for a while and rolled the dice. Now, when my plaid suited Dahmer look alike got the dice, I could not contain it any longer. I thought he should know he looked like Jefferey Dahmer and maybe I thought it would bring us luck, so I said across the table. “Come on Dahmer, roll the dice.” I am sure he was surprised to

have this stranger calling him Jeffrey Dahmer but he proceeded to roll the dice. I don't remember if it was bringing us luck or not but I changed tactics (so it must not have been working). My Jeffery Dahmer became a "blue eyed devil." So, now I am telling this guy to "come on blue eyed devil, roll the dice!" He eventually left the table. The story doesn't end there. This is how wonderful alcohol is, it actually makes you a philosopher. I suppose I was losing because for some reason I started dropping F-bombs at the craps table. This is where it got interesting, because the pit boss came over and informed me I could not use F-bombs at the craps table. So, the philosopher in me decided to debate the logic of this rule with the pit boss. My argument went something like this. "This is F-bombing Las Vegas, I can walk down the street with a beer, I can get a hooker, but I can't say F-bomb. What kind of F-bombing sense does that F-bombing make?" No, I didn't get arrested but as you can tell it was an interesting night.

Now you know part of the reason I don't drink anymore.

I want to touch on one other topic and that is prescription medication abuse. Recently I have been made aware of more cases in which agents are injured on duty and prescribed pain medication. This is something to be very careful with because there is always a risk of addiction when utilizing prescription pain medication. Pain medication is necessary but make sure you are following the explicit directions of your doctor.

Coping Skills

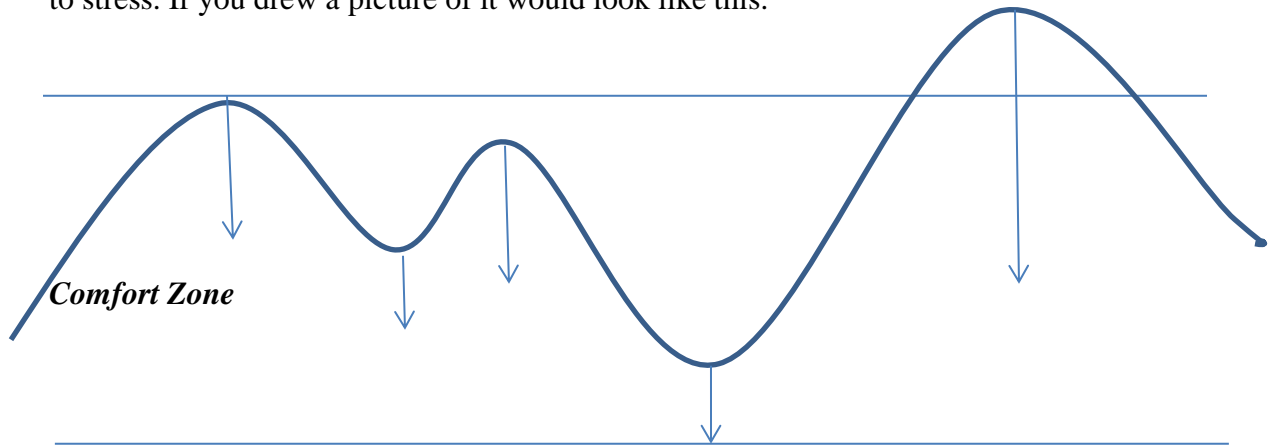
I learned two coping skills early, “Sex” and “Alcohol.” I was an athlete in high school and college so both of them were readily available. That is not meant to be braggadocios by any means. I just want to be clear these two methods I learned early and used them often. I am a firm believer that as humans we do things for a reason and we only continue to do them if they work. At the very least we learn things and we continue to use them until they don’t work anymore or until we can no longer convince ourselves they work.

These two techniques got me through some difficult times but they are not the only or close to the best methods of stress control. As I have stated earlier I suffered from panic attacks in my early days. Alcohol is a simple way of self- medicating. It worked and it reinforced the technique. That is another thing we will justify our action by the fact that what we do works. It could be destructive in nature (as alcohol abuse can be) but as long as it works and we don’t know of anything better we will use it.

I grew up in Los Angeles in the 80’s. It was a violent time for my neighborhood, but I didn’t really know any better. That is another thing. It is amazing what you can get used to. Besides the gangs and drugs there was an inherent danger anytime you were outside. There was a time I did not believe I would survive beyond the age of 25. It was just par for the course. I learned to deal with it by disassociating myself from the reality of the fact that I could be harmed every time I left my house. I was used to gun shots, police helicopters, I was mugged twice and seen brutal beatings all before the age of 12. Any guesses why I had anxiety? You learn to deal with things based on what you have available. I had sports and a strong family, so that helped. I also used my anger to bluff my way out of many a situation. Sometimes it worked and sometimes it didn’t. One time after basketball practice a friend and I were outside the YMCA. My friend was riding his skateboard back in forth in front while we waited for our rides. Well, one of the bigger kids on the team took his skateboard and began to ride it and would not give it back. I felt as though I should do something. Now, I guess I should mention the fact that I was 6 feet tall and all of 120 lbs soaking wet. To put it in perspective my nickname growing up was “pick.” It was because I was as skinny as a toothpick. Anyway, I decide to help out my friend and I stick my foot out and trip the guy on the skateboard who was about 6’2” and 180 lbs. He fell on his face. My brother arrived at this moment and we proceeded to get in the car before the big kid could get up. Now, my older brother had not seen the entire incident but heard the kid yelling at me as I got in the car. Of course since my older brother was there and I was getting in the car I decided to yell back. To my surprise my brother looked at me and said if you start something you better finish it and kicked me out of the safety of his car. Now, that’s just wrong. As I said before I bluffed when I could find no other recourse and this was one of those times. I put on my meanest face and stood chest to chest with him. He looked down at me and I looked up at him, and prayed to God he would not kill me in my head, he finally just walked away. This time it worked!

The thing to remember is as you get older you have access to more and more tools so that you don’t have to continue to use those same old defaults. My default of anger evolved

into athletics which caused more stress at times and evolved again to alcohol and sex which caused more stress at times again. It was like this rollercoaster of stress and stress relief I was on and I really did not have any control over it. I believe we are all on a rollercoaster to some extent. Meaning we try to maintain a certain equilibrium in regards to stress. If you drew a picture of it would look like this:



Each one of these apexes represents at least one stressful event. In each of these cases we attempt to decrease the stress. The closer it gets to our upper limit the more urgent our need to mitigate the situation with coping skills. That is why I state that the more coping skills you have the better. Unfortunately most of us have very few coping skills and we continue to try and convince ourselves they work just fine. In a study done by Anne Spurgeon it was found that the top ten stressful life events were:

1. Death of a Spouse
2. Jail sentence
3. Death of an immediate family member
4. Immediate family member commits suicide
5. Getting into debt beyond means of payment
6. Period of homelessness
7. Immediate family member seriously ill
8. Unemployment (head of household)
9. Divorce
10. Breaking up of family

How many of these have you gone through in your lifetime? How about during your career? I have had 6 of the ten happen to me during my career. My father passed away, I had an aunt who was seriously ill and eventually passed away. I was in debt and lost my house. I went through a divorce which split my family up and for a while, I was basically homeless. Not on the street type homeless but I had no home. It was right before my divorce and I was blessed enough to have a good friend who let me rent a room in his house. Had he not allowed me to stay with him during the divorce I don't know where I would have ended up. Between the bills, the foreclosure, paying for the divorce, alimony and child support, there is no way I could have made it without him. Thanks, Ernie, I will always consider you family for that. I didn't tell you all of that to bum you out, I told you

all that so you can learn from my experience. During these times I used coping skills. Now, people like to say all the time how “tough” they are and what they can deal with. I look back on those times and realize my coping skills were pretty weak. As I said at the beginning of this chapter I had two go to coping skills and they were “sex” and “alcohol.” I didn’t say all coping skills were positive. It is possible to have negative coping skills. Alcohol and sex can be two of them. Don’t get me wrong in moderation they can be quite appropriate. But if that’s all you have, eventually (as I found out) you are going to be in trouble.

For me the most difficult time came about right before and after my divorce. I was raised by my mother so to be away from my children was a reality I had never really considered. I had always intended on always being in the home with my children. That is because I did not want to be like my biological father (whom I ever met). I was having a difficult time with the situation and of course I drank more than I should. I began to notice that the drinking did not really help my situation long term. I had already tried working as much as possible as a way to cope with things. At one point I was working on the Smuggling Interdiction Team (SIG Unit), Going to School to get my master’s degree and working as an intern (a requirement to graduate from the master’s program). That did not work either. So, I had tried, alcohol, sex and overworking as coping skills but they did not work for me. Eventually I had to make some changes. It did not happen overnight but it gradually happened for me. I did have some positive coping skills, such as exercise and writing. Writing my first book was what really got me over the hump. It was the concept of putting together something that could help other people going through what I was going through that somehow made the ordeal bearable. I am not saying you have to write a book (but you can) but the idea is to find as many positive coping skills and social identities as you can to immunize yourself from falling back on your negative default coping skills. I forgot to mention another one of my default coping skills. If you are a Border Patrol Agent, you have it too. It is called “disassociation.” It is something most first responders develop. That and a dark sense of humor. Disassociation at times can be a necessary tool. It allows you to complete tasks in the midst of a situation where most people who freak out. Disassociation simply means you are able to separate yourself from the emotional impact of the situation temporarily (hopefully). An example of one of the many times I used this skill was my first day on the SIG unit. This was a special detail where we targeted smugglers and load vehicles. We were in training getting briefed on what our duties would be and a call came in that one of the other SIG units was in a pursuit. So, we all stopped what we were doing got in our cars and went too assist. About five minutes into the pursuit the agents called for Emergency Medical Services. Apparently the load vehicle had crashed and ejected half the occupants out of the vehicle onto the highway. When we arrived on scene the other agents were assisting the subjects who had been thrown from the car. There were no fatalities but quite a few broken bones and lacerations. It is a tough thing to see women and children hurt and bleeding. This was day 1 and I remember the commander looking at us as we arrived on scene and saying “Welcome to SIG.” Disassociation is what allowed me to get past the shock and horror of the scene and do what needed to be done. All of us as agents have done this before. We tend to use dark humor to deal with it later, as we discuss the days events over beers. So, that’s three different coping skills, disassociation, humor and beer, not bad. Now, this is a

good example of how disassociation can be beneficial, but when can it get in the way. It gets in the way when you use it in relationships. Then it usually turns into avoidance. In my first marriage I would use it to distance myself from my wife in times of conflict. If she was unhappy (disassociate and beer). If she complained that she wanted me to spend more time with the family (disassociate and alcohol). If she wanted to know when I was going to stop drinking so much (disassociate, beer and sex with someone else). You see how this could develop into a problem. It's like trying to fix a car with one tool because you are really good with that one tool (at least you think you are). There are so many other options out there. If you simply google "coping skills" you will get several lists of things. One of the lists I got and a few of my own favorites are as follows:

1. Exercise

I have a saying that keeps me running, it is: I run physically so that I don't run metaphorically." It means I exercise so that I can deal with the daily drama.

2. Writing

There is something about writing that is soothing. It gets all that junk out of your head and on paper. It is like you are giving your supercomputer (brain) permission to data dump.

3. Scribbling

In my private practice I will have kids scribble sometimes as a way of distressing.

4. Be with other people

There are too many people on this planet for us to have been meant to go through things alone.

5. Watch T.V.

Television is a good distraction from reality as long as it is done in moderation.

6. Movies

7. Crosswords

8. Play an instrument

9. Sing

Even if it is just in the shower.

10. Get a hobby

I know several agents who plan and go on deep sea fishing trips. It's a great way to get away from the job and enjoy life.

11. Hot shower/Bath (aromatherapy)

12. Read

There are lots of books out there on self-improvement and coping. A good one for replacing old coping skills with better ones is called Positive addiction by William Glasser. The phrase I remember most is "you can't replace something with nothing." Meaning you can't stop doing something if you don't replace it with something better. Reading is a way to exercise your brain.

13. Music

14. Meditate

Meditation is a good way to reboot your brain and defrag your nervous system. There are lots of different techniques. I can suggest a few. Laura Silva and Burt Goldman (The American Monk) are two I suggest. I also suggest looking up a meditation script or creating

your own and recording it in your own voice. You will find it to be a much more powerful experience when you are listening to your own voice.

15. Paint/ draw
16. Sports
17. Plan a special event
18. Dance
19. Cook

My father was a chef and caterer. So, I grew up knowing men can cook too. So, I love to cook. I make a mean cheesecake.

20. Drive
21. Create something

You are always creating something. So, why not create something consciously for your improvement. Creation is the ultimate stress reliever.

22. Pray

I pray daily and often. It keeps me humble and grounded.

23. Read the bible

If you need someplace to start begin with Proverbs. Even if you are not a believer you can't discount the wisdom in proverbs.

24. Watch comedies

It has been documented by the medical profession that laughter heals. Dr. Bernie Siegel has suggested it for his cancer patients and others for years with great success.

25. Color with crayons

I think this is a fabulous idea. It is a great way to let yourself go back to a time when the world was a wide open playground.

26. Watch Fish (aquarium)

I could do this all day.

27. Video games
28. Random acts of kindness
29. Puzzles

30. Go for a walk (especially in nature or at the beach)

Walking on the beach is one of the most calming exercises I know of. I have always been drawn to water so it's a natural reflex for me.

The more coping skills you develop the better. Everyone is different and what works for one may not work for another. That is why the list I gave you was so long and it is not all inclusive it is just somewhere to start. Begin making your own list. Even though it may be short now, give it time it will grow as you try more things. Write in a journal; keep track of what works and what doesn't. The better you learn it the better you can teach it. If you have kids this will be a great skill you can pass on to them.

Career Survival

“It will be hard work, but the more difficult and dangerous the enterprise, a higher crown of laurel is bestowed on the conqueror.But the point is now determined, and I shall have the liberty to think for myself.”

John Adams

“John Violanti maintains that an average life span for police officers is 66 years, or 10.6 years after retirement, adjusted for age and gender. This is lower than the average for males in the United States (76 years of age).” Badgeoflife.com.

Surviving a career in law enforcement is two-fold. One part mental and one part physical, I will discuss both here.

I will discuss the physical dangers first. The FBI compiles statistics each year on law enforcement officers assaulted and/or killed in the line of duty.

The following are statistics from the Uniform Crime Report:
Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted, 2012.

In 2012, 48 law enforcement officers died from injuries incurred in the line of duty during felonious incidents.

The average age of the officers who died in 2012 was 38 years old.

- The slain officers’ average length of law enforcement service was 12 years.
- Of the officers who died due to felonious incidents in 2012, 43 were male and 5 were female.

12 officers died as a result of arrest situations.

- 8 officers were fatally injured during traffic pursuits or stops.
- 8 officers died as a result of investigating suspicious persons or circumstances.
- 6 officers were involved in ambush situations.
- 5 officers were killed as a result of tactical situations (barricaded offender, hostage taking, high-risk entry, etc.).
- 4 officers who died had responded to disturbance calls.
- 3 officers suffered fatal injuries while handling, transporting, or maintaining custody of prisoners.
- 1 officer was conducting investigative activity (surveillance, search, interview, etc.).
- 1 officer died due to a felonious incident while handling a person with mental illness.

Of officers killed in 2012, most (44) were killed with firearms. Of these, 32 were killed with handguns.

3 officers had their weapons stolen.

- 1 officer was killed with his/her own weapon.
- 7 officers fired their weapons; 2 officers attempted to use their weapons.
- 24 officers were slain with firearms when they were 0-5 feet from the offenders.

In 2012, 24 of the officers feloniously killed were wearing body armor at the time of the incidents.

Profile of alleged known assailants

In 2012, 51 alleged offenders were identified in connection with the 48 law enforcement officers feloniously killed. Of those offenders, the following characteristics are known:

- The average age of the alleged offenders was 31 years old.
- The average height was 5 feet 10 inches tall, and the average weight was 177 pounds.

- 49 of the alleged offenders were male; 2 were female.

33 of the alleged offenders had prior criminal arrests.

- 8 of the alleged offenders were under judicial supervision at the time of the incidents.
- 11 of the alleged offenders were under the influence of a controlled substance at the time of the fatal incidents.
- 7 of the alleged offenders were under the influence of alcohol or were intoxicated at the time of the fatal incidents.

I have highlighted some of the significant statistics. These statistics point to the fact that the majority of officers killed were older experienced officers. The incidents occurred during regular patrol duties. The type of things we do on a regular basis. Of all of these statistics the one that stands out the most to me is the fact that half of the officers killed were wearing a vest and were shot in close proximity to the assailant.

This is good information and it is a stark reminder to be ever vigilant. Do not let your guard down. If you also notice the assailants were not on average large men. We need to treat every stop like a potential life threatening event, because it is! Positioning of your vehicle during stops and approaching the vehicle with caution and having the subjects hands visible.

I have been to one of the training s given by the FBI that discusses these topics. In this presentation they show a video of an interview of several assailants who assaulted officers. These assailants explain how they size up officers just like we do subjects. They mentioned that the officer's appearance, demeanor and officer presence made a difference. Meaning did the officer look out of shape or fit, did the officer seem confident in his commands and was the officer alert. Did the officer treat them with respect?

These are all things we can improve on and control individually. It is something you can train yourself to always pay attention to. After so many traffic stops we get a tendency to become complacent. In this job we cannot afford to be complacent. This iss something

we all know but we forget or just simply get to the point where we do not care anymore. It should be something that we practice on every traffic stop and every subject encounter. After an encounter do you go over in your head how you could have done that better or more safely? I know when I was with a trainee I would ask them after a stop, what did you see? I would do this to get them in the habit of remembering details. I would ask them why did we stop a certain vehicle? This was my way of getting them thinking of how to apply the law that they had just learned. This is what we need to do throughout our careers. We not only need to do it ourselves, but we need to encourage our partners to do it to.

All this falls into the category of sharpening the saw. It is one of Steven Coveys seven principles for highly effective people. It refers to the fact that people who are successful at things have common practices. This is one of them. It is why we practice firearms and defensive tactics. We need to do this with all the other aspects of our job too.

The FBI has sponsored a program called below 100. The idea is to keep the number of law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty below 100 for each year. Here are the five components of the strategy:

1. Wear your seatbelt
2. Watch your speed
3. Wear your vest
4. Remember to WIN-pay attention to what's important now.
5. Complacency Kills!

In order to mentally survive a career in law enforcement there are things we must do also. As I discussed in the earlier chapter we cannot continue to brush out the negative events and disappointment of our careers. There are several prominent speakers who have opinions on what we must do to survive mentally. Three of my personal favorites are Steven Covey, Lieutenant Colonel Dave Grossman and Jack Enter.

Lieutenant Colonel Dave Grossman refers to the fact that law enforcement officers are "Sheepdogs." As such we have a job to protect society from the wolves that would want to do them harm. It is a thankless job, but none the less it is what we do. Colonel Grossman writes:

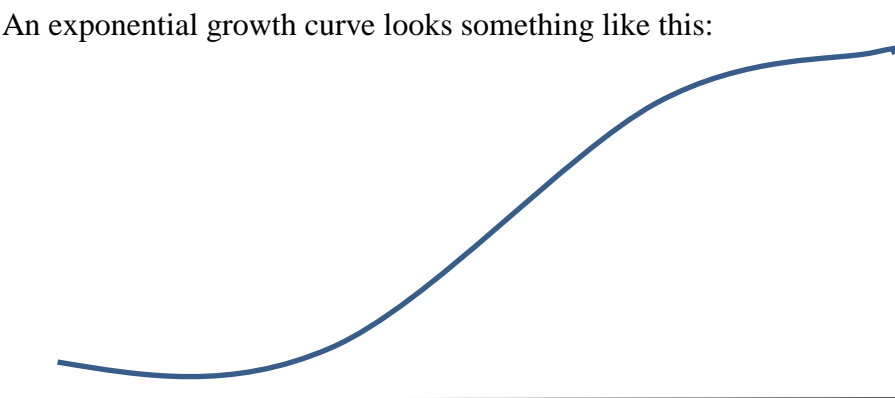
"If you have no capacity for violence then you are a healthy productive citizen: a sheep. If you have a capacity for violence and no empathy for your fellow citizens, then you have defined an aggressive sociopath--a wolf. But what if you have a capacity for violence, and a deep love for your fellow citizens? Then you are a sheepdog, a warrior, someone who is walking the hero's path. Someone who can walk into the heart of darkness, into the universal human phobia, and walk out unscathed."

Another good reference is Jack Enter. Mr. Enter discusses "Leadership Principles for Law Enforcement Personnel and Managers." He correctly confronts leadership from the standpoint that we are all leaders of some sort and as such we are all failing. In order to

rectify this situation we must first take responsibility. In taking responsibility we can see that part of the problem is human nature. Mr. Enter states that human nature is to follow the path of least resistance. The path of least resistance leads us to mediocrity. We must resist mediocrity and peer pressure in order to become effective leaders. Mr. Enter summarizes some of his principles in the statement: “To be a leader you must realize it is a fight, be willing to get in the fight, and have your friends keep you in the fight.” Again this points us back to sharpening the saw and improving.

In doing research for this chapter I began to think about my career. I noticed during my career there were times of excitement and times of discouragement. It was like a cycle of enthusiasm and complacency. I noticed a pattern. The pattern seemed to involved new assignments or productive work. It follows what is called an exponential growth curve. This is a reference to a cycle that occurs in many different areas. One of the reasons this became so relevant to me is because my wife and I recently welcomed a new addition to our family. Kyra Michelle Shigg was Born of February 7, 2014. By the time she was three weeks old she recognized voices, could lift her head and was trying to crawl and talk. Besides being a way to talk about my lovely baby this reminds me of how we learn and grow. When we are babies they pick up things so fast. They are curious about everything and want to grab anything they can get their hands on. As we get older we stop being as curious and settle in so the learning kind of flattens out. It has been scientifically shown that this type of growth curve is present in corporations and populations as well. Meaning there is a slow start then a large growth spurt then a leveling off. Think about your career. When you first joined up you were excited to learn a new job. At first you didn't know what to do so your efficiency at doing the job was low. Then there is an increase in activity and knowledge. You start to get more apprehensions and cases. Then you settle in and your enthusiasm flatlines. It is not until you get a good detail that the process begins again. Knowing this we can keep our careers and growth maximized by doing different details or assignments. I have been on multiple details as well as intelligence units and specialty units. Know my job as a union representative allows me to stay at the top of my game because it is always changing.

An exponential growth curve looks something like this:



It is my belief that each time to discover a new reason to be interested and enthusiastic about the job the curve resets itself. I think we naturally do this on accident, but I think we should consciously do this in order to ensure we do not become complacent.

My last three suggestions are based on my personal opinion and life experience. I have three rules:

1. Be Congruent.
2. It's not about you.
3. Remember what's important.

“Be Congruent” refers walking the walk and talking the talk as they used to say. Be consistent in your words and deeds. Most people think this is so others will respect you. I believe that is a side effect. The main purpose is so that you can respect yourself. It takes a psychological toll on you when you are not living up to your own beliefs concerning yourself. The fact of the matter is only you can know for sure if you are being congruent. You have to be honest with yourself in your self-assessments to make this work. I know because I brushed out for years hoping no one else would notice I was perpetrating a fraud and trying to seem like a better person than I really was.

“It's not about you!” refers to the fact that as law enforcement officers we have an important job. It becomes a problem when you invest so much of your identity into this job that you don't know who you would be without it. It also means don't take it personal. You can't please everyone all the time. If you are adhering to rule #1, you are good.

“Remember what's important” means keep things in perspective. A friend of mine and I always comment that what really matters is our families. That is what keeps us grounded and allows us to do what we do. My “philosophy” goes a little deeper and I truly believe God has given me a purpose. Part of that purpose is to do stuff like this. Write and speak to people and assist or serve them in any way that I can. It has always been a gift of mine. I consider anyone I encounter as someone I have been entrusted with. That gives me a responsibility to them and myself. The responsibility is to be of service when I can and to be as congruent as possible in order to be an example of the principles that I teach.

Good friends and family make these rules so much easier. If you have someone that will pull you aside and give you honest feedback and/or encouragement when you need it, it is invaluable.

The Purpose

The purpose of this book is to change the culture of the Border Patrol. I will discuss the cultural aspects and how they get in the way of the well-being of agents in general. It is my belief that by changing the culture and bringing this topic out in the open we will save lives. I know this to be true as we have already reaped some of the evidence of this.

My first attempt was to suggest a division to decrease disciplinary actions. I proposed that this could be done through psycho-education. Meaning if we looked at the real causes of the discipline and not just what the person was caught doing we could find a way to empower employees so that they made better choices, lived healthier lifestyles and avoided discipline all together. This was not well received. I was generally questioned as to my motives whenever I suggested this type of outside of the box thinking. The question usually took the form of "So, what do you want out of this?" I really couldn't understand because I really didn't want anything. The question just confused me and distracted from the purpose of my mission. I am still inclined to believe that this is the future of employee relations and I will continue to fight for that mission, but until then I will use the tools I have in front of me. After being shuffled around from one manager to the next who just asked me a version of the same motivation question along with the statement of "don't we already do that," I was resolved to use the circle of influence I had immediate access to. That was the union. I approached members of the National Border Patrol Council and asked them if I could give a presentation at the National convention. They were just as confused but more receptive since they were friends of mine. I know they were a little worried as they had never known I could or wanted to speak in front of crowds. To tell the truth I didn't know that I could either. I was given the green light and my first presentation on Border Patrol Agents and suicides was in 2010.

Two years later that presentation was modified and a Suicide Awareness and Prevention Workgroup was formed in San Diego. Myself and another agent were given the task of giving this presentation to as many of the over 3,000 agents/employees in San Diego as we could. This is where we received our evidence that this is a positive venue and it helps save lives. We gave over 40 presentations in front of approximately 1,100 employees in a three month period. We had the opportunity to speak directly to the agents and hear back from them as to what their opinions were in regards to contributing factors of suicide. We spoke to agents about suicidal family members, suicidal ideation and how the suicide of fellow agents affected them personally. It was a grueling experience for us as presenters, but it was satisfying to see firsthand that it made a difference.

Suicide is preventable! If you put together the right system that is flexible and transparent enough to be understood and utilized by the majority of agents, it will work. As federal employees we have access to many different resources. The problem is the culture of the Border Patrol is not conducive to fostering trust that enables employees to use these resources without fear of repercussions. I am a Border Patrol Agent at heart and we learn best by stories. So, here is a story that explains what I am referring to.

Here is an example that comes from the Customs and Border Protection intranet site on fitness for duty exams. This is supposed to be a guide for supervisors as to what situations they could/should submit an employee for fitness for duty.

“In another example, an employee presents a note from a physician with a recommendation that the employee not work night shifts or overtime. The employee tells the supervisor that she or he is being treated for depression and marital problems. The supervisor decides to remove the employee’s weapon and contacts the LER Specialist concerning getting a fitness for duty examination.”

This type of behavior seriously deters employees from asking for help. If someone is having marital problems and or seeking treatment for depression it is not enough information to dictate someone have their gun and badge taken away.

One more example. An Agent is having difficulties. He seeks professional counseling. He is improving and benefitting from treatment. As Agents we are subject to periodic background investigations. During this agents background investigation his investigator who has no psychological training or background feels it is necessary to interview the agent’s therapist.

These are the types of behaviors that get in the way of a program that can prevent suicide and improve overall wellbeing of agents and employees.

The purpose of this book is going to be to expose these problems, give you information and tell you what I think needs to be done.

What I am telling you in this book is not just from books and studies. It is garnered partially from the sweat and tears of agents, their families, myself and other presenters. I have set out to put together something that works in an atmosphere of check the box management. Meaning managers are sometimes more concerns with checking a box then actually producing and creating programs that are beneficial to the agents. It should be noted that the Border Patrol is comprised of mostly Border Patrol Agents but when I refer to agents I am referring to all Border Patrol Employees. It isn’t easy and it continues to be an uphill battle but I will continue to fight on.

If you have any questions or need to contact me for any reason, here is my contact information:

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Appendix

Mental Health Self-Check Survey #1

This survey asks that you rate yourself in the following areas. Rate yourself in your amount of satisfaction and general functionality. Lower scores represent areas where you feel you are doing bad and higher scores represent where you feel you are doing well.

Overall

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Personal

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Work

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Home

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

If you score 28 or below go in for a mental health check up. Bring this form with you as it will assist with the therapeutic process.

This form is based on the work of Scott D. Miller and Barry L. Duncan of the Institute for the Study of Therapeutic Change.

Mental Health Self-Check Survey #2

Mark on the sheet the answer that best describes how much you have experienced each symptom recently.

	Not at All	Sometimes	Frequently	Most of the time
Sad or Depressed mood	0	1	2	3
Irritable Mood	0	1	2	3
Withdraw from or avoid people	0	1	2	3
Suicidal thoughts	0	1	2	3
Self-critical thoughts	0	1	2	3
Difficulty sleeping	0	1	2	3
Nausea, diarrhea, or stomach problems	0	1	2	3
Jumpy or quick to startle	0	1	2	3
Difficulty concentrating	0	1	2	3
Frequent worrying	0	1	2	3

If you score a 15 or higher go in for a mental health check-up. If you answered Most of the time to any of the questions please seek additional resources. If your response to suicidal thoughts was affirmative at all please seek counseling as soon as possible. Bring this form with you to assist in your therapeutic process. This survey is not intended to diagnose or validate mental health stability or instability. It is merely a tool to assist you in the therapeutic process.

Remember this Poem & STAY ALIVE

There once was a man named Jim,
he was my brother, he was Kin.

Jim was of average height and lean,
he was kind, giving and never mean.

He started out his career as a mechanic,
always working hard, but never in a panic.

He had three daughters and a wife,
he had an incredible life.

He worked as a Border Patrol Agent,
and in his duty he was diligent.

Jim drove fast and loved to ride horses,
but somewhere in his head there were opposing forces.

One day the fear that he had in his head,
took hold of his actions and now he's dead.

I tell you his story at this time,
for some day you too, may lose your mind.

When that day comes and you feel so lost,
remember that Christ died on the cross.

You may not feel like anyone cares and there is no hope,
just trust in the Lord and He will help you cope.

Depression is an illness that many share,
Speak with someone and get medical care.

When shadows and darkness come into your life,
remember this poem of Jim and stay alive.

Jonathan M. Perkins

Set Your Mind Free

I do not live my life in the past,
what is done is behind me, at last.
I do not live in the tomorrow,
looking to the future, for time to borrow.
I live my life in the present,
and thank God for his presence.
I do not give in to wishes and regrets,
I remember the good times and bad, but I do not forget,
the time that I have shared,
with those for whom I have cared;
Words that we have spoken, and the fights,
the feelings, sounds, smells and sights,
these are the things that I will remember,
not regretting, what I did not render.
To regret what would or could have been done or said,
brings only sadness, anger and fills one's head,
with thoughts of grandeur, hope and lies,
had not our loved one, gone and died.
Forget those regrets and look all around,
see the ones still here, standing on solid ground.
Do what you are able to, for the living while you can,
one never knows the future, or their end.
Bury your regrets with the dead and let them be.
Live for today and set your mind free.
Your consciences clear your future bright,
Look to Jesus Christ, the truth and light.

Jonathan M. Perkins