JOE'S DASH

From Million Dollar Drug Busts to Multi-Million Dollar Collections for Las Vegas Casinos

LINDA ELLIS
WITH JOE DORSEY

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Joe's Dedication

To my wife, Karen Rose Dorsey, who blesses my life every single day.

And to those in law enforcement who put their lives on the line for me during my career and do the same for each of us every single day.

Joe's Acknowledgments

I'd like to use this section to acknowledge and salute all law enforcement, military and first responders. The respect and admiration you so richly deserve is sadly lacking in today's society. To those who risked their lives to save mine more times than I can recall and to those who do the same every day for all of us. Just know that for every one person who disrespects you or is not appreciative and grateful for your efforts, there are thousands of us that know the truth.

Many of the people who have influenced my dash have been mentioned in this book. The friends and family below are as much a part of my life and have inspired me.

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From day one, I was humbled that Linda Ellis was excited about helping me write my story. Her sincere interest enabled me to open up and relive some of the most difficult times of my life, while taking pride in my achievements. Through it all, we forged a great friendship based on mutual respect.

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My sincere thanks to Tanya Maynard for the phenomenal cover design. To Laurie Cabot for her incredible design work, and the hours spent wading through dozens of photos to produce a center photo spread that I am very proud of.

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Author's Note

In 1996, I wrote a poem that became a world-renowned inspirational work, "The Dash." It's about that little line between one's dates of birth and death, the hyphen that ultimately represents every step we take on Earth.

One stanza from the poem, in particular, kept repeating itself in my mind throughout my journey learning and writing about Joe Dorsey:

For it matters not how much we own:
the cars, the house, the cash.
What matters is how we live and love
and how we spend our dash.

Each and every one of us has stories to share from this journey that I've dubbed the "dash." Yet have you ever wondered, as I have, why certain people seem to have a greater cache of unique life experiences from which to draw?

Sure, every dash has its share of loss and calamities, but the majority of us live routine and predictable lives. Thrill seekers don't wait for life to extend invitations; they create and conquer their own encounters in their own way on their own time. Others simply follow their path, which presents

extraordinary circumstances. Joe Dorsey's, for example, includes jumping out of helicopters in violent storms to save lives, going undercover in narcotics operations, gathering body parts after a midair collision, raising two kids as a single father, and collecting millions of dollars of unpaid gambling debts overseas.

I have done my best to portray Joe Dorsey as he is—the real deal. He has no hidden agendas, he tells no lies, he doesn't put on pretenses. At work and in life, he's the type of man who leads by example. He is, by all accounts, an embodiment of the adage, "Actions speak louder than words."

He knows who he is. His friends and family know who he is. And God knows what's truly in his heart. What more can a man ask for than to be true to himself, his loved ones, and his God?

1

Early Years

Thursday's Child

Joseph Patrick Dorsey was born on a cold Thursday morning in March, 1943. The old nursery rhyme foretold Joe's life well: "Thursday's child has far to go." But only God knew at the time how true those words would be.

He joined two brothers and two sisters in a family that would eventually grow to 11 people, including three younger siblings and his grandmother, living in a three-bedroom apartment located in a low-income section of Cleveland, otherwise known as "the projects."

Joe's family was poor, but he didn't know it at the time. None of the children in his neighborhood knew their social or economic status or lack thereof. Not until he grew to become the young boy who wasn't invited to birthday parties, because he lived on the "wrong side" of town, did he begin to feel the sting of distinction.

Joe remembers how each of his younger siblings suddenly appeared. With each labor, when his mother went to the hospital, his older siblings explained her abrupt departure as, "She went to the store." He remembered thinking,

"Every time she goes to the store, she buys a *baby*!"

Joe took his place in a long ancestry of Irish Catholics who shared a common denominator: alcohol. To this day, the Irish and their whiskey are the subject of many jokes, but where there's smoke, there's often fire and so was the case with the Dorsey family of Cleveland.

The memories of children who grow up in an environment where alcohol is predominant in their parents' lives linger throughout their lifetimes: the muffled sounds of fights coming from the other side of the wall, the silent tears falling, the sudden violence, the unrest that hovered like an ominous cloud over happy times. Fortunately, our origins do not determine our fate. We can rise above our circumstances by seizing opportunities that make things better. And that's exactly what Joe did.

Mother

His mother, Mary, didn't wear the title of homemaker well. She didn't bake cookies, help with homework, or check behind ears. She never served as a dependable foundation for her children. She loved them as best she could, but she was an alcoholic.

Joe's mother was the designated disciplinarian, doling out the physical punishment. Joe vividly recalls one of his older brothers sitting at the dinner table tapping his fork against a glass. Mary asked him to stop, but he continued, which infuriated her to the point where she threw a knife, deeply piercing his arm. As for himself, she once hit him so hard that she broke her own knuckle. That was when she moved on to hairbrushes.

When his mother eventually left this Earth, Joe was in his early thirties. He hadn't seen or spoken to her in 15

years. When Joe's sister called to give him the news, he had little reaction, outwardly or inwardly. He felt as though his sister spoke of an acquaintance they knew, not the mother who had labored to bring them into this world.

Father

Joe's father, Joseph, for whom he was named, drove a truck, then a cab, and later went to work at a Cadillac plant where they made Army tanks. His grandmother and an older sister and brother also worked at the plant. Though Joseph's relationship with Mary wasn't always amiable, Joe and his dad had a solid bond.

According to Joe, Joseph was always cheerful. He was a good father, did his best to be a provider, and treated his eight children equally, providing a solid foundation for all of them.

Joe received a good spanking from his dad only once. One day, he made a makeshift toy out of a small metal index-card holder and a string. He was lying on the top of the bunk beds, swinging the gadget back and forth, when he accidentally hit his sister in the head, resulting in a small cut above her eye. The spanking wasn't nearly as painful as the fact that his father threw away the secret box in which he kept all his money: 15 cents. Though he pleaded, Joseph wouldn't tell him where he dumped the box.

Another time, however, also stands out in his memory. Joe's older brother was good at baseball; Joe looked up to him and watched his skills with the envy of a little brother. One day, Bobby was out playing baseball and Joe asked him, "Can I play?"

Bobby answered, "Sure. Just run home and get my glove."

When Joe returned with the glove, eager to play baseball alongside his big brother, he found out it was just a ruse and his brother had no intention of letting him join the game that day.

His father happened to be passing in his cab and saw Joe crying. He pulled up beside him and rolled down his window. "Got anything going on today, Joe?"

Joe jumped in the cab and spent the entire day with his father, sharing hamburgers at the local bar and grill. (Joe still swears it was the best hamburger ever.) Later, a handgun slid out from underneath the driver's seat. Joe had never seen a gun before. No words were spoken about it, just a secret acknowledgement between father and son.

When Joe was around eight, his family moved out of the projects into a three-bedroom house in the suburbs. The house had a driveway, a back yard, and a garage—none of which he'd ever experienced before.

But when Joe was 11 years old and Joseph was 43, he suffered a fatal heart attack at work and passed away a little later at the hospital. Joe heard about it from one of his sisters. Ironically, his father's death saved his own life when much later, Joe recognized the early symptoms of his own heart attack from having listened to his sister talk about the numbness and pain their father had experienced.

Return to, and Escape from, the Projects

Following the death of his father, Joe, a sixth grader, found himself facing a future of walking a tightrope without a safety net. His father was his security, stability, and chief role model. Also, the death of her husband was the turning point in his mother's alcoholism.

With the life-insurance money, Joe's mother bought

a new car, a bad decision. Their nice suburban home was foreclosed and the family had to return to public housing. Soon, his mother took up with an ex-convict barfly named Johnny who, when he was drunk, often smacked Joe around. Joe was relieved when his mother and Johnny disappeared for days at a time, even though she didn't leave any food in the house for him or his siblings.

One night, his older sister Mary Jo, who had since married and moved out of the house, came by and saw the conditions in which her siblings were living. Together with her older sister Betty, they confronted their mother, insisting on taking their younger brothers and sisters away from her. Their mother resisted, but later it became clear that she didn't care about her children; she didn't want to lose her monthly government check.

Mary Jo, only 21 and recently married, took Joe and his sister Judy into her home, while Betty took the two youngest siblings, Julianne and Tim. Joe slept on the couch and on a cot in the apartment until Mary Jo and her husband Tom bought a house near her workplace, which had bedrooms enough for all. Even so, Joe wasn't the most well-behaved kid and taking him in couldn't have been easy for a young married couple. But they gave him a home, provided him stability, and likely saved his life—beyond the influence of childhood friends who chose poor life paths that Joe could easily have followed.

George was one of his best friends from the projects. Bigger and older than Joe, he was a burglar. Had Joe remained in the area, he most likely would have ended up on the same destructive trajectory as George and others. Indeed, one of Joe's other close childhood friends was later put to death in the Ohio state penitentiary.

Life in this home was very different than anything

Joe had ever known. There were no drunken fights; there was an established routine. The transition took time, but he knew he had it good there. He began to make friends. When they asked him about where he previously lived, he lied. He was afraid the truth would change their attitude toward him and he would lose ground in this new life.

He attended the local Catholic high school, where the boys were separated from the girls. He had grown into a striking young man and the girls didn't fail to notice. It was standard practice that the girls asked the boys to prom. Meeting different young girls from various grades and schools, Joe eventually attended about 10 different proms throughout his high school years.

His brother-in-law, Tom, continued to fulfill the role as a substitute father until he became one himself. By the time his sister and brother-in-law began growing their own family, Joe was old enough to go into the service.

2

Military Service and Marriage

Into the Navy

Joe served a year in the Naval Reserves in high school, figuring he'd join the Navy after graduation. It was winter 1961, he was 18, and affording college was out of the question. But he learned about the GI Bill, which he could use to help pay for tuition. He would also get on-the-job training in a useful occupation.

The temperature was about two degrees in Cleveland with heavy snowdrifts everywhere when he headed downtown to the recruiting office. The recruiter asked him where he'd like to go to boot camp. Joe asked what his choices were and when he heard about San Diego, he envisioned palm trees and no snow. That day, he was on a plane for the first time. When he arrived at 9 p.m., he stepped into a balmy 61 degrees. Waking up the next morning, it was like he'd come to the Land of Oz.

Joe soon discovered that his time in the Naval Reserves,

including boot camp and a year of service, facilitated his training. The 12 weeks flew by, with all kinds of new experiences for a Midwest boy in California. At the end, he was assigned as an Aviation Seaman Apprentice and reported across the bay at the Naval Air Station North Island for immediate duty at the Aircraft Maintenance Division. There, his duties involved pre-flight tasks such as performing visual inspections of aircraft, running the engines to ensure they were operating correctly, and fueling and cleaning the aircraft.

Joe worked with everything from jets and large transports to propeller-driven and small civilian-type planes. Some were from World War II and still in operation. One of the greatest benefits of his job was the opportunity to fly in them. But first he had to attend the Aviation Physiology Training Center at North Island. Training included indoctrination in high-altitude-pressure breathing, the use of survival and night-vision equipment, and the Martin/Baker ejection seat—an actual ejection-seat simulator that "shot" trainees up the rails. One instructor described it thus, "The pilot will, in an emergency, shout, 'Eject! Eject! Eject!' and if you ask any questions, you'll be talking to yourself. The pilot will have already ejected."

Joe took every opportunity to go aloft with various pilots, some having flown in World War II and Korea and so skilled, they could make the aircraft do things he thought planes weren't meant to do. During one test flight, the T-28 flew straight up until it reached 29,000 feet. At that altitude, when the plane couldn't climb any higher, Joe could count the prop blades, because they turned so slowly, even at maximum engine power. The pilot then let the plane slide backwards and turned the aircraft toward the ground as it picked up speed. At that point, Joe relaxed. He could no longer count

the blades on the prop after it resumed normal operation.

Test flights were usually flown over a military area around El Centro, California, approximately 100 miles east of San Diego. The tests often included a "sand-blower" flight, in which the aircraft was flown just above the level of nearby sand dunes.

One evening when they were returning to San Diego from San Francisco in a T-33, the pilot asked Joe if he'd ever seen the lights of Los Angeles at night. When Joe answered yes, the pilot responded, "Not like this!" He turned the T-33 completely upside down. Afterwards, Joe thought, "You're right. I've never seen Los Angeles at night like that!" And he never did again.

Joe spent two years at North Island. While there, he met a young woman, Colleen Griffin. They were married in July 1962, when Joe was just 20 years old and Colleen was 19.

After North Island, he was transferred to Ream Field, a Naval Auxiliary Air Station in Imperial Beach, about 15 miles south. Ream Field was home to all the helicopter squadrons in the area. There, he completed a two-month training course on the state-of-the-art helicopter used in anti-submarine warfare, the Sikorsky SH-3A Sea King. After training, he was assigned to an anti-submarine helicopter squadron. In October 1963, the squadron deployed to the South China Sea aboard the aircraft carrier *USS Hornet*. Other than having to leave Colleen and his new son Bobby, he didn't mind, since he was going to sea and had only about a year left on his enlistment.

Life at Sea

The *Hornet* was famous for its actions in the Pacific during World War II. Whenever the aircraft carrier docked

in Japan, the crew hosted an open house and thousands of Japanese citizens lined up to tour the ship.

The *Hornet* was in port in Japan on November 22, 1963, when President John F. Kennedy was assassinated. All military personnel assigned to the ship were recalled and ordered to put to sea as quickly as possible. Tensions were high in the immediate hours following the assassination and the Pentagon readied the military for possible action. But once the details from Dallas become known, personnel returned to normal peacetime duties.

The outpouring of affection by the Japanese people following the president's death really touched Joe. In the cities, black banners were spread over the streets and department-store windows. People openly sobbed during President Kennedy's televised funeral. Many people came up to the naval personnel to clasp their hands and bow in respect.

For the next few months, Joe's helicopter squadron steamed around the South China Sea with other squadrons that made up the *Hornet's* air wing.

Joe spent a lot of time at sea and loved every minute of it. Primarily, he worked the flight deck at night, 6 p.m. until 6 a.m., seven days a week. All types of aircraft surrounded him, engines running, preparing to take off. His work required a lot physically and he was in constant motion, maneuvering around all these catapulting planes and hovering helicopters. Disasters weren't uncommon: plane crashes on the flight deck, personnel blown overboard, jet-fuel fires—the flight deck of an aircraft carrier is one of the most dangerous work sites in the world. The most dangerous time for everyone involved was when the planes and choppers returned and had to land on a pitching heaving deck smaller than some parking lots, especially in nasty weather. Joe gave enormous credit to the pilots and

their large *huevos*.

One time, an aircraft armed with rockets overshot the deck and was dangling over the side of the carrier, held only by the arresting cable and tail hook. The Marine pilot was still in his seat, upside down; ejecting would have propelled him directly into the sea. A flight-deck sailor tied a line around himself, then crawled out onto the aircraft hanging over the ocean to retrieve the very grateful pilot. All the while, the aircraft was leaking fuel from a drop tank and the tail hook had to be cut to release the aircraft, which fell into the ocean.

Twice, Joe left the carrier on helicopter missions—one to the Marine Corp Air Station in Iwakuni, Japan, for special flight-crew training, the other a week-long trip in early 1964 to a base in Southeast Asia.

While at the base, Joe spoke with an intelligence officer about the current military situation in Laos and Vietnam. The officer mentioned a large buildup of North Vietnamese troops along the Ho Chi Minh trail, a military supply route running from North Vietnam through Laos and Cambodia to South Vietnam, all names that would become all-too-familiar to Joe and the nation in the months to come.

In February 1964, Joe flew off the aircraft carrier, stopping all over Southeast Asia on his way to the Naval Station on Treasure Island in San Francisco Bay to await his discharge. Right after he received his walking papers, he headed back to San Diego to see Colleen and his son Bobby, who was three months old when Joe last deployed.

During his deployment, Colleen and Bobby lived with her parents in Coronado. Arriving at his in-law's house, he saw the Christmas tree was still standing. It was February, but they'd left the decorations in place, so Joe could enjoy them when he returned. Bobby was now nine months old

and had grown more than Joe had anticipated.

He was relieved to be home with his family and ready for his next career move. But as he looked ahead, he also looked back. He was thankful for his time in the Navy and the experience he'd gained. He wished his shipmates Godspeed in their continued journeys.

Welcome to the Coast Guard

The same month Joe was discharged from the Navy, he received a letter from the Army requesting that he stop by their downtown San Diego recruiting office. He thought the letter was some sort of military mix-up, so he went to the office. The recruiter asked his name, glanced down at his list, and replied, "This is no mistake. Your name is right here." Joe's military specialty made him eligible for recruitment into the Army at the rank of warrant officer to begin training as a helicopter pilot.

"Nice offer … bad timing," Joe thought, recalling his conversation with the intelligence officer about the trouble brewing in Southeast Asia.

The Army recruiting office was shared by the Coast Guard. When Joe finished speaking with the Army recruiter, a Coast Guard recruiter approached him, explaining that the Coast Guard would soon be getting new gas-turbine helicopters, similar to the ones on which Joe had worked during his Navy service. Offhand, he mentioned that the Coast Guard had no one enlisted with Joe's level of helicopter qualifications. Joe knew he had an edge. When the recruiter asked Joe what it would take to get him on board, he replied, "A written contract guaranteeing flight pay, my

Petty Officer ranking in the Navy, and a guarantee to be stationed in San Diego for the next four years."

Those conditions made their way up the chain of command, then back down to Joe, all being met. A few weeks later, Joe received his orders and reported for duty.

Air-Crewman Responsibilities

Joe was assigned to air-crewman training on the Sikorsky H-19 helicopter. This was an older model, having served the Coast Guard since 1951, but it was well-maintained and operated by some of the best pilots with whom Joe had ever flown. He trained from June to October 1964 and was certified as an air crewman of the H-19. Later, Joe was certified on a number of other aircraft, including the HU-16E Albatross, a twin-engine propeller-driven sea plane used on extended search-and-rescue missions (eventually replaced by the famous C-130 Hercules).

At one point, Joe and a group of other airmen were deployed to the Sikorsky helicopter manufacturing plant in Stratford, Connecticut, where they received intensive training on the new HH-52 Seaguard helicopters. The highlight of the trip was meeting Igor Sikorsky, the designer and pilot of the first viable American helicopter in 1939. Sikorsky's contributions to the design and production of helicopter and fixed-wing aircraft are legendary.

Desperate Situations

As a Coast Guard air crewman, Joe was responsible for: preflight inspections; weight and balance issues; communications, radio, and navigation systems; rescue equipment; search-and-rescue, hoist, and towing procedures; engine

analysis; troubleshooting emergency repairs and emergency crew survival, and much more.

A lot of the job was technical, but Joe also performed numerous rescue operations that required nerves of steel. One such incident was a night rescue of a sailor from a vessel breaking into pieces off a rocky Mexican shoreline. Heavy rains and high winds combined for low visibility and high instability. The situation was worsened by the loss of the vessel's radio transmitter. Only a lucky break on the visible search allowed Joe and his helicopter pilot to locate the stranded craft. It took two tries of the pilot being directed by Joe to position the aircraft and Joe lowering the rescue harness, but the sailor was lifted into the air just before his sailboat disintegrated. Fortunately, the man wasn't badly injured.

In another emergency call, four teenagers were trapped on a ranch, surrounded by backcountry forest and brush fires. The Coast Guard was now flying the new Sikorsky HH-52 amphibious helicopter that could land in the water to complete rescues. Through thick smoke, Joe spotted the four teenagers in a pond clinging to a small dock. The pilot had to assume the pond was deep enough for a landing and set down as quickly as possible near the teens. Joe pulled them onboard and the pilot turned the helicopter around in the water to face the wind. By this time, the fire had surrounded them. As the helicopter lifted off, its rise was slow because of the extremely hot air. The aircraft shuddered as it labored to ascend from the pond.

Joe watched the tailpipe temperature gauge moving toward 696 degrees Celsius (1,284 degrees Fahrenheit), the maximum operating temperature of the engine. It got very close to the limit, but as they gained lift, their air speed increased and they passed safely through the smoke and

flames. All gauges returned to normal and the pilot landed at a nearby safe location.

Joe knew the teens had been traumatized and when they hugged him with tears streaming down their faces and thanked him for saving their lives, he told them their own quick thinking was the reason they survived. Entering the pond gave the helicopter crew time to get them out. He said, "You're as responsible for your survival as we are." Joe knew that victims often blame themselves and, in this situation at least, they were blameless survivors.

Joe also participated in many emergency calls in which victims, unfortunately, didn't survive their ordeals. In those events, he recovered their remains and delivered them to the coroner at the base. Many of the calls involved military aircraft declaring emergencies on land and over the ocean and, sadly, most of those calls were for recovery only. Many of those crews were victims of tragic and violent aircraft crashes, but civilians weren't immune from them either. During one six-month stretch, every call—and there were many—to which Joe responded had no survivors. He was given the call sign, "Dirty Joe the Body Snatcher."

The Coast Guard often launches search-and-rescue missions when no one else will go, placing personnel in unpredictable and dangerous situations. When the emergency calls come in, no one knows what perilous circumstances the rescuers will enter. And no one is guaranteed a safe return. From time to time, Joe and his colleagues had to rescue their own from aircraft downed during operations.

On one occasion, Joe and a pilot were conducting a night search off the coast when a fog bank suddenly enveloped them. They headed back to base, but the closer they got to land, the denser the fog grew. They were also facing a low-fuel situation. They requested assistance from the Naval

Air Station at North Island.

North Island vectored them out over the ocean and turned them around, so they could attempt an instrument approach where fewer buildings and obstructions cut their landing risks. Doing so, their fuel fell to the lowest level Joe had ever seen. Visibility was down to zero and they knew they had one shot only.

Ground Control Approach finally ordered them to stop forward motion and hover. They complied and were told to set the helicopter down. Unable to see a thing, the pilot slowly took them down to land, without even the guidance of runway lights. A ground-support vehicle appeared out of the fog and they'd just started taxiing behind when the helicopter suddenly shut down. They were out of fuel. If that had happened less than a minute earlier, they wouldn't have made it.

Another task on the Coast Guard's agenda was ocean-survival training for flight crews of commercial airlines with overwater routes. Crews watched instructional films and were then taken about two miles offshore, where Joe and others demonstrated live helicopter rescues. The flight crews were then transferred to a 30-man raft with an instructor and shown how to operate all the survival equipment kept in the raft. Joe jumped from the helicopter into the ocean to display how to enter the raft from the ocean, using boarding ramps.

On one such occasion, Joe noticed a B-25 from North Island circling overhead. The aircraft's circling pattern wasn't unusual, but the length of time was. Routine procedure dictated that all area aircraft and air stations were notified of Coast Guard training drills. While Joe was chatting with a flight attendant, she pointed toward land and yelled, "Look!"

Joe saw the B-25 descend and crash into the ocean.

The Coast Guard helicopter and a nearby cutter responded immediately to the crash site. They later learned that the B-25 hadn't been informed of the training exercises and was justifiably circling the site in due diligence. Unfortunately, the pilot forgot to switch fuel tanks and they ran out of fuel.

The flight attendant asked Joe, "Was that part of the demonstration?"

Joe responded, "No. The Coast Guard isn't in the habit of crashing perfectly good aircraft to demonstrate ocean-survival techniques."

In 1966, a Coast Guard pilot told Joe that a program had been created in which ten Coast Guard pilots would be assigned to the Air Force rescue squadrons in Vietnam. He explained that the Air Force had acquired modern helicopters, but lacked skilled and experienced aviators. This pilot was considering volunteering for the mission and wanted to know if Joe thought he was good enough—not just to qualify, but to survive.

"I would fly with you here or there," Joe responded. "You're one of the best pilots I've ever flown with and I'd say that about you and only a handful of others."

The pilot volunteered, was selected for the program, and was sent to Vietnam for a year's tour of duty. After many years, Joe looked him up and learned he made it back home with a chest full of medals. Joe was relieved, as he'd felt a little responsible for his volunteering. That pilot reached the rank of Admiral before retiring after a distinguished career.

Of the ten Coast Guard helicopter pilots assigned to Vietnam, only one was killed in action: Lt. Jack Rittichier.

A mere 11 days after reporting for duty, Lt. Rittichier was awarded the first of two Distinguished Flying Crosses for rescuing four Army helicopter pilots from two downed aircraft. If this isn't a testimony to the quality of the pilots in the Coast Guard, nothing is.

Joe received three Sikorsky Helicopter Rescue Awards, rescue emblems signed by the aviation pioneer Igor Sikorsky bestowed for skill and courage while participating in a life-saving rescue mission. But ask him and he'll tell you that no award takes the place of the face of a person rescued within minutes or even seconds of losing his or her life. On many occasions, he witnessed the victim's look of terror transform to a look of gratitude.

Joe loved his career in rescue operations. His intense training and fortitude paid off countless times, because to him, failing was never an option. In 1967, he was named Aircrewman of the Year. To this day, Joe is unable to describe the sensation of knowing that you've saved another person's life. To be directly responsible for ensuring someone wakes up the next day and has an opportunity to live life brings a unique satisfaction.

At times, he was frightened beyond words and after responding to many no-survivor callouts—especially military-aircraft crashes—he knew that any one of them could have been him. After serving his four years, Joe left the Coast Guard with a modest sense of pride, knowing he'd done a good job.

And he was on his way to a much "safer" career—as a San Diego police officer.