



## THE BLUE FAMILY TREE

**Newsletter article February, 2020**

I've hit that 20 year mark. I'm a little nostalgic about it, not gonna lie. When I began, this was my bench mark. Can I make 20 years? Now here I am... with 15 to go. I have had a pretty typical LEO experience. I did a half a career with a couple other agencies before settling down. It's been a great run. When I look back from my first FTO to my last week, I know I have made a difference in my community. I know I have saved lives. I know I have changed paths for people making poor decisions. I know the world is better because of my contribution. There is no 20 year cop out there who would disagree. But my job isn't done, it's just changing. In addition to my police duties, I am the founder of a non-profit that supports families of our fallen brothers and sisters, and is dedicated to keeping officers off that list in the first place through officer survival classes and articles like this one. Keeping a conscious mind about our own safety is absolutely paramount.

I often wonder what would happen if I died on duty and how would that affect The Blue Family Tree? I'm sure we all wonder what it would be like. It's natural, to some extent, to project the possibility forward and play it out in your mind, but I preach to cops around the country about officer safety. I actively work everyday to make officers think about their decisions and how it impacts what they do each day, but I still do the job myself and I am not immune to the possibilities.

This last week I was first on scene to a shooting that just occurred with two victims down and the shooter fleeing on foot. As I entered the area, I was trying to think tactically. I was trying to get the best information I could from dispatch and set units behind me up for the best response, all while thinking about suspect apprehension and public safety. But I had an added pressure on my mind. What happens if the guy who teaches officers safety makes a fatal mistake? I have got to be extra vigilant for all of you. I can't pass on duty. But I quickly made this realization. It's still my job too. I take calculated risks. "Calculated" means there is still a risk. We sometimes die despite our best efforts. Maybe, like last week, we are too close in our response time and we do not have all the information we need. Maybe we have gotten bad information and set up our response from the wrong direction. Maybe a car blows a red light and hits us. And maybe the life of an innocent civilian hangs in the balance of fractions of seconds and we make the conscious decision to trade our for theirs.

The point is we could be the most tactical cop on our agency, and we will still lose. It's a calculated risk. Everyday we must decide what level of risk to the safety of our community is worth our lives in exchange. The majority of the time, we will decide it is worth it. That's who we are. That's what sets us apart from the rest of society. We don't rush into unknown life threatening situations for an hourly wage. No one ever would. We do it because we think the risk is worth it.

But who is paying that price? Us? Our agencies? Our families? I am not here to tell you not to take that calculated risk. I do it myself. We wouldn't be the police if we didn't put the community's safety ahead of our own. I am asking you not to take foolish or uncalculated risk. As long as police exist, losses will occur. My wish for you is that you don't pass without calculating the risk first. Never throw caution to the wind. We are too advanced in technologies and tactics to allow ourselves to respond without thought. Pay attention to what is happening in front of you right now. If it's your driving response, make sure you are focused on arriving safely. If it's your firearms training, be sure you are using it as you've been taught. If it's your arrest tactics, be in the moment with your suspect and recognize cues of looming danger. Never don't respond out of fear of losing your life, but always be aware of the risk and weigh it against the risk to the community.

We are the community's peace keepers. Without us, chaos would ensue. We have a job to do, and we are expected to do it to the end of our lives. Make sure that if you take it to that extreme, the exchange is worth it.