

Perspective from a Police Officer's Wife

by Natalie Stahl

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Note: The author Natalie Stahl is the wife of a police officer in Glendale, Arizona.

Do You Know Her?

"When an officer dies, the question is always, "Did you know him?" like somehow it can diminish the pain of a fallen officer if you had never met them. As the spouse of a police officer I get that same question, as well – but with an added twist, "Do you know his wife?" My response? "Yes. I know her".

I know that she finds herself alone a lot. I know she spends a lot of time explaining to family members, friends, and co-workers why her officer husband is not with her. I know when someone asks what her husband does – she may have an alternative answer like 'he works for the city (county or state)' or 'he's a trash collector', yet someone in the room always clarifies for her – he's a cop.

I know she cringes every time she hears the words "officer-involved" and HATES the words "routine traffic stop". I know she spends a lot of time defending her husband's career choice and sometimes realizes that her silence is necessary. I know the justice system frustrates her, yet she relies on it anyway. I know that people feel it necessary to tell her of every contact they've had with LE – especially if it was bad, yet never seem to remember to tell her when they saw one do something nice.

I know she sleeps alone a lot, spends her birthday, anniversary, and her children's birthdays wishing he were there. I know "date nights" on Wednesdays are better than a Saturday every single time. And I know when on that date, he will have to sit facing the door. I know when they do get a chance to go out, she'll let him drive so as to not have to hear about her "escape route" or recite portions of the traffic code. I know that he'll always recognize someone somewhere that he's arrested. I know they probably have a 'code word' that means grab the kids and head the other way – I'll meet you at the car.

I know when her children are little they are proud of their superhero. And as they grow into teenagers, they no longer offer what their dad does for fear it will make them unpopular. I know high school boys don't want to date cop's daughters. I know that she finds things in her washer that most people don't have in their homes – from blue gloves to bullets – and thinks nothing of it. I know she's picked a handcuff key out of her dryer more than once. I know she has learned to ignore the smell of his vest in July and buys Febreze by the gallon.

I know her biggest load of laundry is black (or tan or blue). And they're usually washed separately to make sure that any bio-hazard he's come in contact with doesn't end up in the baby's clothes. I know that she wants him to eat better, but knows a 'good day' for him means more than one trip to QT. I know that she buys Tupperware by the case to

store leftovers in hoping he'll eat a 'real' meal when he gets home. I know she's watched him age, his hair gray and the sunspots show up on his left arm and neck.

I know she has a hard time scheduling vacations because shift change is coming. I know that when one of his brothers is hurt – his vacation time will probably get donated to him anyway. I know that when it's his regular day off, he will probably still get called to court – even if he worked all night.

I know that a text message with two words – "I'm okay" – is like a sonnet or love song to most... especially when we see "breaking news" flash on our TV screens.

I know that her favorite sounds are the garage door and the sound of Velcro. He made it home safely. And I know she can tell by the sound of his boots on the floor whether or not to ask how his day was. And I know that even though she knew his job had risk, and officers are dying in the line of duty – she never TRULY believed it would happen to hers.

Do I know her? Yes. Have I met her? No. But when I do – you wouldn't be able to tell the difference."