

Police officer says moment of valor not without - Fayetteville Observer, The (NC) - June 7, 2019 - page A6

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Sgt. Charles Cochran never will forget Stephanie Williams, and Stephanie Williams never will forget Sgt. Charles Cochran.

He is a city police officer, and has been for 16 years.

Williams, 35, was the pregnant woman who was held hostage by her boyfriend on the morning of July 3, 2018, at Treetop Garden Apartments on Greenleaf Drive, off Raeford Road and near Skibo Road.

"I've been stabbed," Williams would tell a 911 dispatcher. "He said he is going to kill me and him."

Once inside the apartment, Cochran and fellow officers found Williams in her bedroom bleeding, and **Lemuel Bunn**, 40, of Roanoke Rapids, holding a knife and wrapping his arm around the neck of the woman he had been holding hostage for 12 hours.

Cochran and those other officers ordered Bunn to drop his weapon.

"The phrase 'You will always revert back to your training' has always meant something to me," Cochran says, "but it means more to me now than it did at 8 a.m. on July 3, 2018."

Cochran was a police officer without choice.

A woman's life hung in the balance, as well as the life of her unborn child.

Cochran would end the crime with a single bullet from his revolver, and Bunn would die later that evening at Cape Fear Valley Medical Center.

"Our response was on-point," Gina Hawkins, the police chief, later would say. "Definitely on point."

Today, Stephanie Williams and her newborn are alive and doing well.

"My family has developed a relationship with her and her family, and she asked me to be the baby's godfather on Mother's Day," says Cochran, 46, a former 82nd Airborne paratrooper who on May 10 was awarded the Medal of Valor by the Police Department at the Fayetteville Police Foundation Ball at Highland Country Club. "I can't put into words what that meant to me and my family."

The Medal of Valor is not just any award. It is the highest honor presented by the Fayetteville Police Department, but one Cochran shares with others.

"As a professional, the award validates the quality of training I've received and the greatness of the individuals that I've been surrounded by in my time here at the Fayetteville Police Department," Cochran says. "I've been blessed to have trained with men and women that didn't allow me to settle for average."

Among them, he says, are the officers with him on July 3, 2018. "Sgt. Kenneth Holland, Officer Jonathan Covault, Officer Sara Hanson, Officer Shawn Arnold, Officer Joshua Walcott and Officer Pedro Padilla were with me that day," Cochran says, "and they all performed very well under a great deal of stress. I am very proud of them."

He says, too, that the officers were not alone on that difficult day of protecting and serving. "Personally, I'm thankful to God, and I know he saw us all through that incident from beginning to end," Cochran says. "I don't make the decision I made as quickly or accurately as I did without God's presence. I know it all sounds very cliché, but that's how it truly is. I'm very thankful."

As for Stephanie Williams, he says, she has a story to tell.

"She will be a great advocate for domestic violence victims one day, and she deserves so much credit," Cochran says about the life he and his fellow officers saved from the throes of a potential homicide. "She is a tough young lady."

And something else Cochran wants you to know.

"And the baby," Cochran says, "is gorgeous."

Tomorrow: "Right place at the right time."

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