

# In Memoriam

Deputy Stephen D. Sorensen

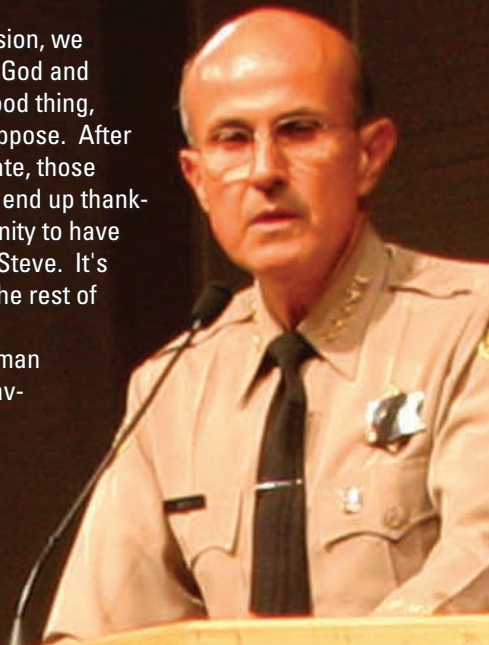


On Saturday, August 2nd, 2003, our world changed. A hero was taken from us and we were not ready for it. We never are.

Deputy Steve Sorensen had not planned on working that morning, but as Resident Deputy of Lake Los Angeles, he felt it was his duty to go wherever he might be needed, whenever that might be. There has been a lot of speculation as to the details that took Steve to a remote area regarding a problem with trespassing. A detail that is glossed over in the media is the fact that this was a self-initiated call, an "obs," as were many of the calls that ended up in Steve's mobile digital terminal (MDT) buffer. I know that Steve frequently gave out business cards to citizens who complained of "quality of life" issues, and he often scrawled his personal phone number on the back, encouraging those he trusted to call him day or night if a problem arose. I imagine that's probably what got Steve to suit up and log on that day.

So now, as I write this, I study a printout of my friend's last call, tag 155 at 1017 hours and I wish I had a time machine. At some point after 1017 hours, Steve made contact with a coward in a trailer and we all wish we could have been there to back him up. He was shot and killed at the scene, though we know Steve put up a fight and got off three rounds from his Berretta.

In our anger and confusion, we begin to second-guess God and that's probably not a good thing, though it's natural, I suppose. After a while, if we're fortunate, those feelings evolve and we end up thanking God for the opportunity to have known people such as Steve. It's with that mindset that the rest of this article is written. My first glimpse of the man was in a somewhat heavenly setting, in fact. It was February 11, 1991, the first "real" day of our academy and there was a very heavy fog rolling across the grinder at



## Lancaster Station

the Sheriff's Training and Regional Services (STARS) Center. It was as though we were walking through clouds as we made our way to class and there learned that we were anywhere but heaven. Steve brought with him prior police experience as an Army military police officer (MP) in Germany and it showed. He had also been a Los Angeles County Lifeguard for nearly ten years and we were all jealous of his low employee number.

As it turns out, Steve had a lot on his mind as he was going through the academy. He had just met the love of his life, Christine, the previous year and married her in September 1990. It wouldn't be long before the couple would relocate from El Segundo to Lake Los Angeles, opting for the open air and rustic surroundings of the area over the hustle and bustle of the city. Steve finished near the top of our class and was promptly assigned to work custody at North County Correctional Facility. Not terribly long after that, we ended up being assigned together at Pitchess Detention Center North Facility (formerly Pitchess Honor Ranch North). I was not the only person to be reunited with Steve; Deputy Robert Desantis, who arrived at the Facility several months before us, instantly recognized Steve as a fellow bouncer from years previous. Desantis, now assigned to Lost Hills Station, recently said of Steve, "I will never forget the nights downtown and in Westwood, and that comes from the soul."

## Born: June 18, 1957

It did not take long for Steve to be appointed as a lead deputy at North Facility, responsible for the smooth operation of a module typically packed with over 400 inmates. There was only one way to do things in Steve's module -- the right way.

In the summer of 1997, God answered Steve's prayers and got him the heck out of custody. He was assigned to Crescenta Valley Station where he was remembered by his first training officer, Paul Dino, as the "perfect trainee." Paul, now a sergeant at Lancaster Station, fondly recalls the first time he met Steve.

"He was standing near the trunk of the patrol car, looking around," recounts Dino. "As soon as he spotted me, he snapped to attention, as if he were back in the military." Steve extended his hand and said, "Deputy Sorensen, Sir. Glad to meet you!" That encounter became the foundation of a true friendship that would last to the end.

According to those he worked with, Steve did everything right the first time, even on training. His officer safety was flawless and his paper was perfect. It wasn't long before he was inviting friends to ride along with him. One of those friends was Deputy Chris McMaster who would ultimately be assigned to Lancaster Station. For my part, I remember Chris showing up as a trainee at Lancaster and immediately proving himself as a top-notch deputy due, in no small part, I'm sure, to the countless ride-alongs he did with Steve at Crescenta Valley Station.

## Entered Department: February 8, 1991

McMaster recently shared, "Steve was not only my partner on duty, but he was my friend off duty." He adds that Steve and Chris opened their hearts, opened their arms, and even opened their home to him, when needed.

Steve didn't care much for the drive over the Angeles Crest Highway to get to work each day and when he learned that the Lake Los Angeles resident deputy position would be available in the spring of 2000, he submitted his name for the spot and was soon working in his own community. This is where many of us really got to see Steve shine. On paper, Steve worked a 40-hour work week, but nearly all of us knew better. This was a man that was seen not just patrolling, but also giving presentations at businesses and schools, attending civic meetings, buying groceries for the needy, and cleaning neighborhoods. It was a Lake Los Angeles business owner and good friend of Steve's, Jose Gomez, who proposed at a candlelight vigil held in his honor that the community park be named The Steven D. Sorensen Park. I can't think of a more fitting tribute to a man who devoted his life to bettering his community.

In June 2001, Steve and Chris' lives were enriched immeasurably with the arrival of a son, Matty (Matthew). Matty smoothed the rough edges of the crime fighter and Daddy became putty in his hands. This was entertaining to see, to say the least, for those of us who had known Steve for so many years. The

## Killed in the Line of Duty: August 2, 2003

house looked like an amusement park on Matty's first birthday, with balloons, ponies, and a bouncer scattered through the property. Add to this a menagerie of 12 dogs, 13 goats, pigs, a horse, chickens, geese, fish, and cats, and you have an image of the Sorensen's estate. It has remained an oasis in the desert for those of us fortunate enough to work the east County area of Lancaster Station, and in spite of all that wildlife, Chris and Steve have kept it impeccably clean.

To say that Steve Sorensen will be missed is frustratingly inadequate. Yes, he will be missed, but the community and the Sheriff's Department will never quite become what it could have been were he still here. Steve was completely focused on making a difference. In a strong sense, he is still with us. He was with me last night as I got back into a patrol car for the first time since his death. He's there every time I've seen Matty smile.

It's been suggested that if we could hear what Steve had to say at this moment, that he would urge us to action. "What's all the fuss?" he would ask, "C'mon, let's get moving. There's work to do!"

And do it we must.

Thank God we knew you, Stevie. Rest in Peace.

Deputy Dan Burdick