



## THE BLUE FAMILY TREE

**Newsletter article December, 2022**

Times are changing.... Or are they? In the words of Tracy Lawrence as time marches on, "The only thing that stays the same is everything changes." However insightful and thought provoking this saying may be, is it entirely true? When we look at line of duty death, there are some trends that support the thought that everything changes. Take for example 9/11 cancer and COVID 19. In the last five years 9/11 cancer has followed this trend: 47, 28, 29, 14, and now 4. I am certain this trend will continue and it won't be long until we are reporting no more 9/11 cancer LODDs. The explanation for this of course is a simple one. The same would apply to COVID numbers. beginning pretty much on January 1 2020 the numbers: 280, 469, and this year, 67. When groups like The Blue Family Tree are trying to impact LODD numbers through education, we cannot focus on the numbers that change as time marches on. These numbers are specific to events in the world and will come and go. Instead we have to focus on the numbers that never seem to change. It can feel like you're talking to a forest when the results don't seem to change, but reaching you, or your shift partner or any other cop across the country is our number one goal. We want to put your safety at the forefront of your mind while at work. When you remove the trendy deaths occurring from a single event or epidemic, you are left with some real obvious LODD winners over multitudes of years.

Coming in at number one with no other category even close forever: gunfire. Over a five year period now gunfire has claimed 265 officer's lives. Number two is vehicle crashes at 120. The next three are substantially lower numbers: Heart attack - 81, Vehicular assault - 61, Struck by incidents - 45. If you look back a decade, two decades, or a hundred years, these trends are very steady and in the same general

order with the exception of heart attacks which only becomes a top contender after the invention of fast food.... Strange.

The reason it is so important for us to know these numbers and give them conscious thought is because they are all factors we have some control over, and some of them we have entire control over. Let's address each one separately with that thought in mind.

### Gunfire

This all comes down to training and experience, and admittedly we do not have all the control. Sometimes these events come out of the blue and we are completely caught off guard and unable to react. Much of the time however we fail to give the call we are responding to the attention it deserves because we have responded before to similar calls and they've turned out just fine. We get relaxed with our response to people not complying with us because it happens all the time. We choose to not be so direct with suspects because we're wearing body cameras and being recorded by spectators and we are afraid to be the next police defendant. Whatever one of those struck home for you, take a minute before you go to work tonight and address it. Always protect your life and the lives of innocent civilians and victims first. Remember, guns need hands. Without them they will not kill you, but simply watching hands does not buy you the response time you need to survive a gunfight. There will be warning signs from the body before the hands do their thing nearly 100% of the time. It takes serious courage to pull a gun on a cop, and as that courage is building a person will struggle to listen and formulate responses, and ultimately will tense up and take combat breathers all before those hands do their job. Get a jump on the hands presenting the gun by becoming familiar with the advanced signs from the body. Take a class. Study video. reflect on your own calls. Take the signs serious and be prepared to beat the bad guy to the punch, or better yet defuse and avoid the gun battle all together.

## Automobile crashes

This category is nearly 100% in our control. We respond to fatal crashes for a living. We have a better understanding than anybody as to how vehicle crashes occur and what kills people in crashes. We also know that although there may be one person that committed a traffic violation, the crash could have been easily avoided if the other driver was paying closer attention and driving defensively. There are always those exceptions but generally this rings true. We do not need to get to the shoplifter running on foot so bad that we can't control our vehicle. By getting all police to pay attention, drive defensively, and stop taking unnecessary chances to get to ultimately un-important calls, we could have a massive impact on a big LODD factor.

## Heart attack

This job causes stress whether you feel stressed or not. I am in no position to preach good life habits as I am in the waning years of my own career and have neglected to take care of myself to the extent that I should. The heart attack category is all about small choices every single day, but this category is entirely in our control. It's easy to say the job creates stress hormones that weaken the heart. It's even easier to point to our fathers and grandfathers and blame our heritage. But the truth is that we can all make lifestyle changes and save our own lives. Perhaps one of the hardest things in life to do, but also such an easy fate to avoid. Heart attacks and retirement are two things that will never change as time marches on. The seasoned vets in the briefing room who are trying to squeeze a little more out of their agency before leaving can say it till they're blue in the face, "Take care of your health and start saving for retirement. I wish I had listened to those words of advice when I was new." But the rookies hearing that advice today will be giving the same exact advice in 20 years. How can we brake that cycle?

## Vehicular assault and struck by incidents

Of the top five categories, these two are generally the least in our control. While the two categories represent two very different styles of death, one

being intentional and the other accidental, the awareness on our parts is quite the same. There are certainly unavoidable struck by incidents just by the very nature of working on interstates with 75 MPH traffic flying by, but we can follow TIMs practices and common sense to place ourselves in a better position of advantage and reduce the risk. More times than I can count I have watched a semi go by and thought to myself, 'if they're load shifted and the trailer swayed, or if a wheel came off, there is absolutely no way to avoid tragedy.' Make stops in safe locations and move investigations that can be moved, even if it's only for minute because with this style of death it is entirely unpredictable to the second.

In policing we accept there is some risk. We are quite willing to lay down our lives in defense of our fellow man and the constitution of this great nation. The passing of a police officer on duty is an honor that has never changed as time has marched on. In some ways, as prehistoric as the thought may be, a police officer dying on duty is a shroud of pride that will follow his or her family forever. They will be permanently memorialized in Washington DC and likely in their hometown. They will pass a hero. We are all prepared for such a fate, but wouldn't it be even better to keep serving, teach others how to be as heroic as you were, and one day steal every last dime you can from that pension bank?

[HOME](#)