

CORRECTIONAL OASIS

**A PUBLICATION OF DESERT WATERS CORRECTIONAL OUTREACH
A NON-PROFIT FOR THE WELL-BEING OF CORRECTIONAL STAFF AND THEIR FAMILIES**

VOLUME 7, ISSUE 2

Combined Federal Campaign #82466 ♦ Combined Colorado Campaign #3908

FEB 2010

How Do You Train For This?

© Caterina Spinaris Tudor

The C.O. looked tough—what I lightheartedly like to call “the testosterone overload type”—and very professional. I knew he was a veteran who had seen it all during his 13-year corrections career—inmate murders, drug overdoses, beatings, stabbings, and staff assaults. What came out of his mouth though, and the tears that periodically welled up in his eyes, told a story that is rarely voiced.

As I sat listening to this warrior-like officer, I tried putting myself in his place. I ended up flooded with sorrow for the human condition, anger at evil, and a sense of urgency to be of assistance to this individual.

The C.O. described two incidents when he responded to inmate on inmate assaults. Both times he could not deliver the victims fast enough from their blood-thirsty would-be executioners.

In one case an inmate was getting viciously assaulted by his cellie with a lock in a sock. The C.O.’s “soul armor” was pierced by the abject terror in the eyes of the inmate who was getting pummeled—his wordless frantic begging for help. As their eyes locked, the C.O. was startled to experience overwhelming compassion for the victim, anguish for his suffering, and a powerful urge to save him from his impending fate, even if it meant risking his own life. However, he had to wait for more staff, as per policy. Not being able to do anything to help for what seemed like an eternity—less than three minutes in reality—caused him to unravel inside. He took his duties to serve and protect very seriously. To him, being unable to stop the fight shortly after it started meant that he had failed as an officer, that the inmates were in control, even if only for a short while. This thought weighed

him down with guilt and shame even though the inmate survived his injuries.

In another case there were six on one in the yard. The C.O. tried to dive in the middle of the pile of human bodies to extract the targeted inmate, but a coworker kept pulling him back until a sufficient number of staff had responded to the incident. He helplessly watched the inmate get stomped and kicked, head eventually swollen as big as a pumpkin, while his assailants’ white tennis shoes turned red with blood. Not being able to intervene for a good two minutes devastated him. Again, grief and guilt flooded him and almost overwhelmed him.

The C.O. added that I was the only one to whom he had confided about the way in which these two incidents had affected him. He stated that he would never tell his coworkers about it because he was certain they’d call him weak, an inmate lover and a hug-a-thug.

When I asked him how he dealt with these painful memories, in a resigned tone of voice he replied, “I drink. Every night.”

And in case you may think that this C.O. is a strange bird, I’d like to tell you that over the years I’ve heard similar stories from staff that had been wounded emotionally by witnessing horrific violence which they could not prevent or stop before grave damage had been done. They all said, “I don’t care if they are inmates. They are still human beings.” I even heard such comments from staff that were not at the institution when the assaults occurred, but who saw pictures or read reports days later.

IN MEMORIAM

Lt. Samantha Williams
Jacksonville Sheriff’s Office
Pretrial Detention Facility
Jacksonville, FL
July 25, 2009

Sgt. Robert Finney
Winfield Correction Facility
Kansas DOC
December 30, 2009

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

HOW DO YOU TRAIN FOR THIS?	2
RISK FACTORS	2
WE ARE ALL BROTHERS & SISTERS	2
WHAT ARE THEY SAYING TO YOU	3
TIME TO RENEW YOURSELF	4
MANY THANKS	4

THE CORRECTIONS VENTLINE™

866-YOU-VENT

youvent@desertwaters.com

(Continued on page 2)

How Do You Train For This?

(Continued from page 1)

As a psychotherapist I can attest that some degree of psychological traumatization is practically unavoidable when people are exposed to gruesome incidents. Witnessing extreme violence firsthand rips open our “protective membrane” and penetrates our core where we identify and “feel with” other human beings in their suffering.

How do correctional trainers prepare rookies to face such occurrences? How do they teach them to confront extreme violence and horror (a) without losing their own humanity by becoming totally calloused, desensitized and indifferent to others, or (b) without becoming devastated and suffering in secrecy for years after?

I believe that trainers need to acknowledge that in different ways and to various degrees all staff is affected by the horror to which they are exposed at work. Trainers also need to emphasize that being affected does not make staff “weak,” unless you call being human a weakness.

Staff needs to be encouraged to seek professional help to process traumatic memories and acquire tools for healthy functioning on and off the job. Traumatic memories do not evaporate by themselves, and no amount of alcohol can wash them away.

And just as importantly, we need to change the culture so staff can discuss the gamut of their reactions to horrific incidents openly and honestly without risking being alienated or ridiculed by coworkers.

Risk Factors that Contribute to Psychological Trauma

Here is a list of factors which can aggravate the impact of traumatic events and contribute to the development of acute stress disorder or post-traumatic stress.

- Peritraumatic dissociation (dissociating/“spacing out” during the incident)
- Close proximity to the traumatic event
- Prolonged exposure to danger

- Intense distress upon exposure to the event
- Physical injury due to the incident
- Lack of family or social support
- Lack of opportunity to tell one's story
- Prior exposure to traumatic incidents or life losses
- Pre-existing anxiety and/or depression
- Substance abuse or dependence
- Chronic medical conditions

From the Old Screw

We Are All Brothers and Sisters

We who work in corrections are all brothers and sisters no matter what country we live in and work for. We have similar issues to deal with in our chosen profession. Will we live through the shift? Although it is not talked about much, this is a thought in every Correctional Officer’s mind. Will we leave the shift with the same number of body parts we started the shift with, and will they still be in good condition? Will it be a quiet shift or will we have to fight?

Corrections is the same everywhere. If it gets quiet, Officers go on guard. We all seem to be able to look in a 360 degree circle. We all check out everyone when we enter or leave a building. We usually sit where we can see all the entrance ways when we are sitting down.

We all mistrust people and when someone is too friendly we think, “What do they want?” I can only guess that Correctional Officers worldwide think these thoughts. I have never been out of my own country, but I can’t think of it being much different elsewhere.

No matter what county you work in as a Correctional Officer, I salute you and yours. We have gangs to deal with, and I’m sure some of you do too. We all have concerns about our families and homes.

Again, I salute you for doing a job that most people can’t or won’t do. As I’ve said before, it’s not how big you are on the outside, but how big you are on the inside. May you and your family be protected!

Take care, *The Old Screw*

What Are They Telling You That Makes You Fall In Love With Them?

By Contrenia C. Fann

Corrections staff sexual misconduct causes much damage in corrections systems. Sometimes it occurs due to "games inmates play" and other times it is the result of staff coercing inmates into sexual involvement. Either way it is utterly reprehensible and destructive.

Contrenia C. Fann is a former Correctional Officer with the Georgia Dept. of Corrections and the author of "Common Sense: Do Not Play The Game With An Inmate!!!" Reprinted with permission from corrections.com.

Claims of Sexual Misconduct in prison have more than doubled in eight years. A Deputy Warden I used to work with once asked me the following question, "Fann, all I want to know is, what are these inmates telling staff members to make them want to have any kind of relationship with them?" Another warden told me, "Don't get your money where you get your honey." When I first heard that, it was funny and I didn't recognize the seriousness of this epidemic of officers and inmates engaging in inappropriate relationships. A couple of months later, a female officer was fired for having a sexual relationship with a female inmate, and the latter warden's statement made sense and was no longer something to laugh about.

In regular society being attractive is a very good thing, but in the world of inmates, it doesn't matter what you look like. Inmates are human beings and it doesn't matter who fulfills their sexual needs and desires. As professional correctional officers we have a job to do. Inmates will flirt with you and tell you how beautiful or handsome you are or that your cologne or perfume smells good. Under no uncertain terms should staff members feed into or be baited by the games inmates play. Male prisoners know how to say kind and flattering words to get female correctional officer off track. An inmate might say something like this, "I like the way you wear your hair. You need to tell your coworkers to go where you get your hair done." He might use this same flattering approach and ask you if you have been working out or if he can do anything for you. He always asks with a smile.

Inmates love to be engaged in long conversations on sports, too, and they may even use the Bible and discuss religion just to get your attention. In my experience, I've found that inmates are trying to get you to see them without their prison uniforms on, to see them as good

guys and not prison inmates. Let me elaborate: the inmate wants you to respect him. He wants you to forget he is incarcerated.

Yes, there are attractive inmates, men who have made mistakes. But common sense should tell us three things. You are employed to do a job. You are not employed to have a personal relationship with an inmate. Your self-esteem should not be so low that you take the word of an inmate as truth. You should not sacrifice your self-respect or the respect of your family, friends, and coworkers to have a relationship with an inmate. Why give up all the hard work you went through for an inmate?

I have seen erring staff members often escorted out through the same gates they entered seeking employment. Staff members need to remind themselves that they do not need an inmate's words nor their flattery and compliments, not their money, and especially not their sexual attraction and consummation.

Case No. 111

A female officer was having a sexual relationship with an inmate from Atlanta, Georgia, whose rival gang members in the dorm were from Savannah. She was bringing drugs, paraphernalia, porn movies, and magazines in for this inmate. She and the inmate were also having sex in the cell while another inmate acted as lookout. During chow one day, an inmate from Savannah began talking about how this officer was a whore. The inmate from Atlanta addressed him, and soon a fight broke out. There were two officers in the dining area with 70 to 80 inmates. The officers were not only greatly outmanned but severely injured while trying to break up this altercation. Later, when a rival gang member reported what the officer was doing, she was investigated and charged. Her husband divorced her and took custody of their two children. She was charged by the state and did time in the state prison for women.

Inmates are being physically assaulted and raped by each other every day. With HIV and AIDS on the rise in the inmate population, no sexual encounter is safe.

A word to the wise. These inmates, both men and women, have been or will be locked up for a long time and will not be intimate with the opposite sex for a long time. They will find the most unattractive person attractive. Do not risk your job for an inmate that has nothing but time to manipulate and swoon you.

Desert Waters

Correctional Outreach



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

Caterina Spinaris Tudor, Ph.D.
Executive Director

P.O. Box 355
Florence, CO 81226
(719) 784-4727

DESERTWATERS@DESERTWATERS.COM

WWW.DESERTWATERS.COM

Contributions are tax-deductible.

www.desertwaters.com/a-donations.htm

MANY THANKS!

Individual donors: Anonymous donors, Paul & Cindy Bowen, TC & Joellen Brown, Eric Carlson, Bill & Victoria Dent, Glen Doughten, Anne Gard, Peter & Susan Hoppen, Harold & Becky Hutson, Ron Jansen, Denis Kuhens, Richard Lins, Jeff & Connie Mueller, Don Redmond, Kevin & Robin Rivard, Russ & Cherrie Scharf, Eric Spierer, & Betty Wilson

Business donors: Janice Barnett, CPA; Hoppen Advertising Specialties; Kirkwood Memorial Presbyterian Church USA; Vineyard Christian Fellowship

Grants: Abdoulah Family Fund; American Association of University Women, Cañon City Chapter; City of Cañon City

Special thanks: Colleen Abdoulah, DWCO Board, Florence UMC Women, Holly Conwell, Pete & Susie Hoppen, Tara Kane, Nancy Mann, Jim & Barbara Martin, Mark Peel, & Larry Tucker

Ventline Sponsors: City of Cañon City; Credit Union of Colorado; Doing HIS Time Prison Ministry; Hoppen Advertising Specialties; Russ & Cherrie Scharf; Vineyard Christian Fellowship

DWCO's 3rd Annual Conference—May 6 & 7, The Abbey, Cañon City, CO
http://www.desertwaters.com/DWCO_FLYER_2010.pdf

It's Time to Renew Yourself

by Sgt. Barry Evert

Alright, so our profession seems to be in a proverbial lull. Budget cuts and program changes have taken their toll on many of us. As you read this, officers are going to work, seemingly on cruise control. This is the time to renew yourself. Think about why you joined the department. Was it for the pay, the benefits or for other reasons?

Once you think of this, think back to how excited you were when you first pinned on your badge. Do you remember feeling proud? Do you remember being excited or even scared? The reason I want you to think about this now is so you can lean back on these emotions and reasons as we enter into another rough year. It can be very refreshing to go back to the basics once in a while and remember why you strap on your duty belt every day in the first place. It can help you get through the tough times many of us are facing right now.

Take this opportunity to remind yourself and your coworkers why you are there. Think about, and talk about, what life would be like without us. Where

would America be without its dedicated Correctional Officers working quietly, bravely, behind the scenes, keeping society's outcasts away from our children? Where would America be if not for those of us that do the right thing even off duty, those of us that stop at accidents, help those in need, and commit ourselves to live our lives unsullied?

This is the time to renew yourself. Renew your faith in yourself and those you work with. It is not always easy to do this, especially during times of seemingly endless crisis. Use the energy to help a colleague get over his or her slump too. We cannot afford to "turn on the cruise control" while we are at work. This is when we get hurt...or worse. Revitalize yourself, revitalize your family, and keep your head up high. Throughout history there have been millions of men and women whose names are long forgotten that have tirelessly done the same as you are doing now. Where would the world be without them?

Stay safe out there, vest up, turn off the cruise control, and get to work! We do make a difference!