

Hello,

My name is Eric Konzelman. I am a lifelong Oregonian and former Benton County Deputy Sheriff. I started at the Benton County Sheriff's Office as a volunteer, reserve deputy in 2005. I was then hired as a full time Deputy Sheriff in April of 2007. I spent all 15 years of my law enforcement career serving one county.

I was raised in Albany, and in nearly 40 years, I have only lived outside a 20-mile radius for about two of those years. I grew up in a middle class home and was taught from a young age to understand the difference between right and wrong.

I guess you could say I was the cliché kid coming into law enforcement. I wanted to help people, I wanted to be a part of the process of holding people accountable for the wrongs they had done, and I wanted to do something exciting. I had a very pure hearted intent. I simply wanted to do the right thing. I can safely, and with great pride still say today, that never changed.

When Scott Jackson became the Benton County Undersheriff, I did not know him well. He had been the Jail commander and that was about all I knew. During his time as the undersheriff, he remained mostly in the shadows of our administration. When he became the Sheriff following the previous sheriff's retirement, halfway through the term, no one was surprised. In fact, most of the patrol deputies were anxious and excited to see what positive changes may come.

And, and first the changes were welcomed. Things like new uniforms and some updated equipment were a boost for morale. After some time however, we started to notice some things were occurring that as a deputy, you initially just thought to yourself, "I'd get in trouble if I did something like that." Something like giving his girlfriend a ride-along was not unethical. That said, when it later became a daily ride to and from her job, it started to raise eyebrows. Then, when one of Jackson's now wife's co-workers witnesses Jackson speed away with his lights and sirens going and enquires, she merely tells the co-worker he had a call to go to. When that co-worker then asked a deputy at the sheriff's office about that incident, a little further investigation found that the Sheriff did not respond to a call that day. It was about this time when deputies started noticing more and more incidents like this.

Now, instead of being able to come to what is already a very stressful job, and try to maintain the professionalism and integrity expected of us, we were left wondering what unethical act our Sheriff, whom we represent to the public, was going to commit next. And, we weren't wrong to wonder. Things like driving family members to the airport and stopping by a deputy's house on the way home to look at a boat for sale, while driving his company vehicle. Things like being seen in Safeway on a Sunday, holding hands with his girlfriend while grocery shopping, having traveled there in his company vehicle.

Why do I mention these incidents? I mention them because my former co-workers won't. And, I don't blame them. In fact, if I had it to do all over again, I don't know honestly if I could go through what the last two years have been like for my family and I again.

The unethical, immoral and frankly, shameful actions that had now become the norm by the Benton County Sheriff, had also become the subject matter for what was now a running joke. This was the case for more than one reason. First, the Sheriff had now stopped working full work days, and full work weeks. As a swing shift deputy, arriving at 3:45 PM for my shift at 4:00 PM, I would go months without seeing the sheriff. This would mean he would have to have been at the office by 6:00 AM. If that was the case, the graveyard deputies would see him, but they didn't.

Second, it was now known that he had purchased a house in Waldport. I personally overheard him joking with members of his administration about driving a Prius to and from Waldport and how it would still do 70 mph on highway 34.

Again, why do I mention this? I mention these things because several deputies had finally had enough. But, what do we do? Do we tell the commissioners? Do we go to the newspaper? Our fears, and rightfully so we later found out, were that the retaliation would cost us our jobs. One co-worker thought the best way to protect our community would simply be to run against Scott Jackson for the Sheriff's seat.

That co-worker then developed an exploratory committee to research the possibilities of both running a successful campaign and unseating an incumbent Sheriff. However, he later decided not to run for the position and dissolved his campaign.

Months later, someone told Scott Jackson there was a group of union members planning a vote of no confidence against him within the deputy sheriff's association. The deputy who had planned a campaign against Jackson and the union president were placed on paid administrative leave and an internal investigation was launched.

The Patrol Commander, Captain Don Rogers sent D.A. John Haroldson an email stating there were Brady vs. Maryland implications about several deputies. My name was mentioned in this email and that I was planning on bringing the vote of no confidence against Jackson. By the time this email was sent, the union meeting I was alleged to be planning to raise this vote of no confidence at, had come and gone. Not only that, I did not even attend that meeting. Did that keep Don Rogers from telling the DA I was planning on bring a vote of no confidence against the sheriff? No. Not only that, even if I had planned on raising the vote of no confidence against the sheriff, it is not only my right to do so, as a union member, no such action holds any implication of wrongdoing nor does it pertain to Brady vs. Maryland caselaw.

I was later interviewed as a witness in the internal investigation. I was then called a liar and placed on paid administrative leave myself, so that a new internal investigation into my truthfulness could be investigated. I prevailed in that investigation and was returned to work.

During that investigation however, Don Rogers openly lied in his memorandum outlining his investigation into my conduct, directly misrepresenting my, my attorney's and his own recorded statements.

Six months later, following an investigation and the arrest of a juvenile male, I was again placed under internal investigation. This time, for conducting a poor investigation in making a good faith arrest. I was ultimately terminated from my employment by Scott Jackson. I had just gone from having no discipline action against me in over 10 years, to being investigated internally twice in 6 months, to being terminated.

I fought. I took my case all the way through the process to arbitration. The arbitrator agreed and I was returned to work, receiving the arbitration decision one year and one day after I had been fired by Scott Jackson.

Through this process, starting before I was terminated and continuing through my return to employment, I tried to jump through the hoops. I tried to blow the whistle. I plead to the Department of Public Safety Standards and Training. I plead to the Benton County Commissioners, I plead to the Benton County Elections Office, I plead to the Secretary of State's Office. How is it, that someone who has devoted half of a career to doing the right thing, helping victims be heard, cannot himself be heard. How is it that someone can have evidence to show the downright criminal wrongdoing by someone who is supposed to be held to a higher standard, and go unheard?

Scott Jackson made an example of me. He showed that, as an elected official in a small county in Oregon, he is untouchable. I have a fear, not for the citizens of Benton County, they will be protected by the outstanding Deputies at the Benton County Sheriff's Office, because they are where the rubber meets the road. My fear is for those deputies themselves. They, have been shown that though they are expected to go out and catch the bad guys, that if the bad guy is Sheriff Scott Jackson and his Captain Don Rogers, then they will be put through hell and be forced to defend themselves from a severe disadvantage.

I won. I persevered. I was right. They were wrong to do what they did to me. I settled my federal lawsuit against them out of court and left the Benton County Sheriff's Office. How is it that I don't feel like a winner? I won't get the years taken off my life by the stress I was put through. My family won't get the hours upon hours without their father and husband while he was preparing to defend himself against these people. Benton County residents and any other resident in this State and Country, deserve a better accountability in their elected officials.

Sincerely, Eric Konzelman