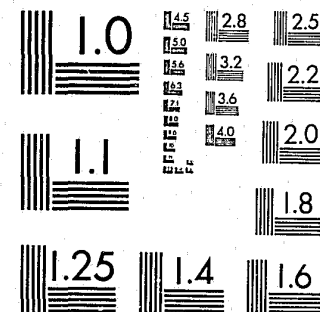


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National Institute of Justice  
United States Department of Justice  
Washington, D.C. 20531

# FBI LAW ENFORCEMENT BULLETIN

MAY 1982

U.S. Department of Justice  
National Institute of Justice

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## Boat Theft



82975

## Personnel

By

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Director

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Department

and

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Many law enforcement couples have shared with us their joys and difficulties, along with methods they have used to weather successfully trying times in their relationships. We have also gained knowledge in this area by observing both our parents and others. It is our desire to impart some of this knowledge to you.

Initially, we would like to dispel a few myths! We know of no evidence to support the popular notion that the divorce rate in police marriages is higher than other occupations. Although we have read and heard that police have a higher divorce rate than others, a review of the literature failed to produce any evidence for this belief. In addition, we checked with many authorities in law enforcement and they, too, did not know of any studies to support this common misconception. Often, statements or reports claiming higher divorce rates for law enforce-

ment of the officers in his department were divorced. When questioned as to how he knew this, he responded, "We keep records, I guess." Records like that are difficult, if not impossible, to keep.

What is meant by divorce rates? Often, in discussing divorce statistics, researchers compare apples and oranges. Municipalities and other governmental bodies consider divorce rates as the ratio of divorces to marriages in any given year. For example, if a municipality had 87 divorces and 100 marriages in a year, its divorce rate would be 87 percent for that year. Different marriages and people are used for comparison in reaching a divorce rate. Using these criteria for divorce, the rate in Los Angeles County for 1979 was between 80 and 90 percent! Divorce rates by others are determined by examining the number of people who are married and subse-

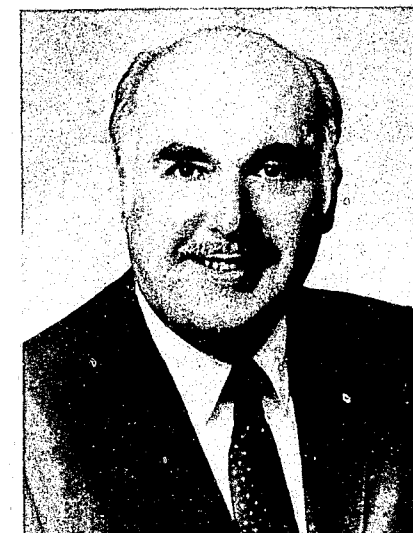
ment are based on supposition rather than fact. What may be occurring is that law enforcement personnel who associate mainly with others in the same profession see or hear of officers getting divorced or having marital problems. As a result, those getting divorced or having problems can be seen as representing the majority, if not all police. However, if they were to consider divorce rates in other occupational groups, they might discover ratios similar to those in law enforcement. A police officer from a medium-sized city reported that 85 per-

cently divorced within an occupation. These statistics are difficult to determine in any profession because of inaccurate or outdated records. However, estimates are that in the 1980's, 40 to 60 percent of all marriages will end in divorce. Law enforcement divorces are not higher than the above statistics.

Police and their spouses are people—members of society. As members of society and like others in various professions, they experience divorce. There is no question police work is stressful. However, it is often forgotten



Dr. and Mrs. Stratton

Sherman Block  
Sheriff

that police possess, to a higher degree than most, traditional American values: Dedication to improving society, commitment to family, and freedom for all law-abiding citizens. People in various occupations, whether they be doctors, lawyers, businessmen, or construction workers, seem to have as many problems, divorces, and permanent marriages as those in law enforcement. At a recent Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department Retirement Program for prospective retirees and spouses, a very small minority were divorced. The majority had been in law enforcement for over 20 years and were still married.

#### Communication

A priority in any relationship is communication. To have communication there must be time to be with each other. In our busy world, whether it be a result of both partners working, getting the kids from one activity to another, or living different schedules because of shift work, time together can become almost impossible. Unless communication and time to be alone, time together as a couple, and time as a family is made a priority, it may not happen. We can end up like one couple who leaves notes to each other on the refrigerator and may not see each other for more than a week at a time. This may be overstating the case, but how much time have you and your spouse spent together or with your family?

*U.S. News and World Report* (1975) did a study on the amount of time spent on communication between the average American couple, not while they were watching television or during commercials when they were saying, "Get me a beer," or, "How was your day in 30 seconds or less," but listening and paying attention to each other. They discovered that married couples average about 30 minutes a week in involved communication. Some believe that's too high an estimate, while others believe it is too much time dedicated to communication.

Communication is important for many reasons. The way we are today, our thoughts, values, wants, and needs are different now than they were a year, 5 years, or 10 years ago, and they will change in the future.

Consider for a moment what is important and unimportant to you, valued and not valued—your life issues. Now think back to 15 years, 10 years, or even 5 years ago and examine what you valued and thought was important. For example, think of your values in the 1960's—your thoughts about the Vietnam War, "hippies," the civil rights movement, busing, college unrest, etc. For most people over 30 years of age, the day John F. Kennedy was assassinated will always be remembered, and quite possibly you can remember specifically how you heard of the assassination. Also, remember what your values were and begin to think about the changes you've experienced since then, both individually and in your relationship with others. Unless these changes are communicated, a couple can grow apart and become strangers to each other. Consider the normal course of relationships. Initially, there are two complete, separate, and

**"Without communication or the desire  
to reevaluate continually and understand each other  
. . . many relationships break or crumble."**

unique human beings who, for a variety of reasons, are attracted to each other. After this initial attraction, each person still possesses his own individuality, but they begin to share more of themselves and get to know each other better through their communication of feelings, thoughts, and ideas. As their relationship grows and they continue to spend more time together discussing values, attitudes, beliefs, likes, and dislikes, the two either become more interested in each other or they grow apart. They begin to talk more in terms of "we" or "us," while still staying in touch with their own individuality. After further communication and time together, the couple may feel that they know each other totally—they understand each other in all ways. Their wants and needs are compatible—they are able to fulfill the other partner's wants and needs. This closeness and deep understanding are the result of the communication between the two. Because they understand each other so well, the couple decides to marry.

However, after the marriage day, the amount and level of communication may decrease, and after a period of time, become nonexistent. At times, it appears as though the partners assume their knowledge of each other, including knowing and understanding the other's values, wants, and needs, will stay the same forever. They forget that the values that were similar at the beginning of the relationship change for a variety of reasons, such as the influence of social mores, worklife, social life, and all they encounter in their daily experiences. These important

and very different changes must be communicated to the spouse or there is a tendency for the relationship to grow apart and be dull, unfulfilling, and lifeless.

When couples seek counseling, it is initially awkward for everyone—they have never done this before! Generally, they face us and talk about each other. Rather than have them talk to us about each other, we ask them to talk to their spouse. First, we ask them to turn their chairs to face each other and not say anything, just look. Comments such as "Do we really have to do this?" "Boy, this is difficult," or "You aren't bad-looking after all" are heard. We may ask them to share feelings. Sometimes we hear, "I really love you," "I'm sad and want to be closer to you," "We've really grown apart," and others.

We may then ask them to share their wants and needs with each other. Sometimes spouses do not realize they can have desires and needs in a relationship and expect to have them satisfied. At times, when a spouse will state his/her desires, replies include comments such as, "Do you really want that?" "That's important to you?" or "I want that too!" Couples who have been married 10 years appear totally shocked by the wants and needs of the person they love and married. They find it difficult to believe what they hear from their loved one.

A final example is that of Harry and Peggy S., who were in their late twenties and were married for 7 years when we first met them. Their decision to marry had developed naturally from their common values and interests and their deep love for each other. It was all so easy—they considered themselves to be a "perfect match."

The young couple could envision their lifestyle for at least the next 10 years and were in perfect accord on what they wanted—all the conveniences, flash, and splendor that goes with "keeping up with the Joneses" in our modern society. To accomplish this, they would both work for at least 3 years before having their first baby. To supplement Harry's income in case of emergency, Peggy would work until the 6th month of pregnancy.

Initially, all went according to plan. After the baby's birth, things seemed fine for a year or so. The funds for "extras" were somewhat limited, but they were financially stable. Although Officer Harry's income steadily increased and his position was secure within the department, he began to fret about providing for his wife and child in the manner to which they had grown accustomed. Harry felt compelled to keep up with his peers, who had no children and two incomes. Without consulting his wife, he began to work overtime occasionally for additional money. Soon, he found himself working two shifts a day and because of the long distance between home and station, it often made more sense to sleep in his camper truck, parked in the station parking lot. So now Peggy was home alone at night while he slept alone in his truck.

As pressure between the couple mounted, they sought counseling. After the initial introductions and general conversation to help them feel comfortable, Harry stated his wants. "I want to provide my wife and child with a very satisfactory lifestyle." Peggy burst out, "I don't give a damn about expensive clothes, a beautiful home, a nice car, swimming pool, and a boat, or anything else that may impress others. I want to spend more time with you. I want you to hold me, touch me, I want to be with you." Barely listening, Harry angrily interrupted, "What's gotten into you? We both knew exactly what we wanted, didn't we?"

Tragedies like this can and do occur to couples and families. When either spouse presumes that there will be no changes in the relationship, their values, wants, or needs, there is bound to be less communication and more problems.

Without communication or the desire to reevaluate continually and understand each other, without attention to exploring our problems, many relationships break or crumble.

In discussing communication, time has been emphasized. Even more important than the quantity of communication is the *quality* of what we communicate. Often, individuals get caught up in verbiage. They believe they must tell each and every detail of an event or discuss nothing at all. Although the events—positive or negative—an officer experiences at work do not have to be communicated in detail to the spouse, he could communicate how the day was. Statements of feelings, such as, "I am bushed," "I am tired, worn out," "I am feeling good," "I had a rough day," or "I am really sad," tell a great deal. These statements

often communicate more about the individual and are often more important than the details of the day.

#### **Attitudes in Relationships**

A major component of our life and relationships is the attitude with which we approach them. A positive attitude can be seen in the following saying: "As we ramble through life, whatever our goal, keep your eye upon the donut and not upon the hole." Life, like a donut, is very rich and good. There does exist the hole, but it's not the major part. We have to be careful not to fall into it. When we do, we can approach our difficulties with a positive attitude expressed by the view, "If life gives you lemons, make lemonade."

An approach that sees relationships like life, with ups and downs, good and bad, happy and sad times, emphasizing the belief that the relationship is important and can be successful is much more positive than a position of "if it doesn't work, I'll get out—it's not important anyway." One's attitude and view of relationships and life greatly affect the end results.

A spouse's attitude toward his partner also affects the relationship. A spouse who is seen as a special, valuable, and important person will add more to the relationship than one who is seen as unimportant. At times, offi-

cers forget that spouses who are not in law enforcement can add a perspective they may not consider, insights they do not have, a balance to some of their law and order dominated views, and different ways to understand, approach, and relate to their children. Our partners help, contribute, and add to us. Spouses love us and make us what we are, as we do them.

#### **Qualities of Relationships**

We have talked to, counseled, and worked with a wide spectrum of law enforcement couples—young couples who have just entered the academy, those who marry after an officer is already in the department, those anticipating retirement, and retired couples.

In lecturing to couples beginning the academy, we generally talk about what could happen in law enforcement relationships—or any relationship for that matter—and feel sure those young bright-eyed couples are saying to themselves, "That will never happen to us; we're different."

We have worked with couples in the midst of problems at various stages in law enforcement careers and in their relationship. Some weather the storm; others experience too much turbulence and decide to separate.

Our belief is that for every successful, competent, caring police officer, there is an equally successful, competent, and caring spouse. These couples have the insight, the conviction, and the courage to make their marriages work—to tread through the struggles and to enjoy the excitement, love, and happiness in their relationships. Both contribute to each other, their marriage, children, other people, and society as a whole.

**"... for every successful, competent, caring police officer, there is an equally successful, competent, and caring spouse."**

#### Love

Love, being in love, staying loved, working at love, and nurturing a relationship take as much work and determination as a career, running a house, or raising children, but the rewards are many. However, there are days that being involved with anyone either directly or indirectly connected with law enforcement is difficult at best.

It is difficult to love someone who, when he leaves his position of authority and arrives home, forgets that when he walks through the door, he is *not* the boss. This is especially difficult when he tries to treat his spouse like a secretary, requesting that she wait on him while he sits in front of the TV.

It is difficult to love someone who has been in a position of telling others what to do and how to be and then continues this lecture at home. He may continue to believe that he's the expert and begin lecturing on how to clean the house, cook dinner, or have a better relationship. At this time, the "boss" may need to be reminded that he is at home and not at work. Some spouses suggest ignoring him the first hour. Another approach is for the couple to take a walk or get out of the house for awhile to allow him to defuse all the day's happenings. Perhaps then they can share again more equally.

It can be especially difficult to love someone when he treats his spouse and her world as less important than his. Police officers deal with crises—

life and death situations—and as a result can treat everybody else, including their spouse, as if police work is the only thing that is important and whatever anybody else does is meaningless. Even though the job is difficult and demanding, the spouse may believe, because of the officer's behavior, that she has to be in a crisis before the officer will talk to her, acknowledge her, or even listen to her.

In our own particular case, we have established a code that signals John that it's time for him to listen. One week after several emergencies occurred at the house, Barbara was frustrated because she couldn't get through to John. Finally she commented that she would have to call his answering service and tell them that Dr. Stratton's wife was committing suicide. When they "beeped" him, he would give at least 1 hour of his time to listen to her.

Now, when she says, "answering service" or "suicide," John listens. Sometimes Barbara threatens to call the sheriff and tell him that "Stratton isn't practicing what he preaches." She knows then that John realizes he must listen.

It can also be difficult to love an officer when he forgets that men and women are different sexually. It is difficult to love someone when he comes home wired, after an adrenalin-filled shift or from an emergency at 3:00 a.m., flips on the lights, and concludes that this is the perfect time to make love, even though his spouse may be sound asleep. Occasionally, this may be acceptable, but a steady habit of it can cause problems.

Yes, there are days that being married to a police officer is difficult. There are also weeks, months, and years that can be exciting, rewarding, and totally fulfilling.

There is value in loving and being loved by someone who has purpose in life and who helps people. Law enforcement officers have a sense of direction and dedication and want to make the world a better place to live. They believe in tradition and their families, and at times they need support, patience, and understanding from their wives and children. It is important that they share that sense of fulfillment and purpose in life with their loved ones.

#### Suggestions

We have emphasized the importance of communication. For over a year we both worked within a few miles of each other, and as a result, drove to and from work together. We liked this time together, but never realized how important it was until one of our work locations changed.

While driving home, we had a half hour together with no interruptions and were able to discuss all the day's happenings, problems, feelings, etc. When we arrived home we were ready to be with the kids, prepare food, and handle other responsibilities. However, when this ceased, we arrived home, dealt with the children, and did household chores with no time to talk with each other.

It took losing this time together to make us realize how important the time was to us. Because we believe in the value of having time to "let down" or defuse, we developed an alternate method. We exercise now in the evening—jogging, walking, bicycling—

sometimes by ourselves, sometimes with the children. Though we preferred the time driving to and from work, this approach allows for diffusion and discussion of the day's activities for us and the children. The conversations we have at these times are different and easier than if we make a special effort to talk when we have other pressing responsibilities. This time is important. Communication is a two-way street in which each partner must be willing to express feelings, thoughts, ideas, etc.

The value of sharing, and the power we each have to help each other through sharing, cannot be overestimated. We help each other by sharing. Many of the things we experience are similar. Just to know someone has had similar difficulties and survived or has found a successful way to handle a problem can be most helpful.

This type of sharing can be accomplished in numerous ways. A frank discussion with another spouse, whether it be among officers or their spouses, is one type of sharing. Workshops, seminars, 1-day programs, or meetings of small groups and associations enable law enforcement couples to discuss common problems and find solutions to these problems. The sharing of our experiences and methods of handling difficulties is very powerful and influential in helping others.

We have been fortunate to have people share their difficulties, as well as their enjoyable times. They let us understand their struggles and how they handled them to make their law enforcement relationships better. This

has helped us to find ways to improve our relationship. Knowing how other couples have coped with similar problems can assist us in coping with ours. Each spouse can also talk, listen, and learn from the other.

It is essential that each individual value himself—we are all important. If you don't believe you are valuable, there is little we can do to change that belief. The change must come in your attitude and feelings about yourself. These positive attitudes and feelings must also extend to your spouse for a healthy relationship.

In the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, special emphasis is focused on the employee and his family. We believe in the interrelationship of one's home, work, and social life. If an individual is happy and content at home, it is likely that he will be more effective at work and vice versa. We provide services to our officers and their families because we know if things are unsettled at home, the officer's work suffers.

The recognition of the importance of the spouse is evidenced by our spouses program, which has been replicated in over 100 departments throughout the United States. This only emphasizes the value attributed to the spouse by the sheriff's department. Employees are paramount to the organization. Any program that benefits the employee and/or the spouse, whether it be programs such as confidential counseling for work or personal problems, alcoholism programs, spouses programs, retirement seminars, workshops or other approaches, can only add to an officer's successful career.

#### Conclusion

Our emphasis has been on the positive—what we can do to improve relationships when difficulties arise. Hopefully, by sharing with others, we can all develop new ideas, concepts, and approaches that can add to and improve our relationships. If successful, we will be involved in a relationship that allows each partner to continue to grow into a new person with whom the other can continually fall in love. **FBI**

#### Footnote

<sup>1</sup>J. G. Stratton, and D. A. Parker, "Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department Stress Assessment Survey" (Unpublished manuscript, 1981).

#### Correction

In the article "Obtaining the Bite-mark Impression (Mold) From Skin: A Technique for Evidence Preservation," published in the January 1982, issue of the FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, the term "dye stone" was incorrectly spelled. The term should actually have read "die stone."

**END**