



April 2009

# MBPD RETIREE NEWS

UNITY IS STRENGTH FOR A BETTER RETIREMENT

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## Sam's Corner March 2009 "A Collection of disorganized thoughts"

It's been 7 months since I retired and if you recall from my earlier columns, I was having some issues dealing with the "separation anxiety" I was feeling. How do I feel now? Pretty good I must say. Former co-workers I run into often ask me that question. It seems that I was the exception in the group of recent retirees in terms of how I've adapted to being retired. I've probably had a bit more anxiety than most. Other retirees I've spoken with about this indicated they felt pretty good early on. While at the FOP awards banquet in January, I ran into my old friend, retired Fire Lieutenant Mike Timmoney. He asked me if I was still having those "dreams". I mentioned the "dreams" in the October, 2008 newsletter. You know, the police (or in Mike's case, fire department) dreams. Mine have pretty much stopped, but recently they started up again. The dreams I'm referring to consist of "doing stuff" that's police related, such as answering a call, driving around in the car or mingling with old co-workers.

This brings me to the "point" you're all waiting for in my disorganized ramblings about retirement, dreams and awards banquets. I was going to try to keep this quiet, but I blabbed it to too many people and the "cat's out of the bag" so to speak. So here it is! Brace yourselves! Retired Miami Beach Police Lieutenant Samuel Gam is now Reserve Officer Samuel Gam of the Virginia Gardens Police Department.

How did I come to lose my mind and jump into police work again you ask? Well, I was recruited by Lieutenant Glenn Hodges of the Virginia Gardens P.D. at the Shelbourne Hotel during the retirement party for Rick Mendoza, Bobby Jenkins, and Greg Strong. When Glenn approached me at the party and asked me if I was interested in joining his little outfit as a reserve, I sort of felt uneasy at first. I turned down a similar

offer from the Beach. After careful thought, I decided to take the plunge.

Now for those of you who don't know where Virginia Gardens is, it's a rather small community west of Miami Springs and east of Doral just north of the Miami International Airport on 36<sup>th</sup> Street. The place has a bit of everything, including warehouses, businesses, restaurants, apartments, single family residential and strip malls. Just the perfect size for me.

I thought the hiring process was going to be a breeze, but I was mistaken. They really put me through the wringer. Polygraph, background, physical and psychological. The psychological exam alone lasted seven hours! Can you believe I passed? The application package was about three quarters of an inch thick. I had to reveal every place I've lived since I was nine years old. Every school I attended since 1970. Every job I've held since I was fourteen and so forth. No stone was left unturned.

When I finally got the call that my application and backgrounds were accepted and that I passed all my tests, I felt like a rookie again getting my first police job. Well, actually, I am a rookie again. After being out of a patrol car for seven months, it was strange getting back into one. I felt like a fish out of water, but I starting to get used to it again. Not much happens in Virginia Gardens. I rode one evening last week and the only call all night long was a "9-1-1 hang-up". Yeah, I responded with my partner. We handled it. It was "QRU". You know what "QRU" means? Can't tell ya...Cop talk! We cleared the call and went back to the station to write a report. A report??



### Vinny's Breakfast

On March 9, 2009 a breakfast was held at the 84 Diner with 14 people attending, they were Vinny Aprile, Fred Walder, Joan Donnelly-Ochoa, Wally Neuman, Don Freeman, Jack Mackie, Billy O'Neil, Sam Gam, Oldy Ochoa, Billy Rosenstein, Bill Thrall, Charlie Seraydar and his daughter, and Gary Bergert (who advised he shows up once a year to say hello).

On the way out of the restaurant we ran into Tom Columbano (retired fireman), Bill Arwood and his son. Bill advised that his boy just completed the physical portion of the testing for the Hollywood Police Dept.

### Inside this issue:

SAM'S CORNER MARCH '09	1-3
SAM'S CORNER APRIL '09	4-5
A TRIBUTE TO IRVING CYPEN BY: JESSE WEBB	6
IN MEMORIAM -	7
HOW'S YOUR BODY LANGUAGE?	8
ABOUT GREG STRONG - A POLICE STORY	9
WALL OF HONOR CEREMONY -	10-11
SUPPORT OUR SPONSORS AND ADVERTISERS	12

Yeah! In Virginia Gardens, even minor calls require reports. So I wrote one. First report I've written in about five years. But I did a pretty good job, so my FTO gave me a pat on the back. So far, I'm a good rookie.

All joking aside, it's a nice place with nice people. The other night, I was introduced to the City Council by Chief Jim Chononis during their monthly commission meeting. When I addressed them, I told them that I was impressed with the great relationship the residents of the city have with the police department. People actually wave at us...And they use all five fingers. That remark got a chuckle out of the commission and the audience, but the Chief looked horrified, although he never said a word to me about it. Well, it's not like he can suspend me without pay, I'm working for free! More on Virginia Gardens next month.

The next item is the one you've all been waiting for. The story of the "Phantom". Gene Toreky was "The Phantom". He told me that it was not until he retired that many found out about his little secret. Gene also claims that many "old timers" still don't know that he was the Phantom. When Gene retired, he wrote a letter to the Chief and announced that he and the Phantom would be retiring together. That's when many realized that it was Gene all along. I briefly remember the days of the Phantom also. I was a pretty naïve rookie then and really didn't know what I was reading about most of the time, but I did enjoy the drawings. They were fantastic.

Gene explained that several years into his tenure with the Police Department, a flurry of rumors started to fly. Officers were hungry for information and they weren't getting it. Gene admits that he had a "nose for information" and became aware of many juicy tidbits that even most of the brass didn't know about. So he decided to find a way to discreetly disseminate this information without revealing himself or his sources.

It was then that he and his wife Wanda came up with a plan. With her artistic abilities and Gene's input, they created a cartoon cop. Gene would bring the buzz home and Wanda would draw the cartoon cop holding up the gossip. There was a locked bulletin board in the old police station near the rear police entrance. Gene changed the lock with one of his own and snuck the cartoons in, replacing the comic strips each time a new rumor popped up. Gene watched as everyone from rookies to the Chief bellied up to the bulletin board to glance at the Phantom's latest cartoon, and view the latest rumors. It was yesterday's unofficial version of today's "Official Bulletin", and everyone loved it.

One day, Detective Major Fleming became upset when someone drew a mustache on the Chief's picture posted in the bulletin board, so he had the lock cut off and went into remove the Chief's picture. He was careful however, not to molest the Phantom's cartoon, since he knew how important it was to the members of the Department. Not missing a beat, Gene cut the new lock off and replaced it with a new one of his own. He then did some fishing around and found out who gave the order to have his lock cut off. A memo was sent to Major Fleming from the Phantom, along with a key taped to it. The letter read: "Are you looking for this Major?"



Gene never heard anything else about it.

Gene used his comic strip to tease some officers who got in trouble with a subject they dealt with. The subject went to the State Attorney's Office and made some "allegations" resulting in the officers being indicted. They were later cleared of their charges. When it was all over, Gene posted a comic strip (in color) depicting a bunch of police cars and cops carrying an arsenal of weapons surrounding the subject's house, taunting him and asking with a megaphone if he could "come out

to play". It got back to Gene that the rank and file loved this cartoon out of all of them.

Gene went on to say that his cartoons remained popular up until his retirement. He was never caught posting them although he came close a couple of times. He mentioned that one of his greatest fans was a Sgt. Nicholson, who tried to collect the cartoons. Gene had high praise for Sgt. Nicholson, whom he rode with and he also mentioned Jim Casey, who became his lifelong friend. I don't remember ever working with Sgt. Nicholson, but I'm sure many of you do. I remember working with Gene and Jim Casey. As I've said before, I have nothing but good memories of these gentlemen, as I have of many of the other great cops I've worked with.

Gene admits that he had a "nose for information" and became aware of many juicy tidbits that even most of the brass didn't know about.

Gene's last cartoon before he retired was a cop in a casket with his butt facing up saying "I'm leaving and if you haven't liked it you can kiss my a--. See you; I'll give you some news if I get any".

I hope you enjoyed reading the story of the Phantom as much as I enjoyed writing about him. By the way, Gene claims to have a

"phantom" tattoo on his left leg which he describes as a "mean red eyed devilish guy" with M.B.P.D. above him, and "The Phantom" underneath. Perhaps one day he'll take a digital photo and e-mail it. I'm sure we would all get a kick out of seeing it posted in the retiree's newsletter. Thank you Gene!

Speaking of some of the great cops I've worked with, I'd like to say a few words about Billy O'Neil. First of all, I think I speak for all of us when I say how thankful I am that Billy and his passenger walked away from that awful plane crash relatively unscathed. I'm not sure if this incident is still under investigation, so I'll reveal what I know so far about this incident being careful not to interfere with the investigation.

Billy's mishap occurred a few days after US Air Pilot Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger safely landed US Air flight 1549 in New York's Hudson River. The airliner struck a large flock of birds damaging both engines, essentially turning the plane into a giant glider. Billy's experience was strikingly similar.

In his case, pilot Billy "COMMANDER BO" O'Neil was taking off from Everglades City International Airport, a major hub in Southwest Florida with over 3 flights per week. ECIA serves the metropolitan area of Everglades City. A major city with a permanent population of 31 people, 433 alligators, 67 possums, and numerous other forms of unusual wildlife. As Billy took off, the airliner he was piloting struck a large flock of mosquitoes. As the powerful weed whacker engine on his flying machine stalled, he struggled to maintain altitude. The balsa wood in his plane creaked as he expertly touched down in a swamp. He and his 200 passengers, ok I lied, one passenger were shaken but safe. Immediately, rescue personnel near the busy harbor began to rush to the scene. Ok I lied. There ain't no busy harbor and one guy in an old aluminum boat came over to yell at Billy for scaring the fish away.

Needless to say, Billy is the new hero in Everglades City and a parade is planned in his honor. The Mayor said so. Ok, I lied; I

never spoke to the Mayor. Once again Billy, ALL KIDDING ASIDE, I'm glad you guys are ok. Hopefully, you'll show up at a meeting sometime soon so I can tell you myself Mr. President!! You see folks; Billy thought that by writing the story himself and posting it in last month's newsletter, that it was the end of it. I'm here to prove him wrong. He's far from being off the hook on this one. Anyway, President O'Neil is looking for a new airliner, and has offered free rides to anyone who is interested, as long as they don't weigh over 64 pounds. I believe (thankfully so) this will exclude me.

In closing this month's column, I would just like to say this to Mr. Jack Tighe; Jack, you told me recently that I'm your replacement as editor of the retiree's newsletter. I assure you Jack, I am not your replacement. You can never be replaced. This newsletter is your "baby". Besides, you have a certain "style" in your writing that cannot be duplicated by anyone else. In fact, I don't think even *you* can duplicate your own style. How's that for a disorganized thought!

I hope you decide to continue donating your time to this paper. It's an honor to work with you side by side. Now, my question to you sir is; is Alan Solowitz really bald? I could've sworn he had hair the last time we saw him at the FOP Awards Banquet. Please get back with me on this.



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## Sam's Corner "A Collection of disorganized thoughts" - April 2009

My readers are going to get a treat this month. Due to a technical snafu, last month's column did not make the newsletter. Those of you who were starving for my column last month will get a calorie overload this month. You'll get to read my columns for March and April. Yes I know what you're thinking- "Is this guy for real? He thinks he writes for the New York Times or something!" No I don't think that! I'm just making a little fun of myself. I will do that from time to time. You can't take yourself too seriously nowadays.

Finding the time to write this column has been getting harder and harder every month. I am really finding a lot of stuff to do. Several months ago, I joined "LA Fitness", a really nice health club chain with locations all over the United States. Those of you who know me personally know that I've always hated exercising. I've always made excuses to avoid it, such as; I'm working overtime, I'm tired, I have court, I'm working off duty, my wife is sick, my dog is sick, I'm sick!!

Well my friends, once I retired, I could no longer make excuses. Something needed to be done immediately. So, I drove to the neighborhood LA Fitness and joined up. They also shamed me into hiring a personal trainer once a week for 20 minutes. My first couple of weeks consisted of riding the bike for about 30 minutes a day, four days a week. My "personal trainer" was a dude named Andrew, who told me he wasn't doing his job unless he worked my muscles to exhaustion by making me do strange exercise routines with large beach balls and barbells shaped like balloon animals. Those routines left me unable to move for 3-4 days.

It was during those days, and not too long ago either that I was popping 6 Advil's a day for the pain. In spite of all that, I still felt pretty good. At least I was finally doing something for ME!

It's been several months since I first joined and I still go to LA Fitness about 4 times a week and work out with a trainer. But I'm realistic about the whole thing. I'm never going to be Mr. America or Mr. Universe, but I've lost about 20 pounds, I'm feeling better, and I have more endurance than I've had in years, so it must work.

LA Fitness is an interesting place. I like going there and I feel comfortable now. Of course, I like leaving there much more. Sometimes I get exhausted just watching some of those folks work out. There are some routines I will never be able to follow there. For example, there's this one fellow who weighs about 140 pounds, most of it solid muscle. This guy

works out on this elliptical machine contraption thing at full speed while reading a novel, eating a protein bar, browsing the web on his "I-phone", and having a conversation with his lawyer and the woman next to him. I have enough trouble balancing myself on the treadmill at 2 miles per hour without falling on my butt, much less reading a book! I guess I just wasn't born to exercise.

While at one of Vinny's retiree breakfasts recently, I ran into retiree Bill Thrall. Bill was showing me his new "Smartphone" that did everything from surf the web, to sending e-mails, to tracking every satellite orbiting the universe. It was really a nice phone. I used to have a phone like that. When I retired I decided to downgrade and get a cheap flip phone with the "basics". While many of my friends and family were upgrading to those "I-phones", I was actually going backwards.

It really is interesting to experience how technology has grown and advanced in our lifetimes. When I started with the Miami Beach Police, there were no such things as hand held cell phones (not as we know them now). There were mobile radiotelephones. I know that because Detective Frank Cannon (played by William Conrad) of the TV show "Cannon" had one in his Lincoln Continental Mark IV.

In order to make a mobile call, he had to first call the mobile operator. Do you remember that?

The only computers in the police station at 100/120 Meridian Avenue that I knew of were the ones in "CDC" (Communications Dispatch Center), and they were connected to NCIC/FCIC. All other forms of communication were either handwritten or typed on manual typewriters. If you were special, you got to use an *electric* typewriter. If you were *really* special, you had access to an IBM Selectric typewriter, with the interchangeable balls. No, not *those* balls, the ones with the different typefaces. I clearly recall the Department taking delivery of a couple of those "word processors".

THOSE OF YOU WHO  
WERE STARVING FOR MY  
COLUMN LAST MONTH  
WILL GET A CALORIE  
OVERLOAD THIS MONTH.  
YOU'LL GET TO READ MY  
COLUMNS FOR MARCH  
AND APRIL. YES I KNOW  
WHAT YOU'RE  
THINKING- "IS THIS GUY  
FOR REAL?"



They had screens and one could actually see what they were writing and make corrections before printing. What an amazing concept! I was jealous. Department secretary Phyllis Rubenstein had one, but she had trouble using it because her fingernails were about 7 inches long, so she kept hitting the wrong keys.

And...how many of you remember the Department's first attempts at computers in the cars? Remember the Motorola KDT480's? They actually worked pretty well when they worked, which was very rarely. They were bulky and had to be permanently installed. The screens were actually CRT's, like televisions. Their memory was extremely limited as well. The other problem was that they were installed on the floor, so you had to look down to read the screen, which was very small. Thus, it was hard to drive and read the screen at the same time but we managed.

Nowadays of course, we have desktops and laptops (I'm using one now as a matter of fact). We also have access to Smartphones, WiFi, routers, GPS, satellites and a host of other gadgets to make our lives easier. Laptop computers are now standard issue for every Miami Beach cop and they are required to use them daily. I mentioned these things at my last roll call in June of last year. Some of the newest officers in the roll call room were so young that they were downright perplexed. Many of them have never lived without cell phones, computers, VCR's or microwave ovens.

When I started with M.B.P.D. (Oh, here we go again, would you stop!?), they had just come out with VCR's. I purchased my first one in about 1981 for \$650.00. That was a fortune then as it would be now. My Panasonic VCR weighed about 60 pounds, had a remote control with a wire controller and made a lot of noise. It took me months of working overtime and off duty jobs in order to be able to afford it. I loved it because I was able to stick a blank tape in and program it to record my favorite shows, well, one favorite show at a time like "Hill Street Blues", then come home from work and watch it. Now you can't give those things away, and they are just about obsolete. But now we have HD/DVR's...Wow!!

Technology is exciting. I would love to see where the Miami Beach Police Department is in 10, 15, or even 20 years in terms of technology. Perhaps they'll be using the IBM Selectric typewriters once again, you know, with the interchangeable balls!

The recent Miami Herald article was titled- "**Retired jeweler denied bond in Miami Beach murder case**". The article did

not mention who cracked the 1999 case of the retired jeweler, who beat another jeweler to death while robbing him of a five-carat diamond in an apartment in the 4800 block of Pine Tree Drive. The case remained inactive for years until something very interesting happened. Reserve Detective Sergeant William "Bill" Godfrey transferred to the Criminal Investigations Unit from Patrol and was assigned to the "Cold Case Squad".

Bill settled in and began to get reacquainted with his new surroundings, the computer system, and learned a little bit about DNA. He also reviewed the case file and carefully looked at the crime scene photos. With a little bit of help from his partners, he figured a few things out.



Within a few days Bill cracked the case. Seventy year old Guillermo Escobio was arrested soon after and charged with First Degree Murder in the death of Ricardo Junco. Escobio was living across the causeway in Miami.

Congratulations to Detective Sergeant Godfrey of the Miami Beach Police Department's Cold Case Squad. I spoke with Bill at a family function recently and he's already working on a couple of other cases. His enthusiasm and passion for his work are truly an inspiration. I wish him the best in his new endeavor. Best wishes to all and see you in May!

April



Bdays

Mike Bauer James Harkins Dick Izzo

Tom Hunker Steve Jones Mickey Kabakoff

Pete Matthews Dan Pinder Billy Rosenstein

Floris Sax Jose Martinez

# “A Tribute to Irving Cypen”

By Jesse Webb



Hello, my name is Jesse Webb and I'm an "old timer" who had the privilege of knowing Mr. Irving Cypen from the late 1940's until my retirement in March of 1970. I wrote this small tribute to him because Mr. Cypen deserves much, much more recognition than what was mentioned in the February newsletter.

To active and honest officers, Irv Cypen was probably the best friend they had in the entire city, and he never let them down! While I wish I could remember and share more examples; the many years since my police retirement have been filled with pleasant but constant activities of all sorts. My police memories are fewer, but here are two examples of Irv's support.

In the late 1940's, our FOP was established. At the very first meeting, several club officers and Mr. Cypen were standing in front to conduct that number one event. Irv Cypen made it clear to them that he wanted them to do all, or most of the speaking. Everyone there however, depended on him so much and asked him so many questions, that he ended up being the backbone of the entire meeting.

Additionally, he had spent months assisting, advising, and guiding the officers trying to form the FOP. I recall being told he never asked for, nor received any fee or compensation for his hard work. This is just one example of MANY of his efforts to support the FOP.

In the late 1950's, my family was growing and we needed a larger home. We located our dream residence

on a sizable lot in a nice area. The fifteen thousand dollar price tag (including the lot, new house, and all fees) was affordable for us on my police salary, so we bought it and moved in.

About three months later, we received a registered letter from a management or investment company demanding an additional three thousand dollars immediately with orders to visit them immediately to arrange monthly payments.

I was surprised and shocked. I certainly could not afford to pay more each month and I questioned whether or not this was legal or a farce. I went to Cypen's Law Office at Lincoln Road and Washington Avenue and was taken into his office immediately. I explained everything to him.



After reading all the papers, he picked up his telephone and called the CEO of that company. Believe me, Mr. Cypen spoke VERY FRANKLY with that CEO and told him that if I wasn't relieved of this illegal threat, he would see to it that the company's records would be reviewed by the State Attorney's Office and legal action would be initiated against his company.

Obviously, within several days, I received that "relief" I needed. After all his help, Irv Cypen requested no fees or payments, all he said to me was; "so long, have a good, safe day".

This was just one example of MANY, of his support of individual officers. A SPECIAL HUMAN who supported and assisted every officer who needed and deserved it.

Thank you, Irving Cypen. May you now rest in peace, with kindest thoughts and best wishes to your family.

## *In Memoriam*

Dave RICHARDS died on March 13<sup>th</sup>. Dave was born in September of 1926 and raised in Brooklyn. At 17 years of age he enlisted in the Navy. After reenlisting, he was stationed at Opa Locka Navy base and served as an aerial trainer. When discharged, he moved to his mothers house on Miami Beach. Dave, at first, was hired as a fireman on Miami Beach. Then he was one of five City fireman to transfer to the Police Department. He walked a beat, served as a motorcycle officer and finally a detective assigned to Vice squad. In Vice, he arrested the projectionist for showing the movie "Deep Throat". He made friends with different show business people which influenced his decision to leave police work in 1970 and become a writer. One person he was writing for was a Beach Officer, Steve MILLS, who tried to do comedy. Dave owned a popular after hours bar called "The Night Owl" before moving to California where he was writing a book.

Dave married in 1949 and had 3 children. He married a second time in 1961 to PAT, had a son, and remained married until his death.



The **2009 South Florida Police, Fire & Security Expo** is Open to **Industry Professionals Only**: All current and former Law Enforcement, Corrections, State and Federal Agencies, Fire-Fighters/EMS, Corporate and Industrial Security, Government, Military, Municipal Administrators, Purchasing Agents, State Attorneys, Crime Scene Investigators, 9-1-1 Dispatchers, Police & Fire Recruits, Criminal Justice Majors and all other qualified professionals. \*\*\* Spouses & Children are welcome but MUST be accompanied by an Industry professional and register. All Training, Seminars and Demonstrations are **FREE**. Seats are limited and based on a "first come-first serve basis"!!! If you plan on attending a specific class

please arrive early to reserve your seat. The Expo is **FREE** to those who

Register On-line and a **\$5.00 door fee** will apply the day of the show. We highly recommend registering now to avoid long lines the day of the Expo. To register, please click the **Register Now!** Button. The **Host Hotel** for the **2009 South Florida Police, Fire & Security Expo** is the Marriot Hotel located within walking distance to the Convention Center. Reserve your room prior to May 5th, 2009 to receive the special rate of \$99 per day.



*Retiree Fred Wooldridge writes a weekly satire column for the Highlands Newspaper in North Carolina. Occasionally, he writes a police experience and offers it to our Newsletter.*

## HOW'S YOUR BODY LANGUAGE?

Law enforcement officers who work undercover assignments live and die by their ability to lie, cheat and deceive. They must become something they're not and it reaches far beyond their ability to lie or act. They must also be convincing and display no improper body language. When I look back, I get chills thinking I did that for a full four years.

Inappropriate or improper body language can be a killer... literally. While most police officers are taught how to detect lies, undercover officers are also taught how to conceal them.

I once took a phenomenal three day FBI course on body language and lying techniques. The school used video tapes of people talking to each other. They would freeze and slow-motion the frames to highlight their teaching points. Studying body language is a science.



I'm embarrassed to tell you they used a video taped interview of Pope John Paul as their model. The instructor apologized to the class by saying they weren't picking on the pope or the Catholic Church but His Holiness displayed every possible body language mannerism they wanted us to learn. He was, and probably still is, their most visual teaching aid.

The interview with the pope was conducted by a prominent television newscaster and lasted thirty minutes. It took us the entire day to watch and study it in slow motion, both forward and backward. The gestures with his hands, the eyes and finger movements, the body shifting and a lot more were perfect indications that His Holiness was unwittingly sending many hidden messages. I remember sitting there, stunned and fascinated.

That was a long time ago and I have become rusty at reading body language. I've forgotten many of the body signals, especially the subtle ones, but, if I concentrate, I can still read a person who is open and not protective of his or her mannerisms.

And here's a fun story that wasn't so fun at the time.

The first time I met with a drug dealer after attending body language school, the guy chit-chatted with me for a few minutes on vapid topics, then turned to his bodyguard and said, "This guy's a cop and we're outta here." Fortunately they walked away.

I find it difficult to watch cop shows on TV. Like most stuff, it's pure bull, especially CSI Miami, with that red-headed Bozo. Who talks like that? But I shouldn't pick on CSI because they're all garbage.

Waaay back in my day, if we had a suspect who we thought strangled and raped a small child, we wouldn't bring him into an interrogation room with a desk and two chairs, then threaten and sweat him under the lights for hours. Horse feathers!

Our interrogators would take our murder suspect to an office, sit him in a comfortable chair, offer cigarettes even though smoking wasn't permitted, and make him coffee. We made sure there were no physical barriers, especially a table, between the suspect and the interrogator. The officer would apologize for having to handcuff the suspect, explaining it's a stupid police regulation.

The interrogator would sit directly in front of the suspect, legs spread open and arms resting comfortably on the chair arms. Then the officer would display a warm smile and try to convince the suspect that killing and raping a small child is not a bad thing; she was probably a brat and deserved it.



## Body Language



# ABOUT GREG STRONG - A police story.

**C**ongratulations to Greg on his retirement. I hope he enjoys it as much as I have. Although I never had the privilege of working the streets with him, he was a member of our SWAT team. He is a good, honorable man and was an excellent SWAT officer. But that's not why I write about him.

There are always special times during our police careers we know we'll never forget. I'm blessed with many but this is one of my favorites.

I hold a special place in my heart for Greg. I was just finishing Miami's SWAT school (Was that a million years ago?) when I was invited to parachute from a helicopter with a team of instructors. I freaked at first but then said, "Why not?" Several of the Miami SWAT cadre were Army Reserve Airborne and could acquire T-10 parachutes from Homestead Air Force Base. There would be eight jumpers, which included Bob Fitzpatrick who I wrote about in my book, [I'm Moving Back To Mars](#) and Greg Strong, both experienced paratroopers.

The next morning, we met for four hours of training and were teamed up. I was fortunate to draw Greg as my team member. He had made many jumps with the military and I had made, well... absolutely none. After jumping off a park bench in the grassy area next to the Miami PD without breaking anything, we were deemed fit to make the jump. (I'm not making this up!)

We met our helicopter at the MacArthur Causeway blimp base the next morning and Greg went over the preliminaries with me before boarding. He joked, "Anyone can do this. This is all about gravity, like bird poop." He could see the anxiety on my face. "You'll be fine," Greg calmly said as we loaded into the chopper.

The trip to the Everglades was uneventful. When our chopper began to descend at the prearranged jump site, I could see emergency medical teams had already arrived and spread their equipment on the ground at the drop zone. Seeing those ambulances and all that rescue gear sitting there sent chills up my spine. *What have I gotten myself into?* I thought as the chopper touched down.

Greg and I were scheduled to be on the second jump. That meant I would be able to watch the first team make their jump before it was our turn. That was supposed to be a confidence builder. It wasn't.

Greg knew exactly what was going on in my head. He had been there. What a comfort he was to my frazzled nerves.

He had a calming, soft voice and manner about him and went over the jump once more as he helped me put on my chute.

Just when he convinced me I could do this, Sgt. Bob Sullivan, from Miami PD, walked up with a knife and pretended to cut off a vital piece of my parachute. All that calming by Greg vanished as Bob handed me what was supposed to be a piece of my chute and announced, "Here, you won't be needing this." I knew it was a hoax but I didn't need that on my plate right then.

Finally, it was our turn to go. As the chopper spooled up, Greg and I sat next to each other with our feet hanging out the bay door. I looked over at him and smiled. He gave me a thumb's up as the chopper lifted from the sawgrass.

It was so noisy in the chopper, communication was impossible. I knew I would soon get a tap on my back and I would have to roll forward out of the aircraft. I gave Greg a grim look, distorting my mouth, pretending to be funny when, in fact, my insides were boiling. He laughed and patted my leg, made a fist with his hand and mouthed the words, "Airborne."

Without warning, the jump master patted Greg first and he suddenly disappeared from the aircraft. *Oh crap, this is it*, I thought. Then I felt the pat on my back and without hesitation, I closed my eyes and rolled forward.

Obviously, I made the jump successfully but I'm writing this to confess to Greg and all my fellow retirees I would have never left that chopper if it weren't for Greg Strong. I couldn't have asked for a better partner.



PS – I have just finished my second book and it's currently under review. One of the main characters of the book is a tough guy named Greg Strong. I did that purposely in his honor. And, oh, Greg, I almost forgot. If you ever have another opportunity to parachute again, get someone else.

## The Police Retiree's Roll of Honor Ceremony

BY: Samuel Gam

The annual Retiree's Roll of Honor or "Wall Ceremony" as we call it was held on March 26<sup>th</sup>, 2009 under beautiful skies and perfect weather in front of Police Headquarters. The Miami Beach Police Honor Guard presented the colors while retired Sgt. Joe Brownlow led everyone in the pledge of allegiance.

The ceremony got underway with Police Chaplain Rabbi Weberman giving the invocation. Chief Carlos Noriega and F.O.P. President Alex Bello welcomed everyone to the ceremony. But it was Chief Noriega who really stole the show with a barrage of jokes that had the audience in stitches.

Bernie Winer had a few zingers of his own and introduced the inductees. The retired officers who made the wall, besides me are as follows: Robert Bauer, Jr., Walter (Vinnie) Campbell, Lou Fata, Ed Feigenblatt, Kevin Graham, Robert Hundevadt, Robert Jenkins, Paul Lupien, William Maxwell, Richard Mendoza, Greg Strong, Charlie Weaver, and Dennis White.

In addition, for the first time, retired reserve officers have their own special "Wall of Honor" adjacent to the regular wall. That wall was very nicely done and was placed in a perfect, prominent area. The reserve officers honored included Lewis Jordan, Ben Novack, Jr., Robert Taylor, and Ray Yeager.

Unfortunately, not all of the inductees were able to attend, but I'm sure they were there in spirit.

One of the highlights of the ceremony occurred when Greg Strong was called to the podium and his former colleagues on the Motor Squad, who had lined up their bikes in front of the station, simultaneously turned on their lights and sirens to honor Greg.

The ceremony brought a large crowd of current and retired officers including many former police chiefs. The names are too numerous to mention. Also in attendance were several classes of police recruits from the police academy representing the future of law enforcement.

Guests were transported from the P.A.L. Office on 11<sup>th</sup> street to the ceremony. Upon their return, they were treated to an excellent Barbeque lunch at the P.A.L. courtesy of the Barbeque Beach Restaurant (located at 15<sup>th</sup> Street and Washington Ave). On a personal note, it was great to see many friends and former colleagues, many whom I have not seen in years.

The inductees, their friends and families were treated like kings and queens. Many people commented that this ceremony was the best they had ever attended. All in all, it was a great event with a great turnout on a great day. A warm thanks to the Miami Beach Police Department, the Retiree's Association, the Miami Beach F.O.P., and the Police Athletic League for making it all happen!







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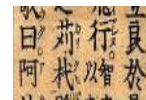


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