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A Must Read Novel that Addresses the Subject of Police Suicide

By Robin Matthews, IAWP Third Vice President

Ellen Kirschman, the award winning police psychologist who is the author of the bestselling books, *I Love A Cop: What Police Families Need to Know*, *I Love A Fire Fighter: What the Family Needs to Know*, and the co-author of the forthcoming book, *Counseling Cops: What Clinicians Need to Know*, has written her first novel, *Burying Ben*, A Dot Meyerhoff Mystery that addresses the issue of police suicide. This 240 page book is riveting; once I began reading it, I literally could NOT put the book down until I had finished reading it!

The story is about Dot Meyerhoff, who had barely settled into her new job as a psychologist for the Kenilworth Police Department, when Ben Gomez, a troubled young rookie that she tries to counsel, commits suicide without any warning and leaves a note blaming her. Overnight, her promising new start becomes a nightmare. Not only is her job and license to practice in jeopardy, but Ben's surviving family and everyone else connected to him are determined to keep Ben's story a secret, as well as Ben, himself, from the grave. By the time she uncovers the real reasons behind Ben's suicide and brings responsible people to justice, Dot has not only resurrected belief in herself, she has also acquired some surprisingly useful new skills: impersonating a public official, burglary, and assault with a deadly weapon!

Police suicide is a difficult topic and one that most people don't want to acknowledge or talk about in the law enforcement community. The fact of the matter is, however, that it's critical that the discussion takes place. We're losing way too many law enforcement officers to suicide from rookies, to Chiefs of Police, to retirees, and ignoring the problem is not going to make it go away. Law enforcement officers need to know that asking for help when battling depression, PTSD, family issues, drinking too much, or anything else that is sending them into a downward spiral is not a sign of weakness; it is a sign of strength. *Burying Ben* is a great way to begin that discussion. You will find it hard to believe that this book is a work of fiction.

As Ellen states in her Postscript, "There are many myths about police suicide. Here is what I know. More officers kill themselves than are killed in the line of duty by a multiple of two. On the other hand, when you control for age, gender, race, marital status, and state of residency, officers may be less likely to kill themselves than the general population. Whatever the statistics or the reasons that push cops to kill themselves, every suicide is a tragic loss affecting many people, often for generations to come. The following resources may help:

Books:

Emotional Survival for Law Enforcement, by Kevin Gilmartin, Ph.D (E-S Press, 2002)

Cop Shock, Surviving Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), 2nd ed. by Allen R. Kates, MFAW, BCECR (Holbrook Street Press, 2008) *I Love a Cop: What Police Families Need to Know*, by Ellen Kirschman, Ph.D. (Guilford Press, 2007) Websites:

www.badgeoflife.com - dedicated to psychological survival and suicide prevention for police officers. Resources include a nationwide (U.S.) listing of alcoholics anonymous-type groups for first responders only.

www.tearsofacop.com - information about police suicide and home to Survivors of Law Enforcement Suicide (S.O.L.E.S.)

Additional Resources:

The West Coast Post Trauma Retreat (www.wcpr2001.org) - a peer driven, clinically guided retreat for first responders suffering with post traumatic stress.

Preventing Law Enforcement Suicide - an interactive CD containing sample suicide prevention printed materials, presentations, videos and reference publication compiled by the Police Psychological Services Section of the International Association of Chiefs of Police. Free from the IACP at <http://psychtheiacp.org>.