



THE BLUE FAMILY TREE

Newsletter article May, 2023

When we become police officers we have some idea of the risk we are inheriting. We have seen news reports of officers killed in the line of duty. Maybe we have stood on the sidewalk with the masses supporting our own local department as the procession passes by. In some cases we may have known a fallen officer personally. It's not unusual, even, for a child of a fallen officer to later fill the ranks themselves. Depending on your own personal experiences leading up to your decision to join the force, you will have a greater or lesser understanding and appreciation for this aspect of the job. I suspect mine was like most. I had heard of officers dying on duty. I had seen some fairly intense news coverage of horrible events and found myself appalled that such evil exists. A large factor in my decision to become a police officer was to honor the sacrifice of officers who gave all, and continue the fight. To my 20 year old self the sentiment was a somber and honorable one. In hindsight it was romanticizing the job and glamorizing death. We die heroes. Who doesn't want that for themselves?

After shrouding my shiny new badge for the first time ever, I promised myself I would never forget the names and the stories of each officer that led me to neatly trimming a two inch strip of electrical tape, and pressing it onto the face of my shield. Five years, and nine shrouds later, I was already struggling to remember them all. I set a more realistic goal. I decided when removing the shroud at the the beginning of my shift, I would put each officer's two inch strip of black tape on the inside of my locker door. I may not remember them all by name as time went on, but I would have a visual representation of their lives and the sacrifice they

made. 23 years later the donning and doffing of more than 66 shrouds has passed. I do not have 66 strips of tape on my locker door.

There came a time when the visual representation no longer served to remember them or promote my own officer safety, but instead became depressing and overwhelming. The tradition ended. The romance and glamour of what we do was wearing off and the reality of the unfair risks and real life scenarios we did not ask to be thrust upon us was setting in.

It did, however, remain a priority for me to remember, honor, and learn from those that went before me. I made it a priority in my career to do all three of those things and allowed myself to consider honoring them and remembering them accomplished if I learned from them. I read the Officer Down Memorial Page every time a name is added. I have since before the inception of The Blue Family Tree. I take a moment to study the incident in which they passed. I take a breath and think about their families and what they must be going through right now. I then reflect on my own experiences and plug their incidents into my life. I try to imagine what could have been done differently. It's training through self reflection, without having suffered the experience directly.

This month, I was fortunate to be selected by my organization to receive a special wrap for my patrol car honoring the 30 members of my organization that have passed since its inception in 1935. It has provided me opportunities to speak to officers about the importance of remembering as well as raising awareness amongst the community. If we really wish to reduce line of duty death, then the way our community thinks of our jobs needs to be a big part of that. I understand we may not touch the hearts of a would be cop murderer, but we can affect the thought process of the community in large as they pass us on the road. We can teach them to look out for us and not just pass us by. We can remind them of the words of Robert Peel that the police are the community and the community are the police. While we wear the badge and gun and collect a check for our service to the community, they too

can help us when our lives demand it. Some of the greatest stories to hear are about citizens lending a hand and saving an officer's life.

Each May we pause as an industry and honor our fallen brothers and sisters. Then, mainly for the purpose of our own mental health, we put our heads back in the sand and carry on. I would ask that for your own survival, and so that you may play a role in your partners survival too, you keep your head out of the preverbal sand box and take the time to remember, honor, and learn from each of our friends, at the time of their passing as well as the celebration of their lives and our profession each May.

[READ MORE ARTICLES](#)

[HOME](#)