

# CORRECTIONAL OASIS

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

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## Workplace Entanglements

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As in other branches of law enforcement, sexual involvement is not uncommon among corrections staff who are married or are in otherwise committed relationships. These behaviors cause a multitude of complications in the workplace and can also wreak havoc in people's personal lives.

Here are some thoughts as to why corrections staff may get entangled in such relationships.

**False sense of intimacy.** Staff spends a good portion of their waking hours in close quarters with coworkers. In many cases they spend more time with coworkers than with their own partners. Together they share stressful and even traumatic experiences. They bond with one another like soldiers in a combat zone. Staff may not confide in their partners about work to not cause them worry, to maintain professional confidentiality requirements, or to forget about work while at home. Over time they may come to believe that fellow employees understand and support them better than their own partners at home. Physical proximity coupled with shared unique experiences on the job can cause professional boundaries to collapse, and so affairs happen.

**Emotional release.** The corrections environment tends to be one of underlying tension, negativity and/or boredom. Distressing emotions get stirred up on the job with few healthy outlets. Romantic involvement in the workplace provides a jolt of excitement, a means of escape from unpleasant emotions, a mood-altering "fix."

**Self-worth issues.** When a coworker flirts with a staff member with low self-esteem, the targeted person feels desirable, "special." That person starts to think, *S/he chose ME! I'm preferred over others! I'm hot!* So responding to a coworker's romantic

overtures ensures that these exhilarating feelings keep getting generated, at least for a season.

**Sex addiction.** The processes of seduction and sexual activity provide powerful yet temporary mood lifts. As the effects wear off, sex addicts seek new "highs" through new conquests and new experiences. And the pattern keeps getting repeated. In some cases even sex addicts fall for the games of others who are deeper into their sex addiction, who are more of a true sexual predator on the "hunt" for their next victim. So those who just wanted to "play" may end up devastated, feeling used and discarded later on.

**Role modeling.** Exposure to certain behaviors desensitizes people to them. Staff's conduct influences other staff. When exposed to coworkers' involvement with fellow employees, some staff might come to regard this as acceptable or even advantageous behavior, and they may follow suit.

### IN MEMORIAM

**Maureen McReynolds**  
March 16, 2008  
Unit Team Manager  
Topeka Correctional  
Facility, KS

**Sgt. Terry DeVore**  
**CO John Schwartz**  
April 15, 2008  
Arkansas Valley  
Correctional Facility, CO  
Olney Springs  
Volunteer Fire Dept.  
Killed while responding  
to a wildfire when their  
vehicle crashed off of a  
burned-out wooden  
bridge in Crowley County

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THE CORRECTIONS VENTLINE™

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## From the Old Screw

## Reminiscing

When I started writing articles for Desert Waters I told the boss lady Cat (I never have learned to pronounce her name right) that I not only hoped my letters would help staff to stop and think and realize that in Corrections some things never change, but that perhaps in time others would start to write to Desert Waters and give their experiences and outlook on Corrections.

This is now happening. Staff are writing and doing a good job, and I feel it is time for a old man to slow down. I love helping Staff when I can, but I'm from a generation that is for the most part gone in Corrections. Yes, it is still very dangerous in this line of work, but I look back now and wonder how in the world we lived through it. We had no panic buttons, no radios or any of the equipment that Staff has nowadays. You did what you had to do and did not give it too much thought, or it would really make you wonder if you chose the right line of work.

I did learn a lot from Corrections. I had always thought of myself as an old southern boy, but I realized that in prison that wouldn't work. I decided that if I was going to work in there I must make some changes. I realized that for me to do my job that it must make no difference what a man's color was or what his beliefs were. Nor could his crime make a difference. I started only handling them as men until they proved different. Even then I would not bum

rap or lie on a report to get them. I would even tell them, "I don't have to bum rap you, all I have to do is watch and you with your attitude will mess yourself up." It never failed and I guess the word went out that I was strict, but fair. I did nothing to be liked or win a popularity contest. I learned to not sweat the small stuff but to be fair, firm and consistent. I learned never to make threats. I would tell them, "If you do that, this will happen. If you think you have to get violent then you do what you think you want to do and I will do what I know I have to do." I learned that a warning given the right way meant more than a threat. A threat was like a challenge to them. A warning was like you were trying to help. Was I trying to help? Yes, I was trying to help my fellow staff and myself from maybe having serious problems. Example: You tell a problem person that you hear there is some kind of crap going on. You tell him that if he knows anyone that might be involved in it to tell them that it has to stop or things are really going to get tight. He knows you know it is him, but by not choosing to point him out you are giving him a chance to save face. Of course he will deny it, but nine times out of ten it will stop. And this is what you want to happen. I'm not saying these things will work for everyone, but you might be surprised how many times they do work.

Take Care, The Old Screw

## Workplace Entanglements

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What can keep staff from getting caught in these traps?

**Count the cost.** Is a fleeting thrill worth destroying years of investment in your partner and your family? Is it worth damaging your integrity, your self-respect, and perhaps your career?

**Seek help.** If you find that you are strongly attracted to a coworker, ask to be moved to a different team, a different shift or even a different facility. Seek professional counseling to learn to distin-

guish between love and infatuation, and to address addictive acting-out patterns.

**Examine your beliefs about yourself.** The less you truly love and respect yourself in healthy ways, the more you'll expect others to make you feel lovable and respectable. Sooner or later your partner will disappoint you. If you can't shore yourself up through your inner resources at low points in your committed relationship, you'll look elsewhere for an ego boost. Get help for these issues, as they are not likely to go away on their own.

**Your future and your family's future depend on it.**

# Rookie Of The Year

By Ann Coppola, Corrections Connections News Reporter

*Published: 02/24/2008 Reprinted with permission*

The first order you give to an uncooperative inmate. The first walk onto a yard filled with hundreds of convicted felons. The first violent incident you respond to. These are moments correctional officers will never forget, and they can be daunting times for officers just starting their careers.

Sergeant Barry Evert certainly remembers the overwhelming pressure he felt when he began his corrections career eight years ago. Now a trainer of new recruits at California's Pelican Bay State Prison, Evert wants to help the next generation of professionals through moments like these and the many others that will follow. His new book *Scars and Bars: A Survival Guide for Correctional Officers and their Families* offers advice on surviving the "firsts" and becoming the best officer and person one can be.

**Corrections.com:** Why did you want to write a book for the up-and-coming corrections generation?

**Barry Evert:** I train new recruits, and I've noticed a lot of the new cadets come from different backgrounds than previous new officers. Corrections used to attract a lot of tradesmen, people with years of experience in the work force who came to the job for the financial security.

Now we're seeing an increase in college students coming in, which is great, but many of these kids have never held a job and they've been pretty much sheltered from the type of violence that goes on in prisons. So I thought I'd write something to better prepare them and make it easier for them to integrate into the prison environment.

**CC:** It seems like there's so much advice an experienced officer could give to a rookie. What did you decide to focus on?

**BE:** I talk about how to set yourself up for success in your first two years. These years, especially when you are 21 or 22 years old, will pretty much determine the kind of person and officer you're going to be for the rest of your life. If you're not careful, you can turn into a burnout: someone who hates their job because they don't understand their job.

This book helps new recruits to psychologically prepare themselves for the worst case scenarios. My concern is that when the officer goes home, they go home in one piece. The main theme of the book is not defensive tactics. That's something they'll learn much more about on the job. This isn't a book about self-defense. There are so many out there. It's about self-survival, what you have to do to be the most efficient corrections officer, to be a good spouse at home, a good son or daughter at home, and a productive member of the community.

**CC:** The book touches on how nerve-racking it can be the first time a "rookie" steps onto the yard or tier. Tell us more about that.

**BE:** Most of us never step foot inside a prison and most never will. When you do for the first time you're nervous, and if you're not, there's something wrong with you. The first day where you actually have to supervise and give orders to an inmate can be overwhelming. The same goes for when you experience your first incident with violence. You realize it's just you with four or five officers on the yard with possibly 200 or 300 convicted murderers, and it's your responsibility to keep you and your partner safe.

**CC:** How can new officers deal with that pressure?

**BE:** One of the best ways to do that is to make sure that when you get home, you have a life outside of work. The most important part of the book to me is the chapter called "Life Outside the Walls." It goes to the core of my book, which is about how to be an officer, not how to be a prison guard. You have to adjust your life to your job, and the responsibilities that come with that, but you don't have to be a super cop all hours of the day.

**CC:** Your book isn't just for correctional staff. You address officers' families as well. Why did you include them?

**BE:** I wrote that, unwittingly, the spouse will sign up for the department also. The families are going to have a lot to deal with as their husband, wife, son, or

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# Desert Waters

Correctional Outreach



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

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## Rookie Of The Year

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daughter goes through their first two years as an officer. I've made phone calls to spouses several times about an incident, and they panic, not just because they're worried, but because they often don't understand how something like that could happen.

Correctional staffs rely on each other a lot, but the bottom line is you need to be able to rely on your spouse and your family. I've made mistakes with what I did and didn't share with my family about my job, and I've seen a lot of officers who've done the same thing. Your family doesn't need to know all the details, but it's nice to be able to come home to someone to talk to after a really bad day.

**CC:** What kind of impact do you want *Scars and Bars* to make?

**BE:** I'm hoping this book will be in every training classroom across the country. I think it will help anybody who is going to work in a prison environment including free staff, not just sworn custody. I also hope that maybe the advocate or civil rights ac-

tivist will read it so they can see that we're not just correctional officers, we're human beings.

Contrary to popular belief, we have a heart. We cry and we laugh. Some days we go to work and don't do a darn thing other than feed and clothe the inmates. But there are other days where we see things we wish we hadn't and we break down. My hope is that this book will equip new staff with the tools they need to successfully navigate these times.

### DWCO's First Annual Conference REACHING BEHIND THE WALLS Mental Health & Workplace Wellness for Corrections Staff

Thu May 8 & Fri May 9, 2008

The Castle, Glen Eyrie, Colorado Springs, CO

Track A: Corrections Staff

Track B: EAP & other mental health providers

More information on [www.desertwaters.com](http://www.desertwaters.com)

We are very pleased to have staff register to come from  
CA, CO, KS, KY, MA, MD, MT, NM, & OR