

# CORRECTIONAL OASIS

A PUBLICATION OF DESERT WATERS CORRECTIONAL OUTREACH  
A NON-PROFIT FOR THE WELL-BEING OF CORRECTIONAL STAFF & THEIR FAMILIES

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## From The Old Screw

### Holidays on the Job

In 1968 I was working at a very rough prison in another state. Of course, being new, I got the "pleasure" of working on Christmas Eve on the graveyard shift. It was the first Christmas I had ever had to work away from my family. I was working a tower and, man, was it lonely and sad! I can't sing for anything, but that night I started singing every Christmas carol I knew. I sang very softly thinking I wouldn't bother anyone. When I finished singing, it was very quiet. Then I heard, "That was nice!", and "Thank you!" from my fellow Officers on other towers. (It was then that I found out that our towers had

open mikes to all the other towers and to Master Control.) That night I started seeing and understanding that at times like this it is important that we share what we have with each other, even bad singing.

On New Year's Eve, I again had the "pleasure" of working a tower. Of course, no one told me what to expect at 12 Midnight. My tower faced one of the double cellblocks. At 12 Midnight I started seeing a whitish powder and burning

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## WIN A TRIP TO PUERTO VALLARTA!

Corrections and detention staff across the U.S. and Puerto Rico are eligible to enter a drawing with **First Prize** being a luxurious vacation for two in sunny Puerto Vallarta, Mexico! The trip includes round trip airfare and seven nights/eight days lodging in the presidential suite at the beachfront Sheraton Baganvillas Resort. Hotel accommodations are made possible by a generous donor who wishes to remain anonymous.

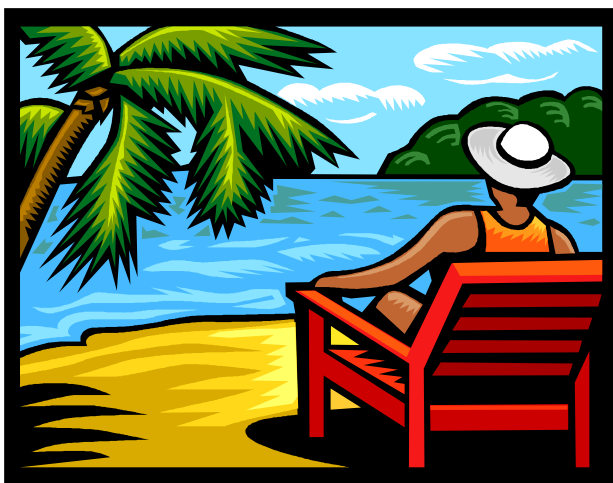
**Second Prize** is a Samsung Digimax L50 Digital Camera with 5MP and 3x Optical Zoom (Silver).

**TO ENTER THE PRIZE DRAWING:** Please mail your \$40 (minimum) tax-deductible contribution pay-

able to DWCO, P.O. Box 355, Florence, CO 81226. With your donation, **please send your phone number and indicate the corrections or detention facility where you work.** To donate online, please go to <http://www.desertwaters.com/a-donations.htm>. All donation-entries for the drawing must be received by

February 3. The drawing will take place on February 17, at the Rocky Mountain Bank & Trust, Florence, CO, and will be certified by the bank's Notary Public.

**ENTER NOW!** Proceeds will be used to help us continue to offer corrections and detention families the services of the Ventline, counseling, and workshops.



## Healing Trauma

# IN SHOCK

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Mike is sucker punched and then stabbed as he responds to an inmate fight. While he is getting back on his feet, dazed and bleeding, he witnesses the slashing of an inmate's throat.

The correctional work environment exposes staff to a variety of traumatic events. These incidents may involve actual or threatened death or injury to themselves, other staff, or inmates. Due to their nature, these events often elicit intense fear, a sense of helplessness, or horror.

In the midst of such incidents, staff can experience a variety of dissociative and/or distressing reactions.

(**Dissociation** is defined as the **fragmentation** of or **disconnection** from one's experience of self, time, and/or external circumstances.) The following two lists present possible dissociative and distressing experiences corrections staff may undergo while in the throes of a traumatic episode and immediately afterwards.

### I. Checking Out<sup>1</sup>

While the traumatic event is occurring, staff involved may experience:

1. A separation between their "experiencing" self and their "observing" self. For example, a correctional officer may later report that he felt like he was floating above the crime scene "watching" himself get assaulted.
2. Blanking out, "spacing out," losing track of what is happening.
3. Acting on "automatic pilot," doing things without having consciously decided to do them.
4. Experiencing "tunnel vision," zeroing in on key information and not registering other information that would have normally been noticed.
5. Experiencing time distortions, with time either slowing down (things happening in slow motion), or speeding up.
6. Experiencing the whole event as unreal, as if it is a dream or a movie.
7. Experiencing body distortions, such as that one's body (or body parts) have become very large or small, or separate from the person.
8. Confusing what is happening to others with what is happening to self. For example, a correctional officer may experience another person's injury as if she herself is getting injured.

9. Not feeling pain associated with a physical injury.

### II. Taking Stock<sup>2</sup>

Right after a traumatic occurrence, staff might experience the following distressing emotions, thoughts and sensations:

1. Helplessness, because they were unable to do more to stop the mayhem or to protect themselves or others.
2. Anger at whoever/whatever caused or contributed to the traumatic incident.
3. Frustration and anger at themselves, because they could not do more to stop or prevent further harm.
4. Sadness and grief about the whole situation.
5. Fear about their physical safety.
6. Physiological reactions, such as sweating or shaking, and their heart pounding.
7. Temporary loss of bladder or bowel control.
8. Horror about what took place.
9. Guilt about the way things turned out.
10. Fear of "losing it," losing control of their emotions.
11. Fear of loss of consciousness—of passing out.
12. Fear (or just a detached, matter-of-fact thought) that they are about to die.

Why are these symptoms important to point out? The first reason is that staff need to know that such reactions may occur—that they are not unusual. Secondly, numerous studies have shown that these symptoms tend to be related to the development of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) later on. Therefore, staff who experience dissociation and/or distress during a traumatic stressor need to receive appropriate interventions to prevent the onset of PTSD or to reduce its impact.

### REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> Marmar, C.R., Weiss, D.S., Metzler, T.J.: *The Peritraumatic Dissociative Experiences Questionnaire*, in *Assessing Psychological Trauma and PTSD: A Handbook for Practitioners*. Wilson J.P., Keane T.M., Eds. New York, Guilford, 1997, 412-428.
- <sup>2</sup> Brunet, A., Weiss, D.S., Metzler, T. J., Best, S.R., Neylan, T.C., Rogers, C., Fagan, J., and Marmar, C.R. *The Peritraumatic Distress Inventory: A Proposed Measure of PTSD Criterion A2*. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 158, 1480-1485, 2001.

## From Caterina's Desk

### TWO KEYS FOR THE NEW YEAR

There are two simple, yet powerful tools for boosting life satisfaction whether on or off the job. If you're not implementing them much yet, give them a good, hard try in 2006. If you do use them already, keep up the good work!

#### A. Own development

The first key is to aim to be all you can be, like the Army motto says. Continue to cultivate your talents and abilities as much as possible. This may lead you to break new ground, such as acquiring new skills, and figuring out better ways to take care of yourself, and more effective ways to relate to others.



#### B. Others' development

The second key is about making others' lives easier or more successful. Look around you. Where can you make a positive difference? Whom can you assist, mentor, encourage, or support? In what ways can you make your immediate world around you a safer, kinder, saner place? It may be that you want to coach Little League. Or you may decide to be helpful to new employees. The possibilities are endless. Pick one and go for it!

### VOTE OF CONFIDENCE

*This is an email we received recently. What an encouragement!*

I would like to be added to your mailing list so I can share this information with the staff here at the \_\_\_\_\_ Prison. I was very pleased to find your website, and, as I am a training officer, I have been sharing it with our new trainees. It is a great resource and a big help to new officers. I think the work you people are doing is wonderful and long overdue. I would be happy to be involved in what you are doing for correctional people in any way I can. Keep up the good work.

### USP TOUR

Chris Wiant, Ph.D., President and CEO of Caring for Colorado Foundation, Linda Reiner, M.P.H., Director of Planning and Evaluation, and I were offered an extensive tour of USP Florence by Warden Rios and Wendy Montgomery, Public Information Officer, on December 13. Thank you Warden Rios and Ms. Montgomery for your availability and hospitality. And thank you, Caring for Colorado Foundation, for investing in the health of corrections staff through supporting Desert Waters.

### SPOUSES' SUPPORT GROUP

We have been approached to offer a support group for correctional spouses in the Fremont and Pueblo County area. If you are a spouse of a corrections or detention staff member and you are interested, please contact us at 719-784-4727 or at [desertwaters@desertwaters.com](mailto:desertwaters@desertwaters.com).

### PEER SUPPORTERS

Our peer supporters are available on Wednesdays from 4:00PM to 8:00PM. If you wish to contact them, please call 719-784-4727 to set up a time and to be given the number where they can be reached.

### PUBLIC HEARINGS

The Commission on Safety and Abuse in America's Prisons has been holding a series of public hearings. Transcripts of the complete proceedings of Hearing 3, which focused on corrections officers and their work environment, can be found on the website [www.prisoncommission.org](http://www.prisoncommission.org). You can sign up there to receive updates about the Commission's work and to submit stories of working inside a correctional facility.

### ONLINE STORE

Let your online shopping benefit Desert Waters! Visit our store at [www.givezilla.com/desertwaters](http://www.givezilla.com/desertwaters). When you purchase products from Amazon at our store, Desert Waters is credited with the commission generated from that sale. Thank you for shopping with us and for us!

#### BLOGS

<http://desertwaters.blogspot.com>  
<http://womenincorrections.blogspot.com>

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**The Corrections Ventline™  
1-866-YOU-VENT  
(866.968.8368)**

# Desert Waters

Correctional Outreach



*a non-profit organization  
for the well-being of correctional  
staff and their families*

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## MANY THANKS!

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This newsletter was made possible in part by a contribution from OmniView (<http://www.radialomniview.com/>), which provides 100% total inmate surveillance with archive in OmniView corrections and detention facility designs.

## From The Old Screw

### Holidays on the Job

Continued from page 1 toilet paper flying through the air in both cellblocks. Being a new alert Officer, I immediately yelled into my open mike, "Fires in J/K hall!" Nothing was said in response. I waited a little while and again yelled about the fire and things being thrown in both cellblocks. Again, nothing. I started hearing some snickers and a laugh or two. I realized then that I had been had, but did not know how. Finally I received a call from one of the older Officers and he informed me that it was state policy that on New Year's Eve every inmate in the facility was to be awakened and given a cupcake. The inmates then set toilet paper on fire and threw cleaning

powder. This tradition had gone on for years. Yes, this is true. The next New Year's Eve, I was working a Max unit and had to hand out cupcakes at 12 Midnight.

My first Christmas and New Year's working in prison were eye openers. I realized that the holiday season could be just as hard on staff as it was on the inmates. When you go home to your family after the shift, you can't help but hold your loved ones tighter and be thankful for what you have.

Take care,

*The Old Screw*