

On July 28, 1997, I was working as the graveyard shift Officer in Charge in the San Bernardino Area. Normally at the start of my shift I would make a run through the freeways in the heart of the city, hoping to find an early drunk driver to arrest. For some reason, on the night of the 28th I went north to the Cajon Pass instead. I made it to the pass and quickly realized I was not going to find any action at altitude, so I turned around and headed for the bright lights of the city.

I was almost back in the area of the Berdoo office when a radio call of a woman having a baby on the side of the freeway came out. The beat officers and EMS were dispatched to the call, but since I was in the area of the report, I responded too. In general, officers view the prospect of delivering a baby with a mixture of excitement and horror. The act of bringing a child into the world is job you definitely do not want to screw up. I had been around long enough to know that most of these calls do not result in the officer actually delivering a child. Far more often we end up holding mom's hand while the ambulance comes or transporting her and dad to the hospital so the obstetricians can add their professional touch to the process.

With the relative assurance that I would not have to do any real work in my mind, I ran Code Three to the call, parked behind the compact car stopped on the right shoulder of I-215 southbound, and casually got out the patrol car. I adopted a professional, and probably exaggerated, air of nonchalance and strode confidently toward the vehicle. As I did so, I was nearly bowled over by a nice looking guy in his late twenties. He was in a state of near panic, and he looked strangely familiar. "Jeff, thank God its you!" the guy exclaimed.

Now I confess, I am not very good with names and faces. It took me a few moments to realize the father to be was Sean Brannon. Sean is married to Arlene, an officer I had worked with for the previous five years in both the Berdoo and Arrowhead Areas. She is a good officer and a darn nice woman. I quickly put two and two together and realized the pregnant woman must be Arlene, since she had been off the road for the past few months on maternity leave. I approached the Brannon's car, smiling as I mentally composed a string of jokes to razz Arlene with.

Arlene was reclining in the front passenger seat of her car. I stuck my head in the car but before I could say some clever remark Arlene yelled, "Jeff, the baby is crowning." I saw Arlene had arrayed the contents of her Emergency Medical Technician bag, (all patrol officers are EMTs), on the dash of her car. I also noted she was still in a night gown and the seat of her car was soaked with what I was sure was amniotic fluid. "Oh, no!", I moaned, letting Sean's panic spread through me. The look on Arlene's face let me know that response was not what she was hoping for from the person who was about to deliver her baby on the side of the freeway.

The patrol maintains the most stringent standards of conduct for its officers. Sexual harassment offenses, even remarks that would be thought innocuous in the average office building, are not tolerated. There is a professional wall between male and female officers that is seldom breached. So you can see how awkward the thought of delivering Arlene's baby was for me. Arlene was too racked by pain to care about the intimate nature of my duties. And, she seemed comforted by my presence. Looking back on it, I realize now her confidence in me and her unbelievably calm demeanor made it possible for me to do my job. I mentally chastised myself, forcing the panic back to that dark place panic comes from. I told myself, 'If Arlene thinks I can do this, then I can.'

I rather timidly raised Arlene's night gown and shined my flashlight at her. Sure enough, a little, gooey, fuzzy head was emerging with each contraction. The contractions were so close together, they were nearly continuous. I froze like a deer in the headlights for a moment so brief I'm certain it was perceptible only to me. Then I fell back on my years of EMT training. Thank God the department had spent thousands of hard earned tax dollars on training me for this stuff.

In the end, delivering the baby was a piece of cake, for me if not for Arlene. I prepared the delivery area, maintained pressure on the infant's delicate little noggin, and did all the other stuff I was trained to do. Megan Francis Brannon was born at 1:16 AM with the most minimal of assistance. My role was more akin to a big league catcher than an obstetrician. Megan shot from the birth canal at high speed, surprising the heck out of me. I caught her as she cleared the edge of the seat. Her first contact with the world was very nearly the floor mat of the Brannon's car.

I pulled out a save worthy of an overpaid outfielder, snagging Megan as she was less than two inches from the mat. To everybody's relief, she was healthy, alert, and more than a little angry. In fact, holding Megan in the first moments of her life was more like holding an livid, wet, eight pound, three ounce spider than holding my own newborn children. Of course, with my three kids I had the luxury of watching the doctors do the heavy lifting.

I wrapped Megan up and gave her to Arlene. I was cleaning up and preparing for the rest of the delivery when I heard the comforting sounds of the crunching of freeway gravel against fire department boots. The paramedics, known both admiringly and derisively as paramagics due to their higher level of medical training, had arrived at last. While I was proud of the job Arlene and I had done, well mostly Arlene, I was more than ready to turn over care of mother and child to the true professionals.

The paramedics were really nice guys. They even offered to let me cut the umbilical cord. I think I told them to let Sean do it but I'm not sure. It's all a blur now. The paramedics were the first to remark on the smile I could not get off my face. That smile lasted for days. I still get that smile once in a while.

As I followed the ambulance to Loma Linda Hospital I called everyone I could think of on my 1992, brick sized cell phone. I phoned my captain, my wife, who knew and liked Arlene, old partners, mutual friends, everybody. I have rarely been as excited and relieved as I was at that moment. At the hospital I posed for pictures and basked in the glow of a successful operation. I also got to do something only a few road cops have been privileged to do. That morning I signed Megan's birth certificate as the delivering physician.

In the days and weeks that followed, I told the story to anybody who would listen. I was interviewed by newspapers and I got a five minute spot on the midday report of a Los Angeles network TV station. About a month after Megan came into the world, I interviewed with Captain Sandra Redding and retired patrol Commissioner Walt Pudinsky for the position of sergeant. At the end of the interview, I thanked them and prepared to leave. Commissioner Pudinsky stopped me. He was known to be a delightfully tricky old devil that enjoyed teasing interviewees and watching them squirm. I held my breath and sat back down as he queried me. He wanted to know all about the delivery. He extracted complete and often embarrassing details.

I left the interview sure that I had failed. Surprisingly, when the promotional list was published, I was at the top of it. I went on to work for Captain Redding, and one day I thanked her for promoting me. Oh no, she said. She felt I had done an adequate job, but the panel member who pushed for me was Pudinsky. Captain Redding said the retired commissioner particularly liked the story about delivering Arlene's girl. He felt if I could deliver a baby under those circumstances, then I was probably ready for any challenge a sergeant could face. So, in an odd way, I owe my stripes to a little girl born on the side of the freeway. Let me tell you, stripes or no stripes, helping Arlene Brannon deliver Megan remains to this day the most rewarding thing I have ever done professionally. And it probably always will be.