

## THE FAMILY DISPATCH PEER PROFILE

Becky Soules

Winter 2016

Loneliness may not be the most prominent of challenges in marriage to a police chief, but it can be one of the most biting.

“You can feel very isolated,” said Becky Soules, wife of former Prineville Police Chief Jim Soules. “As a Chief’s wife, you cannot be pals with the other wives because your husband may have to discipline their husbands if it’s needed. We’re seen as people who should be able to fix things, but we can’t. We can only listen, and care, and love.”

Becky married her husband in 1971, the same year he became a police officer. Chief Soules’ career would take his family from Warm Springs to McMinnville, before eventually landing in Prineville, where he held the position of Chief for 24 years.

“Jim ended up becoming Chief at just 30 years old. He cleaned up the department, which was pretty dysfunctional at the time,” Becky explained. “He spent much of the first five years trying to gain the respect of the community, and that was extremely difficult. Small towns, in my opinion – and justifiably so – have high expectations for their Chiefs.”

Having left behind a deli that she owned and operated in McMinnville, Becky returned to teaching, a profession she had begun in Warm Springs as a Head Start instructor. She took a job with a Christian school before eventually serving the Crook County School District as an educator for 26 years. The first few years after the move were difficult.

“It’s a little like living in a fish bowl,” she said of life as a Chief’s wife. The couple initially struggled to rebuild positive connections between first responders and a community which no longer trusted its law enforcement.

“Jim did very well with that, but it was hard for me,” Becky admitted. “He opened his heart, his mind, his life to them. I had a lot of instances where people were extremely hostile. I would take that on myself and come home very upset. What did I do that they were so rude to me? I had a huge learning curve.”

Eventually, time—and a few hundred cinnamon rolls—proved to be effective tools for building community relationships.

For several years, Chief Soules facilitated not only the operations of the Prineville Police Department, but the county jail, as well. Becky recalled several busy Christmases, which the couple spent cooking dinner for the inmates and cinnamon rolls for first responders on both the day and night shifts.

It was simple acts like these that spoke volumes to local residents—and made the community feel like home to the Soules. Becky noted that she takes great pride in the emphasis her husband placed on always doing the right thing, no matter the time of year or circumstance.

“One night after a drug bust, Jim came home with a little girl who was two or three. He had sat and talked with her. And he had the choice to throw her into foster care or work with Child Protective Services until her grandma could come take care of her. You can’t always do those kinds of things day in and day out, but to step into a moment when you realize you’re needed, you can make a difference in someone’s life.”

By the time Chief Soules chose to step down from his position as Chief in 2003, he and his department were well respected among residents. More than 350 community members attended his retirement celebration.

“I learned that people love or hate policemen based on experiences they’ve had,” Becky said. “Sometimes you can turn it around; sometimes you can’t. I tried not to internalize that. Because we stayed and we faithfully stuck it out through thick and thin, I think people appreciated that.”

Chief Soules would go on to serve as Interim Chief for three more police departments, but Becky chose to make her own retirement a conclusive one.

“I love kids, but I would get a cold in the fall and have one off and on until spring,” Becky laughed. “I have missed working with children, but it’s been nice to be out of the spotlight and spend more time with my daughter and granddaughter.”

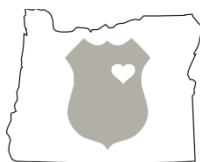
Despite the challenges Becky and her husband have endured, she maintains a positive outlook and encourages the wives of current chiefs to find small ways to combat the stress that comes with a life in law enforcement. Sometimes, she offered, that simply means making a meal at home and waiting to eat together as an entire family.

“Your husband has to be able to come home and unload some; you have to be available to just listen – and not really give advice,” Becky said. “I was qualified to listen [to] and encourage him. So that’s what I tried to do.”

And above all, Becky places her trust in her faith.

“It is my Christian belief to give to God things that are too big for me,” Becky said. “I had to trust God to take care of my kids and Jim. It was a good lesson because when our son went to Afghanistan I got to do it all over again,” she explained. “Bad things happen to good people and good people have to know that come what may, God loves them and will carry them through.”

If you would like to speak with Becky, please contact the OACP at 503.315.1411.



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