

An RCMP Officer Comes Face-to-face with Prison Inmates

by Melanie Koush

When Matt Logan pulls into the parking lot of the Matsqui medium security institution, nestled in the Fraser Valley in Abbotsford, British Columbia, a man called Jose sees him and ducks behind a parked car. He winks with a playful smile, waiting to surprise Matt as the car gets closer. It's Jose's last day before he leaves for a halfway house and he was worried he wouldn't have a chance to say goodbye. "You've really helped me, you've helped all of us," Jose tells Matt. "I really appreciate it - I mean it from the bottom of my heart." And with that, Jose kisses the palm of his hand and reaches into the car to place it on Matt's forehead. And then he's gone.

To Jose and to most of the other prisoners here, Matt Logan is just Matt, the prison psychologist. What most of them don't know is that he is also Sgt. Matt Logan of the RCMP, who once helped put guys like Jose behind bars.

It's an interesting story that brought Sgt. Logan to Matsqui. A 21-year veteran of the RCMP, he began working in the prison two years ago, half-way through his PhD program at the University of British Columbia. In 1997, following the Gustafsen Lake standoff in B.C. where RCMP members and First Nations people dashed over land claim issues, the RCMP decided it was time to have its own operational psychologist to deal with such crisis situations.

Sgt. Logan seemed like the obvious choice. He had gone back to school in 1992 to get his Masters degree in psy-

chology while he was working at the Major Crime Unit in Victoria where he dealt with a lot of child, as well as adult victims of sexual abuse. "The more I spent time with the victims," he says, "the more I realized how unskilled I was at helping them and my level of understanding, empathy and listening just wasn't what it should have been."

For four years, he juggled courses while he continued to work full-time. But all the hard work eventually paid off when he was able to apply what he had learned in psychology to his police work. "That whole process just changed me personally," he recalls. "It gave me a more caring and more empathetic way of being there and it wasn't just a matter of listening, it was actually really caring about people more and more."

After his Masters degree, Sgt. Logan decided to take a break from school, but it wouldn't last long. When the RCMP approached him in 1997 about becoming the Force's first and only operational psychologist, he knew he just couldn't resist the challenge. The PhD program was another long haul, but on September 11, 2001, Sgt. Logan added Dr. in front of his name. "I've always had an interest in the human mind and what makes people tick," he explains, "so it was just a natural progression to get the Masters in psychology, and then the PhD."

The focus for the PhD was on crisis negotiation. Sgt. Logan spent time in Baltimore, San Francisco, Sacramento and Calgary, interviewing negotiators on a particular case. "They go back into the details," he explains, "flushing out the

incidents within the incidents that either move the person towards surrendering or cause them to stay behind barricades. The question in the research is what hinders or facilitates successful crisis negotiation, not just hostages, but any crisis situation. What I was looking at is the communication process which has never been looked at empirically," he adds.

Two years into his four-year PhD program, the funding for Sgt. Logan's studies was withdrawn. "There were no major incidents after [Gustafsen Lake] and it was determined that an operational psychologist was not really necessary," he explains.

For the past two years while he's been on leave without pay from the RCMP, Sgt. Logan took a job as a registered psychologist with Correctional Service of Canada, so he could finish his PhD. He ended up at Matsqui where he conducts psychological assessments of violent inmates as they come into the prison and does one-on-one counselling with recent parolees.

It was a drastic change, going from a cop on the street who had helped sexual abuse victims, to a prison psychologist' who was face-to-face with the offenders themselves. "I came right into Matsqui," Sgt. Logan recalls, "which had a reputation as being a tough place and, to get to the psychology offices, I had to walk through the general population, past' hundreds of inmates. I was wound so tight, I was just waiting for someone to take a poke at me. It was a difficult transition."

Inside, his identity was kept a secret, until his second week on the job when a staff member told one of the inmates that he was an ex-police officer. "Luckily, he says, it came out as an ex, not a current cop." Some of the inmates at Matsqui also recognized him as the cop who put them here. "We had to put some real pressure on some of those guys. If word got out," he adds, "some people would probably still come and see me, probably as a novelty, but a lot of people wouldn't. Then, there's another small percentage that would probably sharpen their knives."

In prison, his training and background as a police officer would provide no advantage because "if something happens, it's 200 people against one," he says. At first, visions of prison riots would run through his head. "When that happens," he explains, "they lock all the gates and the staff has to stay inside. Usually in a riot, the female staff would be most at risk, but in this situation, who do you think would be most at risk - the cop," he adds. "I would try to figure out places where I could hide, wondering if I could make it up onto the roof. I would be wishing that I had my 9 mm with me."

Gradually, his fears subsided and he became more comfortable in his new position. "As time went on," he recalls, "I realized that yes, this is risky, but it's a managed risk."

Today, when Sgt. Logan walks through the general population, you would never know that the fear was once there. On a tour of the institution, he points out some of the tougher inmates as they work out in the gym. When one of the units is evacuated, tattooed prisoners ranging in age from about 18 to 60 file past him, without so much as a second glance.

Sgt. Logan is one of the few, if not the only RCMP officer working directly with inmates inside a prison. This makes him a bit of an anomaly, but his time on the inside has provided him with invaluable experience and a unique perspective into criminal behaviour - which he hopes to bring back to the RCMP. It's also provided some good insight for his dissertation, because "72 percent of the people we're negotiating with have fairly extensive criminal records," he explains. "The more we understand their background and their emotional hooks, the more we can have a successful negotiation without taking a life." He adds, "I spent 15 years as an

investigator working with cons on the street and I thought I knew everything. I didn't know anything. I'm getting inside their heads and learning stuff they would never tell a cop."

Sgt. Logan spends about 25 hours assessing individual violent offenders, four to five hours of which is spent interviewing the person. "At the end of that," he explains, "we're able to say what the risk of re-offending is, what kind of programming they should take, what institution they would best be placed in and then I may never see them again."

With counselling, he sees inmates about every two weeks on a regular basis - a parole requirement. About half of the 12 to 15 offenders he counsels are lifers on parole and the rest are violent offenders or sex offenders. "I have a couple right now that don't want to be here and they're really hard cases," he says. "Usually by the third or fourth session, they're opening up. But when they first come in, it's like, 'I'm only here because I have to be'"

Last year, Sgt. Logan was chosen to facilitate an intensive sex offender program in the nearby Regional Health Centre - a medium security psychiatric hospital. The program, which runs for eight months, selects some of the 16 worst sex offenders in the country. Sgt. Logan would spend almost six hours a day working with them, "and it's pretty intense," he says.

In prison, Sgt. Logan also met ex-police officers and in talking to them, he and other RCMP officers in "E" Division (British Columbia) are now working on producing a video on former cops serving federal time. "It will have a big impact on our membership," he says, "because the guys on tape will be talking about how their lives went downhill." The video will be used as a training tool to show RCMP members, how the slippery slope of corruption begins. He

Sgt Matt Logan at the Matsqui Institution in Abbotsford, B.C. In addition to being a police officer and psychologist Sgt Logan also teaches in the Masters program in leadership, conflict management and crisis negotiation at the University of Victoria and Trinity Western University. Before taking leave from the RCMP to do his PhD, he was in Georgia developing the IACP's core competencies and also worked at the Criminal Intelligence Directorate in Major Criminal (Extremist) Conflict Management in Ottawa

adds, "Our people need to know the consequences of this, how it all starts and how you recognize risk within yourself before it leads to acts of corruption."

Whatever their offence, most of the inmates Sgt. Logan deals with suffer from some form of personality disorder. Never one to turn down a challenge, he says he likes to work with psychopaths because no research has yet proven successful in rehabilitating them. "I would say that maybe five to six percent of the inmates I assess are psychopaths," he explains. "They are the ones who are at this point unreachable, I guess, incorrigible. When I go back to policing, I'll really know how they think"

The issues in counselling vary with each individual but one thing most of the offenders have in common is some form of childhood abuse. "You almost seldom will see someone who didn't have a lot of

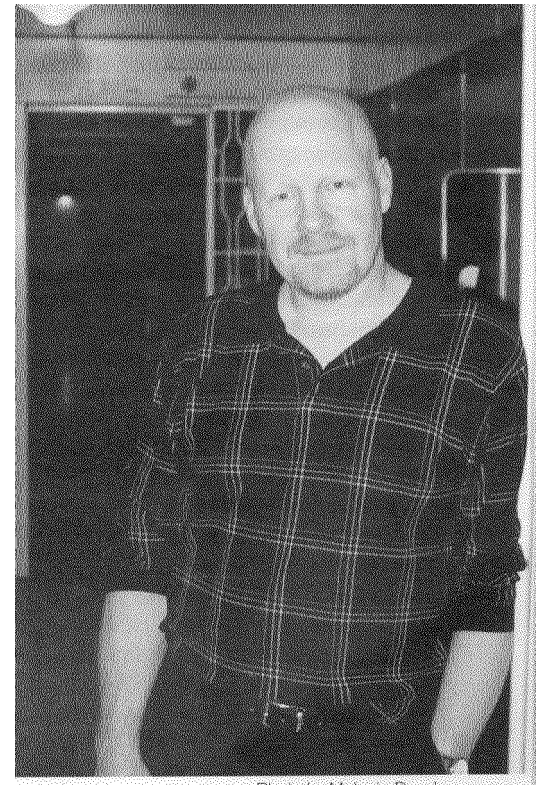


Photo by Melissa Bouch

physical and sexual abuse as a child," Sgt. Logan explains. "As much as I'm not a

"I think I was one of the first prisoners he told," Mr. Flett recalls. "I like Matt, so by the

Until he comes back to the RCMP, Sgt. Logan will likely stay on at Matsqui for the next little while. Armed with his prison experience and a PhD in psychology, his first choice is to return to policing. Ideally, he would like to see the RCMP reinstate the operational psychologist position, which he says has many applications, beyond just events like Gustafsen Lake. "It's not just negotiation," he explains. "It's also crisis and conflict management, anti-corruption, debriefing undercover operators, developing strategies for interviewing suspects, tactical communication training, and the list goes on." Unfortunately, he adds, the mind-set right now "is that you can't really be a psychologist and a cop," which is why the RCMP as well as other police agencies often hire civilian psychologists.

In the U.S., the position is much more common. In San Francisco, for instance, Sgt. Logan visited a police department with only 85 police officers and an operational psychologist on staff. "They used the psychologist to look at fit-for-work evaluations," he explains. "The position is more specific to the operational running of the unit or police force, but there's no reason why in certain situations that psychologist couldn't be useful even for stress debriefing with members who have witnessed tragic situations. I already know what it feels like to lose a buddy and I had a person killed right in front of me in a hostage taking. I can bring things in that other psychologists out there never see," he adds.

With only about a dozen RCMP members holding masters degree and even fewer with PhDs, Sgt. Logan has been in demand in the U.S. and at Correctional Service Canada. All his hard work and schooling he says wasn't done just for the RCMP, but rather "it was done for me personally to develop myself so I can contribute to the lives of individual police officers." As a psychologist, teacher and police officer, there is no shortage of work he can do. It's just a matter of finding the right fit, and of course, a good challenge.

Editor's note: On November 1, 2001, Sgt. Logan returned to the RCMP to work at Health Services, in "E" Division Headquarters, British Columbia

Nestled in the Fraser Valley among blooming trees, a mass of barbed wire and a backdrop of the white capped peaks of Mount Baker in Washington State sits the Matsqui medium security institution. The prison, which opened in 1966, is home to about 300 inmates in the Pacific Region. In 1981, a major riot resulted in millions of dollars in damages.

bleeding heart about the adult who committed the crime, I'm very victim oriented, so I find that a lot of the times I can at least relate to them as a child victim."

Glenn Flett is a lifer on parole who turned out to be a unique case for Sgt. Logan. In counselling, he was trying to deal with his contempt for authority; and police officers in particular.

Mr. Flett spent 14 years in prison for the 1978 murder of a Hudson's Bay store manager who was killed during a Brink's holdup in Toronto. He says his hostility toward police and authority developed early. "I had an experience when I was about nine where the police grabbed my brother and I was traumatized by that - and, from that day on, I never really trusted police," he explains. "I kind of saw them as my enemies and, over the years, I built up a lot of resentment and anger towards them."

Mr. Flett was paroled in 1992 and says, "the way I'm living my life today is prosocially, in a non-confrontational way and without conflict. That's important to me and I try to deal in all my relationships like that, so it's bothered me a lot that I've had a number of incidents in the past with police officers that I didn't deal with very well. Afterwards," he adds, "I'd feel bad and that's why I felt that I needed some help with that."

In counselling, Sgt. Logan decided to take a risk and reveal his true identity.

time he told me he was a cop, I had already formed an opinion of him and he's the kind of guy that I admire. I like his straight forwardness, his dedication to his job, his honesty and his approach," Mr. Flett explains. "I didn't in any way expect him to be a police officer, but it's been very helpful to me in viewing police differently."

Trouble-free since his release from prison, Mr. Flett is considered a success story, but in this job, "success stories are few and far between," Sgt. Logan says.

"I think you have to be nuts to do this job for a long time, because the bottom line is, I'm not going to see a lot of good results. You have some successes and then you look at the sheet and they're back in again. If you're in this job very long, you're probably going to see most of them again."

Of the 16 sex offenders he worked with at the Regional Health Centre, Sgt. Logan says all but one or two will probably end up back in jail again after their release. "Some of these people should never be allowed out," he says, "but it's like the starfish in the ocean - you throw them back in, but you have to think about saving one among thousands. There are times when I think I have to go back to doing something that makes me feel good about what I do, but then I get a guy like Glenn coming in and I see a guy like Jose trying to make it, putting up the effort, and it gives me enough to go on for a while."