

“My Gift from Chris”

Being Redlands' Police Chief is, in my opinion, the greatest of jobs. Daily, I am humbled by the opportunity I have to serve the community that has been so giving to my family and me. While my parents get the lion's share of the credit for raising me, and are saints for putting up with my adolescent shenanigans, this great community also helped steer me in the right direction. Clearly, it took the ENTIRE “village” of Redlands to raise me! In fact, my loving sister and brother still maintain it took my parents, all of Redlands, the Army, Navy, Air Force and the Marines to keep me out of trouble. But what do they know? More importantly, what can they prove? That's the real question! (Thank goodness cell phone cameras weren't around then.)

I love my job. But, like most people, I periodically have days when work seems to be unreasonably challenging. On those occasions, the question, “Exactly why did I leave the fun and excitement of patrolling the streets of Redlands and become the Chief?” seems to percolate in my mind until the day mercifully ends. When I decided I wanted to be a Redlands cop I didn't have budgets, politics, performance measurements or personnel evaluations in mind. All I wanted to do was run fast, shoot straight and catch as many bad guys as I could.

Recently, I was blessed with a new friend, one who helped me gain the perspective that, no matter how difficult my job seems, my challenges pale in comparison to what many of my international colleagues experience.

Last month, I attended the FBI's *Law Enforcement Executive Development Seminar* at the FBI Academy located on the Marine Corp Base at Quantico, Virginia. This is one of the world's preeminent leadership development programs, where police executives from around the world come together to hone their leadership skills. I had the opportunity to spend time with police leaders from all over country and various parts of the world. I am a better police chief as a result and I will cherish the experience forever.

Daily, we interacted with engaging speakers, discussing emerging trends in organizational life, the evolving nature of international terrorism and the need for leaders to increasingly practice “transformational leadership” as our agencies, communities and the world change at an almost exponential rate. During breaks, and after class, I had the opportunity to discuss with my international classmates their policing challenges. I was constantly reminded of how fortunate we are in America and how much we take our freedoms, and way of life, for granted.

Mzwandile “Chris” Ngcobo, has been the Chief of Police of the Johannesburg, South Africa, Police Department since its inception seven years ago. His day-to-day policing challenges are incredible. While South Africa has made quantum leaps in its democratic society since the horror of apartheid finally ended in 1994, its crime has escalated significantly and serves as a constant reminder of the work still to be done.

Chris was raised in Soweto, “Joburg's” largest ghetto. Abject poverty, crime and threats to the health of its residents were his daily reality. So was the brutality of the apartheid government and its racist national police force. Chris related many stories of the brutal beatings he witnessed, and received, by police officers. For three years, he was imprisoned (but never tried) for undisclosed reasons. His cellmate was Trevor Tutu, son of the Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

Chris was eventually released and went on to work with Nelson Mandela, South Africa's first black president. In awe, I listened as Chris spoke matter-of-factly about his incarceration, his work with these historic figures and his appointment as Johannesburg's first Police Chief, charged with creating a brand new, democratic police force – even though he had never served as a police officer a day in his life.

But mostly, I was in awe of Chris' incredibly positive attitude, his sense of forgiveness of those who so intentionally violated his human rights and his unwavering desire to see South Africa put the evil of apartheid in the past and look to the future.

He was clear about the necessity of having black and white officers working together to demonstrate to the people of his country that South African police officers of different races could work as equal partners in a democratic police department to protect them. He spoke with great pride about the fact that the police no longer persecuted, beat and killed innocent people because of the color of their skin. The high level of violent crime, Chris said, concerned him deeply, but at least violent crimes were no longer being perpetrated by the police.

To say that Chris' experiences have put my organizational challenges in perspective is a gross understatement. His life, and what he has endured, stand in stark contrast to my life in Redlands. I was almost embarrassed to share with him our policing issues. But when I did, he listened intently and offered his observations as if ours were the most significant of crime problems. Given his reality in Johannesburg, his empathy and concern for Redlands were, at once, both amazing and inspiring. But that's the kind of humble and compassionate man Chris is.

I will continue to articulate my concerns for Redlands' public safety as a result of the increasingly severe budgetary cutbacks in RPD resources. I will continue to speak out about our need to thoughtfully manage prisoners returning to our community. And I will always remind us of the need to "control crime before it occurs" by supporting strong families, resilient youth and safe and sustainable neighborhoods. But I will do these things mindful of the global challenges and very real threats to human rights – like those my friend Chris experienced – that exist even today. They must serve as constant reminders of why we Americans – and I as your Police Chief – are so incredibly blessed.

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