

On December 22nd 2009 I elected to work overtime on second shift at Northern Correctional Institution. Upon arriving to my assigned post I learned I was going to be working with a "rookie" officer whom I'd never met, or even spoken to. The shift started out normal, we were conducting our assigned tasks and I was giving this "rookie" tips on the job which I had been working for 17 years.

During the shift I approached the cell of a high security, highly assaultive inmate that I had known for nearly 14 years. I offered this inmate an opportunity to take a shower and explained that his cell would be searched. The inmate refused the shower and was reluctant to come out of his cell initially for the search, commenting that he had been shaken down yesterday.

I was firm with my response and explained the rules to this inmate who was serving a 70 year sentence for assault and hostage holding a correction officer, and had been in and out of prison since 1970. Once opening his cell door I instantly knew there was a problem, he squared up to me and threw what at the time I thought was a punch. This instant is when I learned how much bravery, courage, and integrity this so called "rookie" had.

With just 4 months on the job Michael Whitehead without regard for his own safety immediately jumped to action and my aid in restraining this inmate in a highly volatile situation. When responding staff came to assist I was told by a fellow officer that I was cut and he escorted me to the facility infirmary.

While being triaged I learned this inmate had not punched me but had slashed my throat with a make shift weapon using a razor. I was rushed to a local hospital and was told how serious my wound was. The vascular surgeon explained that it was merely millimeters from severing my jugular vein; had that happen it would have been unlikely to have survived. I received seven staples to close the wound and the surgeon suggested I buy a lottery ticket.

When giving a statement to the police the inmate was forthright in saying that he intended to kill me. The memory of the incident still sends a chill down my spine. I could never explain or put into words the gratitude I have that I was working with Michael that evening. He was no longer a "rookie" to me. Without Michael there, my outcome on December 22nd 2009 would have undoubtedly come out different. Thank you, Michael.