



Being a cop in 2017 is harder than it has ever been!

How bad is it being a cop these days? I can only shake my head and think, “Damn, it’s never been this bad!” Should I start off with how difficult and torturous it is? Where do I even start? Just as we start to even think of pulling the Band-Aid off on one wound, we get smacked again! The punches just keep coming and coming. It’s never been this bad, ever! *The cops before us had it easy!*



Did they have fewer rules or fewer tools?

Have the cops before 2017 had it easy? *We lost 140 officers in 2016, and it was terrible!* Well, what if I told you that in the 1990s, if they lost 140 officers, it would have been considered a good year, not a terrible one? What if I told you that in the 1980s, if they lost 140 officers, it

would have been a cause to celebrate? One hundred and ninety was what they averaged. *What if I told you that in the 1970s, losing 200 officers or more a year was a number that was to be expected?* Wait a second, what the hell?! Even in the 2000s, losing 140 officers may have been acceptable and wouldn't cause officers to quit in record numbers because of the violence they faced. I think I need to sit down now and start shaking my head again. Maybe it's always been a hard job.



Left to right, Mission patrol officers: Martin (Class of 6-98), Lozano (Class of 6-98), Del Valle (Class of 10-96) and Escobedo (Class of 11-08).

If you think about it, it's always been like this. In fact, it has been worse. It's a hard job. If it wasn't *a tough job, a dangerous job, a hazardous job*, we most likely wouldn't have to put on a bulletproof vest, strap on a gun, kiss a picture of baby Jesus in our locker and hope for the best. Again, I just shake my head at the thought of what I've seen, what I have had to do and the shared experiences with fellow coppers of the suffering, the death and despair that we have witnessed. For some of us, that's before roll call. But at the same time, we can drive around the corner and eat some street tacos or "Tams" off the hood of our "shop" and laugh like children. Again, I shake my head, but with a smile this time.

If you are working the street and doing "God's work" right now, is it the worst that it's ever been to be a police officer? I would have to answer "Yes." But what are we comparing it to? Are we comparing it to how we wish it could be? Or how it used to be? *We even have someone from upper management telling everyone, "We have been doing police work wrong."* Really? Compared to what? I would imagine that if we transported in time our 2017 officers to 1987, with the tools they have today, policing would have been "different," not "wrong." Just to be fair, I don't know how he was doing police work, it may have been "wrong." *But now 2017 cops are being held to a standard of 2037, with 2017 tools.* Is this making sense now? Maybe we have

always been trying to make it better, safer and, hopefully in the future, we can ride off on our unicorns singing together.

Was it easier for the coppers before us? Did they have fewer rules, or did they have more dangers? Do we dare ask that? Was it less dangerous? The numbers don't show that it was. Did they have to deal with less than we do like having a camera on our chest and being held accountable for the words we choose? Or did they have to punch, kick, scratch and bite instead of using a "Taser" or "beanbag shotgun?" Actually, they had the same job we do now and suffered just as much, maybe even more, being that they had fewer tools... or was it fewer rules? I'm willing to bet that they suffered the same as we do now, only differently, and now we are suffering as they did, only differently. The last time I checked, bullets had flown just as straight then as they do now. Yet so much has changed, and so much hasn't. It's just different, and you will drive yourself crazy trying to compare the differences.

I reached out to hundreds of your former LAPD peers, and some active. Yes, hundreds of retired cops, regardless of rank. Cops from the '60s, '70s, '80s and '90s. I asked them this question: *"What would you tell your younger self? What advice would you give our 2017 LAPD officers?"* I half expected them to pick on us and say how it "used to be," etc. I apologize for thinking that, but do you blame me? I've seen the numbers, they had it bad. Cops today are afraid to say whether they want room for cream at Starbucks because they are afraid to be second-guessed. I fit that category. I'm a 2017 cop. But I was humbled by their sincere response, the concern they have for you, the respect they have for you and how much they still care.

This is what they have to tell you

"Respect friend and foe."—**Bill Skiles** (Class of 10-74)

"Listen, learn, know where you are at."—**Ed Jones** (Class of 4-74 and 7-77 due to an injury)

"We didn't have deferred comp." (Invest in your future)—**Gary Morgan** (Class of 10-73)

"Know what you're doing. Know the law."—**Chuck Mealey** (Class of 11-71)

"Don't make the job your whole life. There is life after the LAPD."—**Kathy Bennett** (Class of 2-90)

"Live within your means."—**George Brietigam** (Class of 1-90)

"If you make sergeant, make your own decisions about people."—**Cliff Hodge** (Class of 2-60)

"One can always enjoy indulging in great dialogue."—**George Moreno** (Class of 3-66)

"Keep your sense of humor."—**Tom Hays** (Class of 2-58)

"If you're not mentally and physically prepared, you may get hurt."—**Barbara Scallon** (Class of 5-89)

"If you have the right temperament for this job, there's not a better job in the world. If you don't, get out now. It can be very stressful, and we all know stress kills."—**Sheldon Kaminsky** (Class of 11-80)

"Being a police officer is like having a front-row seat to the greatest show on earth."—**Bob Warren** (Class of 8-69)

"Don't take it personally. If you fight, fight to win. That extra cheap shot will come back to bite you."—**Fred Fogarty** (Class of 4-72)

"Don't be a cop 24/7. You will never fit into society."—**Larry Heck** (Class of 9-70)

"Stay loyal to your beliefs and support who is right."—**David Reynolds** (Class of 5-71)

“Do not ever forget the real police work is done in the field.”—**Kevin Williams** (Class of 12-84)

“Don’t buy a crap-load of ‘toys.’”—**Yolanda Caterino** (Class of 12-87)

“Remember, someone is always watching you whether you are doing something right or something wrong.”—**Jim Barnett** (Class of 7-71)

“Be true to yourself. Develop confidence and stand up for what is right.” —**Gary Patton** (Class of 4-80)

“When you least expect it, you’re elected! It’s your time to shine, think, slow down!”—**Javier Gonzalez** (Class of 7-74)

“The inside officers will get great ratings with little risk.”—**Bob Weisz** (Class 3-73)

“Have fun. Have someone you love to come home to!”—**Don Farrell** (Class of 4-78)

“Choose a job you love and you will never work a day in your life.”—**Juan Parga** (Class 3-79)

“Get out early, enjoy life after!”—**Marcella Piersol** (Class 11-84)

“Never have malice in your heart when making a decision.”—**Danny Reedy** (Class of 5-88)

You’re probably thinking what I’m thinking. Oh geez, that seems so old-fashioned, maybe they have gotten soft on us! I wanted to hear about “billy clubs, saps .38s and the chokehold” and “not having Tasers and beanbag shotguns,” but that’s the advice they had for you. Honestly, I expected them to talk about how hard it was for them and how lucky we are today—just as we say how hard it is for us and how easy it was for them. What the hell do they know?! *Or do they actually know what is important?* What they found to be important when the smoke cleared?

Well, some things I noticed are that I didn’t see a lot of crying. None of them complained about how bad it used to be. Most of that advice you may have already heard, but have you listened? Are you so focused on surviving this adventure that you’re missing that sound advice? Are you digesting some of this advice as you continue your journey within the LAPD already? Of all the responses I have read and picked through, what I did not see are some of the things I referred to in the first paragraph or so. I didn’t see “Get ready to see death and despair,” “You may have to take a life,” “You will lose friends,” “You will see things that you will most likely never tell anyone, unless they are a fellow cop.”

It took me a while to try and figure that riddle out. Why didn’t these old-timers say these things? Then it hit me. I had answered my own question earlier. *They have suffered already, as you are now suffering*, or are about to. They know all too well what you are experiencing and the violence that is out there. They know you will see and have to do those things that will stay with you a lifetime. They’ve already lived it. And when given the opportunity, they chose to give you sound advice, mostly what you have known already and they just repeated it. Well, isn’t that a punch in the gut?! I guess we aren’t all that different. Maybe none of us are going to have it easy.

Those old guys in the back row have something to tell you, and when they drop the war stories, which is actually them just letting off steam, they have reminders for you. They have sound advice. So when they aren’t letting off steam and complaining about the Department (which is actually a survival skill they have), politely grab them by the shoulders, look them in the eyes and ask them, “What should I do?” “What now?” “How did you deal with this?” Believe me, it will be their honor to answer those questions for you, and the answers you get may

surprise you. They know your job is hard, and most of them think it would be too hard for them now because of what you have to deal with. Remember, they have already suffered, just differently.

We have a hard job. It was hard then, it's hard now, and I don't see it getting any easier. It will just be different, and I'm guessing bullets will still fly straight in the future.

“Next time, get in the line for the fire department.”—**Dennis Fanning** (Class 10-80)

If you have questions, feel free to email me at SteveGordon@lappl.org.