

Revived, Refreshed, and Restored Memories

Emotions were running rampant in me when I started reading a book recently. I had been notified by the author of the book that his book was soon to be released. He had written a book that tells the story of the Sagon Penn Case in San Diego. If you lived in San Diego in the mid-eighties, this name and homicide case will probably ring a bell. Perhaps you'll have some recollection of this murder of a SD Police Officer and the attempted murder of both another SD Police Officer and a civilian ride-a-long. This case took over the news that March of 1985 and for many years to come it made the headlines. Bob was a Sergeant at the time in the Homicide Division and his Team, Team 4, was On-Call and took the lead on the investigation. Our household lived and breathed "Sagon Penn" for many years.

I wasn't eager to read the book. You see, I already knew the story. I knew about the officers involved, I knew about the killer, I knew about the first trial and the second trial, and I knew about the outcome. I knew the aftermath of the tragedy. How interesting of a mystery would it be if I already knew how it ended? I was actually leery to read the book as I wasn't sure that I wanted to relive some of the feelings I had at the time based on the outcome of the trial. So, I didn't order the book.

I mentioned the book to our son Kyle. Kyle wasn't even born until 1990 and was only vaguely familiar with this case/story. He thought it might be an interesting read, so he was able to download the book for free on Libby (the County Library free download program). My feelings about reading the book changed instantly with this text received from Kyle.

"I've been reading the Sagon Penn book. Dad (and you) appears in the 10th Chapter! The book is really interesting and well

written. It is so nice reading about dad-especially his quotes. I can read them in his voice and completely imagine him saying them. I can picture him transcribing them onto yellow legal pads. I'm reading intensely just to find the next time Dad appears."

Yes, that got my attention! So, I immediately went to Amazon and ordered the book. And when it came the next day, I found myself like my son, reading it intensely. What was my takeaway from the book? Yes, it was a well written story about a tragedy for the SDPD. I wasn't surprised at how the book evoked sad memories. But what surprised me is how it much it made me think about and remember the man who was a Homicide Detective. A man that was well respected in his field. A man who was a leader to his team of officers. A man who possessed keen investigative skills. A man who was an extremely competent report writer. A man who upheld the law. A man who was well thought of amongst his peers. A man who loved his job and eagerly went to work day after day after day. My husband.

To be honest, I quite often think of Bob as he was in his later years. The retired older Bob. The Bob with cognitive issues. The Bob with health issues. The Bob with Dementia. It was so wonderful to spend some time remembering a different Bob. Perhaps I could even say that the Bob of his working years was the "real" Bob. The Bob that I hadn't thought of in a while. The Bob whose life became overshadowed by the drastic changes in his later years.

The book was filled with names of people Bob worked with who were part of his Homicide team, coworkers, dispatchers, patrol officers, crime scene investigators, lab technicians, attorneys, Police chiefs--and each of their names and their part of the story brought back a flood of memories of the 30+ years Bob served on the Police Department. I was a proud loyal Police wife, and it was nice to feel those strong positive feelings again. I had renewed pride in my husband!

Quite often when our son Kyle and I are sharing stories and memories about his dad, Kyle ends with a simple comment—*“He was such a silly guy”* or *“Oh that silly guy!”* The Bob of the 60’s, 70’s, 80’s would NEVER have been described as a “silly guy”! Mellowing with age, his retirement, having grandchildren, having our child very late in his life, and then dementia changed Bob’s world. It was bittersweet to be transported by this book back to another time in Bob’s life and remember him in a different light. I was grateful for the reminder of the Bob of earlier years even if reading the book was difficult at times.

I’m glad that I overcame the very strong initial impulse to not read the book. Although I still find the whole incident to be tragic and upsetting, the joy of finding my Bob amidst the sad story was a blessing to me. It’s crazy how a story as heartbreaking as this one propelled me back in time and refreshed my memories. The book actually filled me with many good memories that are totally unrelated to the story.

I know that for many people the release of this book was dreaded and even painful. I get that. Why would anyone want their tragedy to put on display—once again? So don’t take this as a recommendation to read the book. For me, the book was just the avenue that brought lovely and misplaced memories of Bob back to the forefront of my brain.

Bob’s life is now a collection of memories to me, and it was nice to have some memories added to the vast collection. And for that, I am grateful.









A look at Bob over his many years on the SDPD. A favorite is always the picture with Chief of Police Bill Kolender.