

To truly be “Living the Dream”...You Need a Fortress

When I first started law enforcement (about 20 years ago), the culture was a little different than it is today. It was much more positive in a lot of ways.

For example, if you would meet another Officer in the hallway or in a parking lot and greet them you might ask “Hey, how’s it going?” most of the time the reply would be the same “I’m living the dream.” In other words, they were saying “I’m doing good, or I’m happy.” They were sincerely saying “I’m living the dream.” All is right in my world.

Fast forward 20 years, some cops will still answer “Living the dream” but the tone is different. It’s sarcastic, you can tell that they mean something very different. They are saying it cynically. To me that it sad, and I want to help as many LEOs get back to truly living that dream and enjoying their lives.

That feeling that things are going well, or that all is right with the world comes from your belief about the state of things in general and how well you are doing in the world. If things are going well you might call it inner peace, tranquility, or peace of mind.

For many law enforcement officers, these feelings seem more elusive every year. That sense that all is right with the world, and that everything is going to be okay, is increasingly hard to find in this modern age. With so much going on, everything we have to deal with and worry about, is it any wonder that peace is hard to find?

We all want peace, but where can we find it? It’s inside you; it always has been and always will be. The outside world (and the people in) it will always be chaotic. World events have been and will continue to be in turmoil. There will never be a “perfect” time or set of circumstances. If you are waiting for the world and others to align in some ideal way before you allow yourself to feel at peace, you might be waiting a long time.

“If you want peace, prepare for war.”

— Publius Flavius Renatus (Roman author)

The outside world and life, in many ways, is war. The attacks on your peace and tranquility are constant. What you need is a fortress; a secure base, a place where you can feel safe. That is why the Stoics invented the “Inner Citadel.” The Inner Citadel is a place where you can retreat when your tranquility is under attack. It’s a place where peace and calm always reside. If the idea of truly “living the dream.” lives anywhere, it lives within the walls of this inner stronghold.

Below are some fortifications you can build to create your own inner citadel:

- **The Watchtower**

Manage your expectations of events and people. See them clearly from a distance, recognizing their flaws, imperfections, and basic humanity. Expect flaws, and they won’t surprise you.

- **The Drawbridge**

Acceptance. Allow things to be what they are.

- **The Walls**

Amor Fati—love of fate. Recognize that most things are ultimately good or beneficial in some way, providing opportunities to strengthen your resolve and resilience.

- **The Foundation and the Moat**

Virtue. Clearly defined boundaries for your thoughts, words, and actions form a rock-solid foundation. Remember, it’s not about them; it’s about you. No one can cross your moat unless you allow it.

- **The Map Room**

Mindfulness. Be in the moment—where your feet are. Refrain from forecasting the future or dwelling on the past.

- **The Armory**

Practice the Stoic skills, tools, and techniques that protect your Inner Citadel.

NOTE: Think of me and the ancient Stoics as your arms dealer. All these tools and resources that are available to you for free are a huge armory full of weapons and shields.

- **The Inner Sanctum**

Gratitude. Cultivate true appreciation for the people and blessings in your life. Identify all the reasons you have to be thankful.

With your Inner Citadel built, you will have a refuge whenever your peace or tranquility feels threatened. You can always reinforce it with new fortifications and equip it with whatever you need to thrive within its walls.

Keep those fortifications strong, and soon you will get back to "living the dream."

Amor Fati

- Sgt. Steve