

A DEATH IN ST. AUGUSTINE

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**WHAT CAN HAPPEN WHEN THE POLICE
FACE THE POSSIBILITY OF DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE IN THEIR OWN RANKS?**

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On the night she broke up with her police officer boyfriend, 24-year-old Michelle O'Connell was found dead from a gunshot wound in her mouth. Next to her was her boyfriend's semi-automatic service pistol. The local sheriff's investigation concluded it was a suicide—but was it?

In *A Death in St. Augustine*, FRONTLINE and *The New York Times* investigate the death of this young, single mother in Florida—and how effectively police handle cases involving their own officers, especially when there are allegations of domestic violence.

As part of the nine-month investigation, FRONTLINE and *The New York Times* reviewed police, medical, and legal records, interviewed dozens of people connected to the case, and consulted with independent forensic and law enforcement experts who found significant problems with the investigation and conclusions of the local medical examiners and St. Johns County Sheriff's Office.

Through the lens of this complex case, *A Death in St. Augustine* reports on what law enforcement experts say is a vexing and under-reported national problem: officer-involved domestic violence, which is compounded by the lack of a central, national collection agency to track complaints. Using police disciplinary records and its own survey of police practices nationally, *The New York Times* and FRONTLINE examine how police departments handle allegations of officer-involved domestic violence within their own ranks.

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FRONTLINE

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Photos: Courtesy of Patty O'Connell (Michelle O'Connell and daughter); Nagel Photography (front background); rangizzz for shutterstock.com (photo edges, front)



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