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On and Off the Trans-Siberian Train: The Ex-Cop

Mesto47

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(Editor's note: this co-traveller's name has been changed on her request because she signed a non-disclosure agreement upon retirement)

In my job one has to have good sense of humor, otherwise, I would go mad. I always wanted to work for the police. I can't say my parents were happy about my choice. My dad was a policeman for 27 years himself. I am a young pensioner; recently I retired after being a policewoman for 23 years.

This job comes with unregulated hours, so it's hard on family life. You have to have an

understanding husband or wife. You come home, and they call you up. A murder just happened. It means that your workday has started. You have to wake up, put some clothes on and go there at night. Of course, it's annoying when you have some weekend plans, but then someone just gets murdered, raped or beaten so severely, that he or she is about to die. If you work in the homicide team, you need to check out the details of the crime scene yourself.

On average we get 125-128 calls a day. We have three crime scene investigation teams plus three patrol and inspection services. We manage. Sometimes we would get just 80 calls, but this is considered to be few. In our down time, we study law, do target practice, have work out sessions and self-defense wrestling exercises.

Sometimes young girls join the police with romantic ideas in their heads, based on books and movies. They think that they will just stand in their uniform, writing something down or investigating. And in reality they work with morally deficient people, who verbally abuse them. You have to interrogate them, and sometimes they are under the influence of alcohol and can be aggressive. You try to calm them down, but it doesn't always work. They get back their anger at you, even though it's not your fault.

But it's not exactly every day you get thugs, assholes, and scumbags, who should be either in nut hospital or on a life-sentence. You have to treat such people as humans. It's easier to do for a woman, as she has more patience.

Women's criminal psychology differs from that one of a man. A woman is more insidious. She has no obstacles, no long-term strategy. She just has a short plan: to get her revenge on this asshole here and now.

One time a woman stabbed herself because she was jealous. She saw her boyfriend with another woman and said that he had stabbed her. He got arrested, but the doctor said the pathway of the stroke showed that he could not have done it. She continued to claim it was him, but then later lied that she was cutting meat and did it herself by accident.

Once I faced a similar situation. They called us because of theft, and a woman said that her partner stole her earrings. In reality there was no theft. He had been physically abusing her, and she wanted to revenge, to get him punished. To scare him. But at the same time she didn't want to report the beating. The physical abuse was obvious, but she claimed that she had fallen down. This situation really upset me as a woman. I came into a room, and there were three babies lying on the bed. One was a breastfeeding child, and the other two were between year and a half and three years old. The youngest one was choking on his bottle. I took him, and his lips were already blue. I started shaming her, "How can you do this, you are a mother?" At 23 she already had three kids from different men. She didn't even have papers for the smallest baby.

When we watch detective movies on TV at the police station, we laugh at the nonsense. Arrest and evidence collection in the movies is just ridiculous, just bloopers everywhere, it reminds me more a fantasy or a comedy genre. Things don't happen like this in real life - if you did it like they do in the movies, you'd get fired. Any evidence extraction is always recorded, by photo or video.

Policemen don't have many rights, even though they work for a low salary and have really

huge work loads. And they have a lot of responsibility. We had a situation: a boy stole his dad's keys and got his gun. He planned to kill a teacher, who gave him a C for the term. Luckily his sister saw this and told somebody, so the police could prevent him from doing it. But the neighborhood beat officer was fired, since he obviously he wasn't watching them close enough.

It is impossible to define a criminal by the way he or she looks. You can tell a drug addict by his behavior or by their eyes. When I was attending police academy, I had a nice neighbor. He always said hello to all the old ladies who lived near us, he would hold the door for women with strollers. He studied well and was his mom's pride. But one day we found out that he killed more than 20 people. He'd organized a criminal group that would stop on the road and pretend that their car had broken down. They used a girl with a little child, while other members of the group were hiding in bushes. They killed people, took their cars and hid the bodies by putting them under concrete in a friend's garage. One day they were talking about it, and a girlfriend heard it. She ran away. They chased her, but she managed to get into a stranger's car and ask for help. She got to the police station and told them everything.

Half of the neighborhood attended the court hearing. Nobody could believe this, everybody thought that he had been arrested on false charges. Nobody saw the criminal in him, even with a lot of experience in the police. His behavior did not change in any way. He was always self-restrained, polite and calm.

In road police the guys have big bellies since they have to sit around a lot. And in our department, if you are not in shape, you will not be able to fulfill your duties. At some point your level of fitness can save your life, and I am living proof of that.

It happened when I was off-duty. I was just walking home. It was winter, with a strong wind, around 9 p.m. Suddenly a man attacked me from behind and started choking me. The most terrible thing in this situation was the fact that I was pregnant. He didn't say a word to me, he just silently choked me. I shook my head, hit him with it and bent him. He was much heavier than me, and my weight was insufficient, but I managed to escape. I didn't even think about arresting him. If he kicked me in my stomach, I would have been dead. That's why I could not risk it, I didn't have the right to do so. Maybe he wanted to take my purse, maybe to rape me. I don't know what he wanted.

You have to work out so that you can defend yourself. Of course, it is tougher for a woman. Sometimes even a well-trained man can't hold his own in a fight. But you have to hold on for some time, call for help and have a chance to at least run away, put all your strength into one punch. There is a chance. You has to be realistic about it. All self-defense methods are targeted at knocking out a gun or a knife. Of course, not when a gun is pointed at you. In this case you might be better off to agree to his demands and hit him on the sly, when he relaxes and his attention is diverted.

The most important is not to behave like a victim. Never be a victim. It is not important whether you have muscles. If you are tense or nervous, they will pick a fight. You have to be confident.

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