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# BOOK

## Former narcotics sergeant preserves memories with book

By Sam Pimper/Fremont Tribune Nov 9, 2015

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Mark Langan always knew he wanted to work in law enforcement.

It runs in his family's blood.

Langan's father was a federal marshal, and Langan recalls spending numerous afternoons as a child inside of a courtroom pretending to be a judge with his friends. Sometimes, the children would go inside of holding cells to see what it felt like to be jailed.

Years later, that young boy grew into a highly decorated Omaha Police officer and award-winning author.

Sgt. Langan relived portions of his 26-year-long career Sunday afternoon at Keene Memorial Library in Fremont. His memories are detailed in his three-time best-selling book "Busting Bad Guys" which was available for purchase.

Now working as vice president of field operations for the Nebraska Humane Society — as he has for 11 years — Langan spends his days supervising the investigations of crimes against animals.

"I always joke that I've gone from busting meth labs to chasing black labs," he said.

While the job has been a transition, Langan said that it isn't as much of a 180-turn as people might think. Oftentimes, animal abuse goes hand-in-hand with other illegal activity.

He still works with police every day, even though he retired his shield in 2004.

But long before Langan's days of protecting animals, he made it his life's mission to help keep the people of Omaha safe.

Langan joined the force in 1978 as an 18-year-old, which made him the youngest rookie in the department. He turned 19 one week later, but wielding so much power and responsibility at a young age forced him to grow up in a hurry.

In his first few month with the OPD, Langan said he had “John Wayne Syndrome.” He felt untouchable, unstoppable, just like the John Wayne was in the westerns.

“John Wayne Syndrome is when we think we are way more important than we really are. It was an immense amount of power to have at a young age. You have a badge, and a gun, and people have to listen to you.”

But that sense of youthful bravado only lasted for so long. In his five years as a street patrol officer he learned that things would not always go his way, that sometimes, an officer can only control and do so much.

Not every bad guy is going to be stopped, or caught. He learned that part of the job meant making tough decisions and, sometimes, delivering news to families that would alter the course of their lives.

He recalled shortly after joining the department having to deliver his first death notice. A woman’s daughter died in a car crash in Boston.

The then 19-year-old walked up to the door of the house located off of 55th and Ames and broke the news. It might have been the hardest thing he had done up to that point in his life.

It’s something that sticks with him to this day.

“Every single time I drive down Ames I think about when I delivered that news 36 years ago,” he said.

Langan made a name for himself in a hurry at the department, and in 1983 joined an undercover vice squad. This was strange, he said, because he went from wanting everybody to know who he was when he was on duty, to the exact opposite — a person can’t be effective under-cover if his or her identity is revealed.

It can mean life or death.

Langan saw all sorts of things during his days with vice. He saw the goodness in people, and he saw just how dark humanity can be.

In 1987, Langan moved from the vice squad to an undercover narcotics unit where he worked his way up the ranks to command undercover narcotics operations, directing officers under his command to bust down doors while serving hundreds of no-knock search warrants and getting pound after pound of drugs off the street.

In 1988, a new monster revealed its ugly face in Omaha. Crack Cocaine.

It was primarily being transported by California-based gangs into the city. It presented a new set of problems officers had never seen.

People would kill to get their hands on the white powder.

“There’s more violence associated with crack cocaine than probably any other drug I’ve seen,” he said.

While getting drugs off the streets played a major role in Langan’s daily operations, he also worked to shut down a sizeable prostitution ring.

"In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Omaha was a cesspool for prostitution," he said. "Girls would be out in shifts throughout the day and night, and cars would just circle them. It was like piranhas swimming around bait."

One prostitute named Angie actually became Langan’s informant for a number of years. Langan went from frequently arresting her, to receiving pertinent information from her.

“It was a bizarre relationship that we had,” he said.

Angie retired from the streets in 2004, the same year that Langan retired after being involved with a deadly shooting in South Omaha on Valentine’s Day 2002. The details of the shooting play out in his book.

For his exemplary service, Langan was awarded the department’s two highest honors: the Distinguished Service Medal and the Medal of Valor.

Now working for the Humane Society, Langan’s job is different. He isn’t kicking in doors and seizing pounds of drugs. He isn’t carrying around fake identification and growing his hair out to get in deep with drug dealers.

He's making a difference by fighting for the humane treatment of animals. He works closely with the State Legislature to help accomplish this.

After years of butting heads with Sen. Ernie Chambers over law enforcement-related issues, the duo now work together to pass bills — Chambers is a staunch advocate for the proper treatment of animals.

“That’s another one of those bizarre things,” Langan said with a laugh.

Just like when he was on the force, not everything always goes as planned. There are good days and there are bad days, but ultimately, a difference is being made.

“We see a lot of happy things, and a lot of sad things at the Humane Society,” Langan said. “And that’s the same way it was working on the police force.”