

A Journey to the Center of the Mind, Book II

James R. Fitzgerald

Bonus Chapter 5a

(At this point, I've been a police officer on the Bensalem Police Department for a whole month. I heard some inspirational words from my dad on Christmas afternoon. Those words then helped further frame my whole-career mindset on that Christmas night while on a surrealistic lunchbreak from my regular patrol duties.)

As I looked at the calendar on the wall one day, I realized that the end of 1976 was coming up very soon. I realized that it had actually been a very good year. It was certainly a transitional year for me, with multiple personal and professional changes having taken place. I was married in May, got hired by the Bensalem Police Department (suburban Philadelphia) in August, successfully graduated the Pennsylvania State Police Municipal Police Officers Training Course in November, and I had a great working December, the first full month of my nascent law enforcement career. I was appreciative of that on Christmas day that year, even if I was stuck working the 3P-11P shift. I realized earlier that day this was the first time in my life that I ever worked on December 25. It certainly wouldn't be the last.

My parents stopped by our apartment early that afternoon, on their way to my sister Alma's house for Christmas dinner with her, her husband Jim, and her growing family. The four of us (including my wife, Eileen) spent some quality time together and ate a light lunch as I got ready for work. As it came to pass, other than at my graduation ceremony at the academy about

five weeks earlier, this would be the only other time my father would actually see me in my police uniform.

Shortly before I left for work that afternoon, and as my mom and wife were conversing in the kitchen, I went into the bedroom to change and get dressed for work. Afterwards, in the living room, my dad, while looking me over and visually admiring my new shiny nameplate, collar pins, badge, arm patches (BPD on the left side, American flag on the right side), and the other tools of my trade I had just clipped or snapped on, told me in private that he was proud of me for what I had accomplished in my relatively young life. This was the second time in a month he uttered words to this effect, (the prior time after my first night burglary arrest), and it was very nice to hear it again.

Interestingly, out of nowhere, my dad began to relate to me for the first time that he had considered applying to be a Philadelphia police officer in his early 20s, in the 1920s, but it just never came to fruition for him for various reasons. I was surprised he never told me that before, even when he earlier knew my college major and when I began applying for various police officer positions in the area. I suppose seeing me in my uniform, all decked out and ready to go to work, brought back those memories for him. I never followed through with him as to what were those “various reasons” why he never further pursued it. I wish I had.

Not long before I was to leave that day, my dad saw me checking myself out in the mirror on the wall. I developed this new habit not out of vanity, but because I wanted to make sure everything was on my uniform right-side-up, level, and where it belongs. After all, on my uniform shirt alone were two collar pins, a name plate, a badge, a tie, and tie clasp, all attached somewhere on my shirt, either before or after I put it on each day pre-shift.

As I was looking in the mirror, I noticed from an angle that Wally was specifically focusing on my police badge. I turned around and while adjusting his bifocal glasses he actually touched it to read more clearly what was printed on it. It brought back some instant memories for me. I took this opportunity to remind him of the “Sheriff Jimmy” badge he bought me about seventeen or so years earlier at the annual Philadelphia Boat Show. He remembered doing so and then said half-jokingly that he never thought it would have led to this, that being, me actually becoming a law enforcement officer. I told him neither did I, and that I still wasn’t sure what actually drove me to becoming one, but if it all goes wrong somehow, it was his fault. Of course, I said that to him jokingly, and he knew it, and we both chuckled afterwards.

In our brief time alone that day, before our respective wives (with one also being my mom) rejoined us in the apartment living room and shortly before I was to walk out the door, my dad casually remarked, “Be safe out there tonight and make everything you can out of this opportunity.”

I didn’t really ask him what he meant by the latter part of his statement, but after 23-plus years of knowing me he could tell that I wanted him to extrapolate upon what he had just said. He didn’t say too much more on this subject, only in passing that I should take my new position very seriously and have just two basic goals every day as I’m walking out the door to go to work.

Number One and most important, my dad said, was to “make sure you walked BACK through that door (pointing to the front door) at the end of every shift in one piece.”

Number Two, Wally told me, “you should make up your mind early on to be the very best you can be at your new profession...don’t just be average out there, be the best.”

Hmmm....

(I found it interesting my father used the word “profession.” He would always use “job” to describe his own former employment at the Philadelphia Gas Works. I knew the difference though, and so did he when it came to my new vocation.)

My dad ended this brief discussion by saying that if I strive to meet those two simple goals on a daily basis and make both a part of my every day work mindset, I’d have a long and successful life and “profession.”

I thanked my father for those encouraging words. We did a brief man-hug after that, something that didn’t happen very often in our lives up to this time, to which we both agreed was a bit odd as I was now wearing my full leather belt, holster with .357 magnum revolver, handcuffs, night stick, dress shirt with patches and various metal items attached to it, as well as my somewhat bulky ballistic vest underneath. A traditional father-son hug it was not, but it was very meaningful nonetheless. His ending words evaporated into the air momentarily as my mom and wife re-entered the room, but they would come back to me just a few hours later that Christmas night in a somewhat life-altering fashion.

After two or so hours together for our own early-day family holiday gathering, my wife left with my parents to go to Alma’s house. I drove off to the BPD on my own to start my shift. It was a strange feeling watching my family go off without me for a Christmas celebration, and I’m sure they felt the same way. But working these holidays was something that I would have to get accustomed to in my new career. I wasn’t an accountant or salesperson or businessman like some of my friends in their new jobs who would always have the big holidays free to celebrate with their loved ones. I was a police officer now and I didn’t automatically get these days off anymore. When I did, it would be a relatively rare event.

Upon pulling into the BPD station, I wasn't sure what to expect work-wise on this Christmas day-into-evening. However, it ultimately turned out to be a relatively quiet shift. Even the drunks and bad guys take a break on this holiest of nights, I guess. Well, at least on this night in Bensalem Township. Or, their loved ones simply decided to not call the police on them that evening. Maybe they just waited until after 11:00P when our shift was over and when they were really drunk, but for whatever reasons, at least on Christmas evening 1976 not much at all happened in my town during my eight hours on patrol. Several veteran officers, including Sgt. Ashton, took the night off, as they had the seniority and accrued vacation time to do so. We were a skeleton-crew that evening, with one of our fellow officers as the acting sergeant, but as it was quiet out there, we managed just fine.

However, as it turned out, even though the streets were destined to be quiet that night, or maybe because of it, this would be a very different sort of evening for me. It would be so in a subtle sort of way, starting with what my dad had said to me just a few hours before.

Once in the patrol car, again with Dave Huetger as my training officer, hot beverages already coursing through our systems, we drove through the various industrial parks in our sector for possible overnight or even Christmas day burglaries and thefts. (At roll call, the acting sergeant reminded us that over the last few Christmases there had been break-ins at some of the local businesses. So, each officer should carefully check out the businesses in his sector. Better to find them ourselves while on patrol than to have them called in to the dispatcher the next day.)

There were no signs of criminal activity at any of the businesses that we checked. We also responded to a false alarm at an otherwise closed appliance store and one domestic

disturbance call where an angry dad knocked over the family Christmas tree. He was already gone by the time we got to the house, so all we did is help the mom and kids stand the tree back up and tell them to call back if he returns. He never returned during our shift, luckily for them and him. Besides the above, it was just “routine” patrol around our sector that Christmas evening.

I was about to have some alone time that night when my training officer went to his home for an extended dinner break with his family. Dave very graciously invited me inside, but I insisted that he spend this time with his family, and not with this relatively unknown rookie at their holiday meal. As my apartment was in Northeast Philadelphia, I couldn’t go home for my break, and no one was there anyway. Also, since I had a semi-complicated accident report to complete from the night before, I told Dave I would do it while in the car and he could review it later to make sure I got it right. He agreed and went inside his home. I stayed in the car parked on the street right outside.

Dave, of course, would keep his portable radio on the whole time he was inside, so he wouldn’t miss any important calls being put out by the dispatcher. He could rejoin me in a minute if need be for an emergency. I learned in later years on Christmas Day during my own dinner breaks at my own Bensalem home that holiday carols and police radio chatter would many times play as a continuing duet of sort in my ears. My brain learned to clearly delineate the two and I could be equally responsive to each at the same time as the call or the song so required.

On that night, I also had a sandwich with me that my wife had packed for me earlier, and I would split the time Dave was inside with doing my report and eating my less-than-festive but

nevertheless filling Christmas meal. It was all good though, and I was not complaining. I realized I was in a great place after all, on several levels of my life.

My patrol car working-lunch break would be part of a peaceful Christmas evening, the first one of mine as a police officer. It was a bit cold out, with temperatures somewhere around the freezing mark, but with a minimal wind, a clear sky, and the moon and stars shining brightly above me. It was very fitting for a Norman Rockwell-style Christmas night portrait and landscape, to include me in a police uniform. I could envision combining several of Rockwell's popular paintings and coming up with a bucolic image of a uniformed police officer on a cold Yule night eating his dinner in a patrol car on a semi-residential U. S. street. Hey, I would buy it.

After carefully diagramming the accident scene and sketching the movements of vehicle #1, vehicle #2, and vehicle #3 from my notes taken the night before, I took a break to eat my sandwich. Slowly though, and unexpectedly, like an incoming tide, a strange mood-swing found its way into the interior of my police car. It eventually made its way to the very interior of me.

For whatever reason, in this particular setting on a cold holiday night while on duty inside a police car, I found myself in an ever-growing pensive mood. Yet, it was of the positive variety. It was the kind of gradual upbeat emotionality that sort of just sneaks up on you at times when you don't expect it and sometimes you don't even know why. It could also be in a negative sense for one or more reasons that it sneaks up on you on other occasions, but on this particular night, it was definitely proceeding in a very positive direction.

I again found myself very appreciative of where and what I was at this stage in my life. That is, college over and done with and doing the job that I wanted, at least for now, in a field related to my undergraduate degree. The only downside that would creep in that evening, which I just couldn't get completely out of my head, was the murder of Officer Hancock just two weeks or so prior. Naturally, I thought of his family and the awful holiday season it had to be for them, but I knew I had to move on and think of other things too, including my own life and career. I didn't think the late Officer Hancock would want another cop obsessing on his murder. Based on what his former colleagues told me the day of his memorial service, he would say for us to learn from it and move on. I was attempting to do so, and I eventually would to some degree on this night.

It may have been a combination of me focusing on Officer Hancock's tragic death, where I was and what I was doing at this very moment in time, how hard I had worked to get here, and the words my dad had said to me earlier on this day, that the floodgates of past and present life experiences, and potential future life experiences, suddenly seemed to open and converge on me all at once, and from multiple directions. I'm not sure exactly why or how this sense of almost altered-consciousness came upon me at this time and place. I did have a realization later that this may have been the first and only time since donning a BPD uniform that while actually on duty I had such an extended period to myself without training officers, fellow cops, sergeants, dispatchers, prisoners, members of the public, and others, training me, talking to me, yelling at me, being arrested by me, or needing my services for one reason or another.

Here I was, in full uniform and on duty, as Officer James R. Fitzgerald. Just to prove it to myself, I even read my name upside down on my official nameplate on my shirt, as my dad had proudly done (well, with it right-side up) only a few hours earlier. I found myself on this

night, now in this relatively positive mood, with time to think, to ponder, to speculate, to figure out just what was going on here and what did it all signify. The fact that it was also Christmas night, the first one that I ever worked anywhere, and with no family members in my immediate environment, no doubt played into this wistful and contemplative mindset too.

By no means at this point, it being only a few months into my new career (and that's including my police academy time), could I accurately assess much at all about where I was, my path traveled so far, or by any stretch of the imagination where it would ultimately take me one day. But, I realized on a very simplistic level on this Silent Night (at least so far in Bensalem) that things had gone pretty darn good for me up to now. I had virtually no complaints at all.

But, could there be more to all this? Could I take these thoughts, these now positive free-running emotions and realizations, and project them to even further points in my life, both near term and far term? All of this, I again realized, building off of the words of my dad today in which he said to make everything I can out of this, not be average, etc.

Just what did the now well-into-retirement Wally and all of this presently mean to me?

At that moment, something told me I needed some fresh air, even if it was pretty cold fresh air which was outside the protective womb of my car. For whatever reason, I needed to get out of the passenger seat of the patrol car and walk around a bit. I've always tended to have clearer thought processes when I was outside and walking, and this was as good a time to do it as any. So, I stepped out of the patrol car, zipped up my police coat, put on my police hat and my gloves, and strolled back and forth a bit on the relatively deserted street. My portable police radio, in its case carried on the right side of my leather belt, was turned on, just in case there was a call from dispatch. But, all was quiet during my short walkabout in and around the vicinity of

the police car and Dave's house. The lack of any radio traffic, as well as actual street traffic, and other police activity was much appreciated while my thoughts were running in these various yet presently undefined directions.

After a minute or two, I stopped moving around for some reason and just happened to catch my reflection in the front door glass. There was me, looking directly at my police car. And there was me, or someone who very much resembled me in a police uniform, looking back. I realized that I had been looking outward from the interior of this car, or another virtually identical police car, for the last month or so while learning and undertaking my new police duties. But, this was the first time I really stopped to look inward from the exterior of the very car which had encapsulated me and clearly identified me to others over those last few tours.

So, this is what they saw? This is who they saw? Me, Officer James R. Fitzgerald.

This image though was somehow oddly unfamiliar to me, at least at first. Should it have been? Was it someone new, someone different? Or was it still me? The guy I've always been.

Usually, upon completion of roll call or after responding to a report of something-or-other on the street, my partner and I wanted to get into the car right away and take off and move onto the next task. But, on this so far very tranquil Christmas evening, with this unexpected alone time on my hands during my partner's and my dinner break, I found just the right occasion to stop and smell the proverbial roses and take in the immediate environment of who I was, where I came from, where I was, and possibly where I was going.

As I kept staring, looking back at me very intently from the front window of the patrol car was the image of that aforementioned uniformed police officer. An image quite like I had never taken the time to notice before this night. My warm exhalations were mixing with the cold

air around me and it would form an enveloping fog around my head for a few seconds at a time after each of my breaths. As I would look up to follow my quickly dissipating visible breaths above me, from the far reaches of the solar system were stars twinkling in the exceptionally clear night sky. Returning to ground level, Christmas stars of the plastic or glass-styled variety on tops of house bound inside trees and yard bound outside trees were also twinkling, in their case by electronic means. And now, for some reason for the first time that evening, I noticed the beautiful symphonic sound of Christmas carols coming from somewhere within a few hundred yards of my location. They were very welcome to my otherwise cold ears. Whether it was an exterior speaker system playing these melodious holiday tunes, or simply the temporary open doors or windows of a house which allowed their escape, I could clearly recognize the time-honored traditional holiday songs, even if they were somewhat muted travelling through the cold air and over and around dozens of evergreen trees and two story houses.

It was truly a surreal occasion for me on Dave's street on numerous levels this frigid night; me in full police uniform with dozens of unseen families celebrating the holiday under their roofs all around me, the sound of classic Christmas season music in the background, and brightly shining stars above me and alongside me, the former being real, the latter being artificial. I could easily tell the difference between these various stars, even if from behind the little vapor clouds temporarily surrounding my head after each breath.

Unlike these shining beacons from afar and near, my new job, at times, put me in situations where the surface clarity was not always as obvious as to what was "real" and what was "artificial." This, no matter how brightly a person may have "shined" in his or her attempt to explain to me the problematical situations in which he or she found themselves. In other

words, were they lying or telling the truth about their situation. Determining that issue, I would learn, wasn't always as clear as that of the stars on this particular night. That was for sure.

But back to me! What is real and what is perhaps artificial about me right now?

And...just who am I right now?

Geez, I'm a cop! A professional law enforcement officer! But, am I the guy I always was, or am I someone different now?

My dad told me today he was proud of me. That's great, but as a cop? As a person? As his son?

Which one am I? And to whom? And most importantly, to me?

I had to figure these things out, and then some, before too long.

I realized standing very much alone in the street that night and looking at my hazily reflected image that I really hadn't yet fully processed my whole new professional life and public persona. Perhaps the vaporous clouds surrounding my head ever so briefly were a natural manifestation of this somewhat complex issue to me, in that some things were clear, but then some things were not.

I was not the exact same James R. Fitzgerald I had been for the last twenty-three or so years, to me or to others. I knew that. My badge and uniform said that now I was different, with different responsibilities, obligations, and even a different look and demeanor.

But, I was still *me* at my core. Right? I certainly hope so....

I even had different title for the first time. In life I went from "Master" Fitzgerald as a boy, to "Mister" Fitzgerald after that, to now "Officer" Fitzgerald as of just a few weeks ago,

with a shiny new nameplate and badge to prove it. But how different was I now? And, how did it relate to who I had been? Or as others had seen me?

My Christmas evening, fully sensually stimulated, ever-expanding mindful ruminations during my brief time outside in the cold air was getting a bit too esoteric for me. I knew I still had an accident report to complete, I could receive a radio call at any moment, and/or Dave could come out of his house ready to go back on patrol. But, out of all of these thoughts and musings, compressed into just a few minutes on this beautiful approximately thirty-two degree evening, those two very specific goals my father had mentioned to me earlier that day seemed to guide my mindset into a whole different direction.

The first one, to essentially stay alive, was obvious to me, and something I trained for and practiced at all times. Officer Hancock's recent murder certainly reinforced it to me even more so.

My dad's second goal though was a bit more nebulous and harder to define, codify, or plan for. They didn't necessarily teach "making the most" out of things at the State Police Academy. This notion, this concept, would have to be addressed from elsewhere, perhaps even from deep within. Deep within me, that is.

Was I capable of this?

I believed I was, and I decided to go for it. In fact, I decided that night after re-thinking about Wally's simple words, for the first time in my life, whoever it is I now was, and wherever it is I was may be going, I wanted to really make the most of this opportunity, just as he had suggested.

Okay, so that's been decided, but how do I accomplish it? Where do I even begin?

I know! Keep it simple. Make the essence of my goal something readily attainable and doable, certainly at first, and something upon which I can build.

How about this? Attempt to be very good at what it is I'm now doing! That's essentially what my dad said to me just hours before. Yes, if I wanted any element of control over my future, to get ahead, to create options for myself, to take advantage of this and all future opportunities, and also determining who it is I was, what I was, I had to first be successful at what I'm now doing. I should strive to be very good, even one of the best, at this new police officer thing of mine.

But why limit myself to just "one of the best?" Maybe being THE best at what it is I do should be my goal. With that, I convinced myself once and for all, then and there, I could be this person and attain this success, if I truly put my heart and soul to it.

In the remaining few minutes of my musically accompanied and star-shining holiday epiphany, I stood in the cold, late December air, still glancing at my reflection in the car window. I thought again about my past, my present, and my future, my dad's admonitions, and all that was going on in my life right now. I clearly didn't know where I was going, how fast or how slow it would take me to get there, or even by what means, but I nevertheless locked in on one forward-projected mission that night.

In this new profession of mine, I was going to attempt to do everything by the rules, be focused at all times, stay ahead of the professional curve, continue to apply myself every step of the way, take every aspect of it very seriously, to get me as far as it is that I would ever want to go. This was now my goal, my mission, unlike one I had ever consciously undertaken before in any aspect of my life. And, strangely or not, I formulated it all on this very evening.

I was now in my chosen career, and even at this very early juncture of it, I knew I wanted to excel at it. Whether as a Bensalem patrol cop, perhaps someday advancing up the chain of command into management, maybe into investigations, or even at a whole other agency; but regardless, I had made up my mind that night.

I came to the conclusion that the genesis of these feelings was probably four or so weeks ago, having worked its way through my sub-consciousness since then. This was all triggered, I now believed, with my first felony arrests, the three burglars, on my first ever shift, which resulted in the next day newspaper headlines. It was an omen of some sort I believed, and it was meant to be.

This momentum, in subtle forms, continued with my father's advisory words to me just hours before. I was going to continue that forward momentum, with even more intensity than before, starting tonight. Actually, make that, right now!

In my earlier youth, I must confess, problematic thoughts which occasionally entered my mind, but which I would then figuratively shake my head and fend off, included the fact that I simply wasn't really very good at any one specific thing. I was a pretty nice guy, I had a good head on my shoulders, I possessed above-average intelligence and common sense, I developed viable street smarts, I was personable when I wanted to be, or had to be, I had a great family and many good friends, and yes, I did graduate number one in my senior lifesaving class a few years ago. These issues were all very important to me and I was grateful for them.

But it also bothered me that I wasn't the “-est” in any one category. By that I mean that I was never the *smartest*, the *handsomest*, the *fastest*, the *toughest*, the *strongest*, or any other positive descriptive word ending in that three letter superlative suffix. These were (and no doubt

still are) especially important to young men and women to one degree or another in their developmental years. When looking back, I can safely state that none of my peers, or even those somehow associated with me at the time by one means or another, could truly claim they were the “best” at something or another at which they strived. Some of them, nonetheless, were still very well-noted for various endeavors and accomplishments, from academics, to music, to sports, to even guzzling a sixteen ounce can of beer in one big swallow, and/or street fighting, with the latter two events many times associated with each other.

But, that wasn’t me. Yes, I had my positive attributes, I knew that, but they just didn’t translate well or mean a whole lot in my youthful world around me, in terms of me sticking out among my peers and being, well, if not the best at something, certainly being damn good at something. And, no, I didn’t want to be known as a champion beer guzzler, or anything as relatively meaningless as that. But, maybe there was something else, someday, somehow, upon which I could eventually hang my hat.

Hmm...”Hang my hat.”

Wait...“Hang my hat?!”

“Yes, that’s it! Hang my hat!”

I looked at my car window reflection one last time. Subconsciously, I exhaled forcefully and off to one side to blow my billowing breath vapors away from the area of my head. Then, in that now clear image I saw it, I saw me, and much more clearly than ever before. AND, I was wearing a hat!

I’ve got it! I could hang my POLICE hat on it, figuratively speaking of course, and prove to myself, and hopefully others important to me, that I was the best at what I did, or at least very, very good at what I did - that being a professional law enforcement officer. Maybe with the

catalyst being this brand new beginning at the Bensalem Police Department, and the near beginning of another calendar year, I could now strive to be the best at what I did, on an everyday basis, as a police officer.

I decided then, in that cold air, with Christmas carols in the background and real and fake twinkling stars shining from far above as well as from the nearby houses, while walking around my patrol car, which now represented (but did not define or limit) who I was, that I was going to attempt to truly master my new tradecraft, to be the very best at what I do, by whatever legitimate means necessary.

I actually started thinking of how I would go about this. I'd start with the easy things, at least for me. I would get eight hours of sleep every work night, I would not drink alcoholic beverages on days or nights before a shift, I'd prepare accordingly every day at the police station before and during roll call, maintain constant vigilance while working, enforce the law fairly and justly, as well as diligently follow the law myself, embrace my newly found maturity and professional pride, and not only survive the streets of Bensalem (Dad Goal #1), but to also excel in and advance my fledgling career while doing so (Dad Goal #2). I wanted to go to the top of my profession (as it's not just a "job"), or at least hold a very important and rewarding position within it, and earn it myself, through the front door, the whole way. That was now my mission.

Was this unreasonable or unrealistic on my part?

No, not at all, I decided. Not to my new way of thinking, initiated more-or-less by my "omen-like" first night burglary arrest a month ago and then by what my very insightful dad offered to me earlier this Christmas Day. I was off to a good start, I further convinced myself. After all, I was one of the relatively few police officers, at the time at least, with a four-year

college degree related to my profession, I had earlier practical experience as a department store detective, I was in good physical shape, I was relatively well-read, had a great interest in this field, and I already had those felony arrests under my belt. So, why not make this my mission?

I even made this “wish” my sole New Year’s resolution about a week later. I didn’t tell anyone but Eileen upon her asking me what my goals would be for 1977. So, when she asked, I somewhat hesitantly told her. It may have taken her aback a bit at the time, but it’s what I meant and what I wanted. She replied, in so many words, “Okay, well, good luck with all that.”

I believe this particular Christmas night and what came over me was a great start to a new attitude to develop very early in my law enforcement career. My father’s (and mother’s) influence over my early life and certainly what he said to me that day all contributed to this new demeanor too. It didn’t mean other things weren’t still important to me, certainly to include family, friends, my health, etc., as they all played a major role too in this newly devised master plan. It also didn’t mean that I was now in competition with other members of the BPD or officers from other law enforcement agencies. If there was any competition, it was intrinsic, that is, me challenging me, if you will. Not to necessarily “win” at anything here, but to push myself really hard to achieve being really good (the best?) at something, an attribute which had eluded me so far in life.

My professional ambitions and an elusive life goal came together for me that night, outside of Dave Huetger’s house, as the Christian world celebrated the birth of Jesus Christ. Was this my “birth” or at least “re-birth,” in some professional and personal sense? Perhaps.

However things would turn out, I realized this night was nonetheless a cathartic moment for me. The vow I made to myself that holy night stayed with me for the rest of my 31 year career, and even beyond.

I eventually returned to the passenger seat of the patrol car to do some actual work. The warm car interior felt good. Dave came out of his house shortly thereafter and upon getting behind the steering wheel casually asked me, “What’s new, Kid?”

“Oh, not much,” and I showed him the accident report from the previous night that I had just completed.

Dave put on the car’s ceiling-mounted work light, reviewed the document, and said, “Good job! Turn it in tonight.” He half-jokingly then added, “Kid, you’re gonna go places in this job.”

I responded in all seriousness, “I’m gonna try, Dave, I’m gonna try.”

Officer Huetger lit up a cigarette, threw the car into “Drive,” and back on patrol we went for the rest of the shift. Oh, and we checked his muskrat traps too that night. They were empty, but he didn’t complain. (Dave trapped muskrats while off-duty. He then sold their oil.)

The 3-11 shift that evening proved otherwise uneventful for us. Except for me and the sensually enhanced, holiday career epiphany I experienced on Dave’s street. He didn’t have to know about it though. I’d just show him and the other BPD officers through my actions as time unfolded. They’d notice. Many would appreciate it, some wouldn’t. It was a competition for some of them I learned, even if it wasn’t for me. And, it would get ugly at times too.

Dave, aka Trapper, wasn’t one of those competitive-at-all-costs types of guy, at least not in the departmental upward mobility category. He merely did his everyday job and did it very well.

Dave Huetger would quit the police department, along with numerous other hard working and honest officers, when the internal political strife commenced and the PD leadership changed just a year or so later. He was an excellent cop, a fighter, and not one to back down from any injustice, on the streets of Bensalem or in the hallways and offices of the police department itself. But, when the bad times came, he and his family apparently felt it wasn't personally or professionally worth it anymore and he hung up his badge and duty weapon and moved out of town. I believe he even left the law enforcement profession all together. That was a loss all the way around for the citizens of Bensalem, and law enforcement in general.

Maybe not for the local muskrats though. I'm sure they didn't miss Trapper at all.