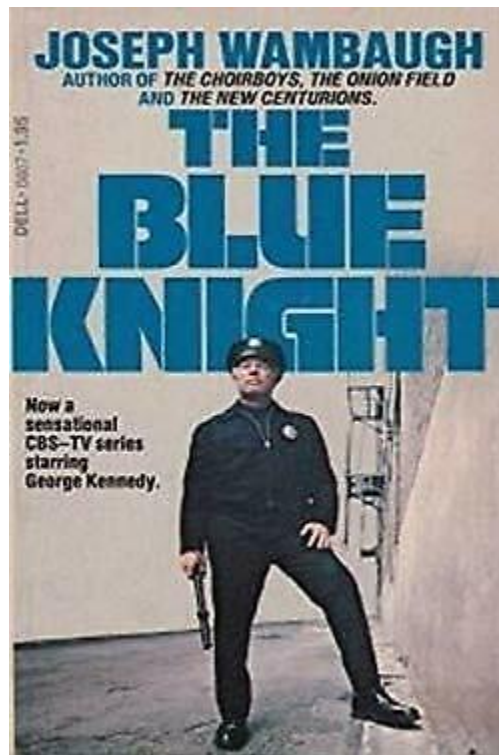


LAW ENFORCEMENT TODAY

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH JOSEPH WAMBAUGH

WELCOME TO LAW ENFORCEMENT TODAY, LOS ANGELES POLICE DEPARTMENT SERGEANT AND AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR, FILM, AND TV PERSONALITY, JOSEPH WAMBAUGH, ONLY IN AN EXCLUSIVE



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BY: LORI COOPER

JOSEPH WAMBAUGH, THE GRAND MASTER OF POLICE NOVELS AND A 14-YEAR VETERAN LOS ANGELES POLICE DETECTIVE SERGEANT, ON ANY PROJECTS IN PROGRESS, AND ON TODAY'S CLIMATE OF POLICING

Joseph Wambaugh is credited as “the father of the modern Police novel” and the first to tell a true crime story in modern times in an urban environment, delivering a new era of Police storytelling through his unique experiences as a Detective Sergeant for the Los Angeles Police Department. Earning both a Bachelor’s and a Master’s Degree while he was ‘on the job,’ Joe Wambaugh wrote his first three books while serving and protecting the people of Los Angeles.

In today's Interview, Wambaugh answers questions about his own Law Enforcement career, the art of storytelling from the perspective of what it's like to be a 'True Blue' Cop, and how he feels about the climate of Policing today.

Thank you, Joe, for joining us here at Law Enforcement Today. It's an honor to have you with us, and even a greater honor for our 50 million readers who receive all of their law enforcement news from one of our platforms. Can you tell us how you're enjoying retirement, and what, if any, additional projects are on the horizon for you and all of your fans? Can we count on another Police novel from you, or perhaps another film or two?

“Lori, I doubt that I am “the first to tell a true crime story, etc.”. Now to the answers: I don't enjoy retirement, never have. So, I am always trying (without success in recent years) to get my book adaptations on TV or in the movies. Therefore, I can kid myself into thinking that I am not retired because I have creative hopes and dreams. I am too damn old to write another novel, and I have no control over getting my work in the cinema or on TV. That's up to Hollywood, but I keep those hopes and dreams.”

So many in the Law Enforcement community have revered you as being one of the greatest influences of depicting what the life of a real Cop is all about. Can you tell us if it was difficult to navigate some of those deep waters and *really* share both the optimism a Cop can receive from the job as well as the cynicism which comes with the job fairly regularly, too?

“I don't think in those terms. I just try to create characters who come to life for me and then I follow them and write down what they think, feel and do. I am not very good at plotting so my books are character-driven rather than plot-driven.”

When you were a Detective Sergeant for the Los Angeles Police Department, can you tell us what your best day was on the job? Not as easy to answer, how about your worst day?

“My best and worst day occurred on the same day when I was extraditing a prisoner from Denver to L.A. He wasn't dangerous, just a commercial burglar, and we were not allowed to handcuff a prisoner on commercial airlines. But because he was a prisoner, the flight attendant seated us in the far aft of the aircraft, and soon after takeoff when we were over the Rockies, we hit turbulence. It was turbulence like I had never seen. It was so bad that the flight attendant, who was in the middle of serving a snack from the drinks cart, actually ran to her forward seat against the bulkhead and strapped herself in, letting the drinks cart roll free. The plane at that moment lurched upward and the cart flew aft, smacked into the rear bulkhead and the little bottles of booze flew everywhere. People were screaming, and after a terrifying minute, my burglar said, “Sergeant, I don't know if we're going to make it, so can I please have a drink?” I said, “Hell, yes, get me a couple.” So, he scooped up several little bottles from the floor and we unscrewed the caps and gulped them down. Many bottles later, the turbulence

dissipated and I knew we would survive, thus making it my best day on the job. When we got back to LAX, we disembarked by stairs rolled up to the rear of the plane where my partner was waiting on the tarmac in our detective car. Suddenly, I was shocked to discover that my legs were not working. In fact, I may have taken a nosedive on that staircase if my burglar had not put both his arms around me and helped me stagger down to the car. And so, it was also my worst day on the job because my partner took a look at my burglar and me, arm in arm, mumbling drunken gibberish to each other. And he said, “Well, I guess I’ll have to share this with the other teams in the squadroom ASAP: Wambaugh has gone over to the enemy!” They never let me live it down.”

Undoubtedly, your New York Times bestselling nonfiction Title THE ONION FIELD changed the trajectory of Policing tactics forever. When you wrote THE ONION FIELD, did you have any idea how much Police procedures would change for the Law Enforcement community around the country?

“Never, and if procedures did change, I’m not pleased about it because the surviving officer, Karl Hettinger, did not do anything wrong. He was faced with the choice of surrendering his weapon or having his partner instantly shot dead. We had always been taught that we could not second-guess decisions made in the field under extreme conditions. And, in fact, prior to that night in the onion field, there had been other incidents in Southern California where cops had found themselves in a similar situation and had given up their weapons and survived. I tried to make all that clear in the telling of the story, but apparently, I failed, or some of the readers failed, because soon came orders like LAPD’s “Hettinger Memorandum” where officers were ordered never to give up their firearms under any conditions whatsoever.”

With over 20 books to your credit, and almost all related to stories about crime fiction, mystery novels, and true crime nonfiction, and nearly all appearing on The New York Times best sellers list, which is your favorite work of fiction, and what would you say is your favorite work of nonfiction? Can you tell us why each is your favorite?

“I have written 21 books. My favorite fiction is THE CHOIRBOYS and my favorite nonfiction is THE ONION FIELD. They were also by far the biggest sellers, so others agreed. They were major motion pictures as well, but unfortunately, THE CHOIRBOYS is the worst movie I have ever seen. I would love to see it remade someday. THE ONION FIELD is a good movie and absolutely true.”

With PTSD affecting upwards of what some experts suggest could be as many as 30% of our Law Enforcement Officers around the country, what ideas do you have to reduce job-related stress and offer hope to Officers around the country who feel the serious effects of critical incidents of the job?

“I guess I was the first to write about PTSD in police work, long before we called it that, THE ONION FIELD being a textbook example of it. Officer Karl Hettinger, who suffered overwhelming survivor’s guilt, had no help given to him. Just being aware of PTSD and having police supervisors and command staff understand it, is critical in police service. I hope it goes without saying that today’s officers should be given time and psychological counseling to deal with it after every major stress-inducing incident.”

Do you feel like there is a pervasive sense within the Law Enforcement Community of an ‘Us vs Them’ mentality? Do you believe an anti-Police sentiment exists among civilians throughout our country now, and, if so, can you give us your opinion about why that might be occurring and how to make Police and their communities a more cohesive group?

“Yes to your questions, and to a certain extent, it will always be so. Cops often have to redirect people and prevent them from activities they may want to engage in. How to eliminate all of the inevitable resentment is above my pay grade. In one of my novels, I forget which, a veteran cop tells a rookie, “Lots of people won’t like you when you are doing a good job. Some will hate you. If you want love, join the fire department.”

Your Father was a Police Officer in Pittsburgh. Was he the individual and mentor who influenced your Police career? Was there anyone who influenced your writing career?

“My father was a cop for several years in East Pittsburgh, a small town about ten miles southeast of the big city. I don’t know if that influenced me at all. As to my writing career, it was influenced by Jack London. As a young boy I liked the public library and read THE CALL OF THE WILD three times. It made me love story telling.”

Whose work do you read the most these days? How about Television? Any special shows which are your favorite Cop Dramas?

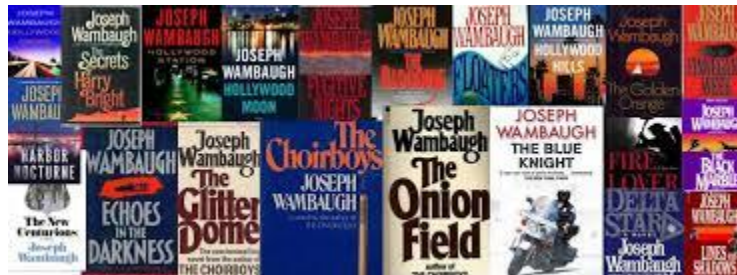
“Can’t choose a favorite writer or TV show these days. Of course, POLICE STORY was my favorite back in the day, probably because I created it. Most of the time they got it right, at least when the network would not interfere.”

If you could offer any piece of advice to anyone considering a career in Law Enforcement, what would it be?

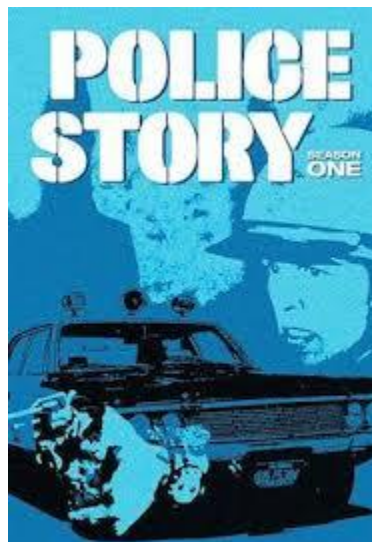
“I would tell them that there will be lots of psychological danger that they are not prepared to handle, because dealing with the worst of people and ordinary people at their worst, produces premature cynicism in people too young to be cynics. That hurts them and everyone around them and accounts for high divorce stats and other relationship issues. But there is one antidote to keep in mind: As a police sergeant dubbed “The Oracle” says in HOLLYWOOD STATION, “Doing good police work is the most fun that you will ever have in your entire lives.” I

would place emphasis on “good” and agree wholeheartedly. I can never have that kind of fun again.”

We are so grateful to you for joining us and hope we’ll be the first to know about any of your future, upcoming projects which may come to fruition. Thank you for showing the country the real grit of the job of the American Law Enforcement Officer.



With many thanks to you, Joe, a living Law Enforcement legend, we’ll never forget your books, films, the creation of the first TV Anthology in POLICE STORY, or Dispatch’s Radio calls in opening and closing credits on POLICE STORY: “11-Mary-6, Call the Station. Thirteen-Zebra-5, John-Frank-William 8-9-9.” Cut to crackling radio noise and one of the best Police Dramas ever to have appeared on Television. Thanks for the memories, Joe...



Lori Cooper

Law Enforcement Today Content Writer

Feature Exclusive

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR:



I’m Lori Cooper, a fierce Warrior of a Blue Family and a Champion Law Enforcement Advocate, the Daughter of a late Law Enforcement Officer shot in the line of duty and whose perp was a fugitive from justice for 4 decades until I found him all by myself. A Writer and Inspirational Speaker, my life in retirement after a 28-year career is busier than ever! After majoring in Comprehensive Social Studies at Ohio University, my professional life was dedicated to being a Public Information Officer for an Ohio governmental regulatory agency, where I wrote Press Releases, Public Service Announcements, hundreds of speeches, legislation, and so much more. In my spare time since, I’ve been a freelance writer for Universities, Fortune 500 companies, and nonprofit organizations, with a concentration on social media content, blog articles, tutorials, and email newsletters.

I’m thrilled to write for the millions of readers who rely on Law Enforcement Today for all of their news about law enforcement topics for Officers, their Families, and the outstanding supporters of the profession, and on topics which are current, relevant, passion-driven, and necessary in today’s climate of Policing. Together, we are a dedicated and an impassioned “force.”

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