

Did we make a difference?

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Just before retiring, some young puppy was busting my shoes about how law enforcement has changed, and the system is improving for the best. I just smiled and gave him a little laugh.

He asked what was so funny. I told him that I felt sorry for him. When asked why, I told him, "Because in about 15 years, THIS is going to be your good old days".

We all saw the change in our jobs. I came on in 1970. I used to tell the rookies that our academy lasted 3 months. They gave us a stick, a gun, a dime, and kicked us out into the street. They told us: If you need help, use the dime. If you can't get to a phone, use the stick. If using the stick pis*** him off, use the gun.

And the first order we received when we were assigned to a pct. was from our road sergeant. His order was "Don't you EVER bother me, kid."

Law enforcement then, was much different than the current mission. We delivered babies, got rough in the alley when we needed to, made "Solomon like" decisions at least once a tour, and often wound up being big brother to the kid we roughed up in that alley a year or so ago. And, for some reason, none of that managed to get on a report. And the department didn't really want to know. All they wanted was numbers, and no ripples in the pond.

Because of the changing times, and the evolution of Law Enforcement, the modern young officers will never see that form of Policing, and of course this is best. The current way is the right way... now. But it was different then (ergo, the Dinosaur Syndrome).

When it's time to go, we wonder if we're going to miss the job, after all, other than our kids and a few marriages, it was the most important thing in our lives. Actually, it was the other way around. The job was first, but only another cop could understand how I mean that.

But have faith brother! After a short time of feeling completely impudent, (After all, you're just John Q. now), reality hits like a lead weight.

It's not the job we miss after all. It's what we as individuals, had accomplished while in this profession, that we miss. The challenge of life and death, good and bad, right and wrong, or even simply easing the pain of some poor bastard for a while, someone we will never see again.

We know the reality of what's happening out there. We are the ones who have spent our entire adult life picking up the pieces of peoples broken lives. And the bitch of it all is that no one except us knows what we did out there.

(I was once told that being a good street cop is like coming to work in a wet suit and peeing in your pants. It's a nice warm feeling, but you're the only one who knows anything has happened.)

What I missed mostly though, were the people I worked with. Most of us came on the job together at the age of 21 or 22. We grew up together. We were family. We went to each other's weddings, shared the joy of our children's births, and we mourned the deaths of family members and marriages. We celebrated the good times, and huddled close in the bad.

We went from rookies who couldn't take our eyes off of the tin number of the old timer we worked with, to Dinosaurs.

After all, what they gave us was just a job. What we made of it was a profession. We fulfilled our mission, and did the impossible each and every day, despite the department and its regulations.

I think the thing that nags you the most when you first retire is: After you leave the job and remove your armor, the part of you that you tucked away on that shelf for all those years, comes out. It looks at all the things you've hidden away. All the terrible, and all the wonderful things that happened out there. And it asks you the questions that no one will ever answer.

"Do you think I did OK? Did I make a difference? Was I a good cop?"

You know what Yeah, you were a good cop! And you know it!

In closing;

The best advice I got, by far, was from an old friend who left the job a few years before me. He told me to stay healthy, work out and watch my diet. He said "Cause that way, the first day of every month you can look in the mirror, smile and say.. Screwed them out of another month's pension!!"

Be well, my brothers and sisters!!