

The Cost · Sheriff Bob Jonsen

MARRIAGE · INVISIBLE EROSION · PARTNERSHIP

# The First Goodbye



"You can't get back the moments you didn't create."

**60-75%**

ESTIMATED LAW ENFORCEMENT DIVORCE RATE OVER A CAREER

**#2**

RELATIONSHIP CRISIS — SECOND LEADING STRESSOR CITED BEFORE OFFICER SUICIDE

**3x**

HIGHER PTSD RATES IN OFFICERS EXPERIENCING RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN

## WHY THIS IS A CRISIS

Law enforcement has one of the highest divorce rates of any profession — and the marriages that don't end in divorce frequently end in parallel lives, partners who have become strangers, and families that hold together for the children while the partnership quietly dies.

### **The job doesn't just take time. It takes presence.**

Officers who are physically home but emotionally unavailable produce the same relational damage as those who are absent. The hypervigilance, emotional shutdown, and scan-for-threat wiring that works on patrol becomes, at home, the ghost that nobody can reach. Relationship failure is both a consequence of officer stress and a primary driver of it.

## WHAT THE SONG DOES

Written from the experience of two divorces, the song traces the arc of a dedicated officer who built a career while a marriage crumbled — without ever intending to. The specificity — married in '85, a new badge, a first son, late nights — gives officers who are mid-arc the precise mirror they need to recognize themselves before the goodbye arrives.

The acoustic guitar outro strips everything back to one line: "You can't get back the moments you didn't create." That line lands differently for every officer in the room.

## WHAT THE BRIEFING ACCOMPLISHES

- Names the "ghost dynamic" — physically present, emotionally absent — as the most common and least-discussed form of officer relationship failure
- Provides a translation table: what partners say versus what they're actually communicating, giving officers a new way to hear familiar phrases
- Creates private recognition without requiring public disclosure — the most important outcome for this particular topic
- Gives supervisors language to hold emotional responses, including the long silence this song reliably produces
- Opens the door to EAP couples counseling as a proactive resource rather than a crisis intervention

# The First Goodbye

*"Take your time. This one hits close to home for a lot of people in this profession, including people who've been doing this a long time."*

## BEFORE YOU PRESS PLAY

"This one's about the people waiting at home. Just listen."

This song may produce the longest silence of the campaign. That's not failure. An officer sitting quietly with this song is doing exactly the work it was designed to prompt. Give the room a full 15 seconds before you speak.

## DISCUSSION PROMPTS

### CHOOSE ONE – DON'T RUSH THROUGH MULTIPLE

- A** The song says 'I thought I was building a fortress, but it would eventually fall.' Have you ever used the job as a reason to be somewhere other than home when it mattered?
- B** The chorus talks about being a ghost on the walk. What does presence actually look like for someone in this profession? What does it take to actually be home when you're home?
- C** The bridge says two goodbyes later, he finally saw the cost. What do you think it takes to see it before the goodbye happens?

## TO CLOSE

"The job will always have another call. Your family has a finite window. I'm not telling anyone what to do with their personal life – I'm just asking you to be as intentional at home as you are out here. The people waiting for you deserve your best too. Stay safe."

If you have been through a divorce, or if your marriage has survived a close call with one, this is a briefing where brief, honest personal disclosure will do more than any facilitation technique. You don't need to tell the whole story. A single sentence – "I know what this song is about from the inside" – changes the room.