

Who am I? I am a widow of a fallen officer. My husband, Sgt. David Land, was killed in the line of duty in March of 2003. David was my heart and soul. We had only been married for eight months so you can imagine the devastation when I got a knock on the door. It was unimaginable. How could this have happened? We were to grow old together and have a family of our own. My life was forever changed in that minute.

I am not here to talk to you about my pain and suffering or my loss. What I would like to do is share with you what an organization named COPS has done for me. What is COPS? I had never heard of it nor had David. When he was killed, a man named Roger Parker introduced himself to me saying he would be in touch. I had no idea who he was or what he meant. After that, Roger called to check on me telling me that COPS was available if I wanted the support. Then several months passed and I was notified of a Spouses retreat. This retreat was held in September of 2003. Hesitantly, I decided to go. Why not? I had never been to Missouri and what could be worse than what I was currently going through?

I landed in Missouri and did not know a soul. I found my way to a meeting room in the airport where I met numerous women who were sharing their stories of love and loss. Finally, I was surrounded by people who "got it." I did not have to pretend that things were going okay if they were not. I learned that everyone's feelings were similar even if their circumstances were different.

Then the journey began to the YMCA Trout Lodge. Here we would play games, take part in outdoor activities, as well as attend counseling sessions. It was a wonderful experience. I challenged myself to physical and emotional tasks that I did not think I could do. Guess what? I did them. When it was all over I thought of David and instead

of crying began to smile again. If these one hundred women can walk this path then so can I!

The experience I have described is my first year. I have been back every year since then. Every time it is different because I am different and at a different place in my grief. It is amazing to reflect on the growth that I have undergone in two and a half years. I do not think I would be at the same place if it were not for COPS. The Spouses retreat has provided the arena to meet people in similar situations. As a result, I have made some wonderful friends that I can call on at any time. I would encourage all widows to take that leap....step out of your comfort zone...make new friends....begin to heal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Paula Land". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Paula Land, Wife of Sgt. David P. Land E.O.W. 3-26-03