

“Virginia Law Enforcement: A Commitment to Community.”

“With regret, the Police Department announces the deaths of Rodney Poccaschi. Rodney died on Monday June 23, 2003 at 4:05 am of multiple gunshot wounds.” As I heard these words, I stopped, tears filled my eyes, and my heart sank in my chest. I listen more intently and discover Rodney left behind a wife, Maria and a nine-month-old son Carson. Last Sunday was Father’s Day. I had treated my Dad to dinner out, and he opened a few gifts but had I really stopped to appreciate how very lucky I am, and how quickly it all can change. Then my thoughts went to Carson.

I have always known about crime and the extreme danger that police officers place themselves, but I had never allowed myself to concentrate on the officer. Now I could think of nothing more. Maybe because I am at a cross roads in my life, but somehow it seemed important that I really try to understand why would someone who loves life, his wife and children put himself in such grave danger to protect strangers? I have always heard that it takes a special type of individual to be a police officer. Where do they find that strength?

The answer I was looking for came as I watched the television coverage. The large number of police officers who dropped their plans, and came to pay their respect for a fellow officer who had lost his life in the line of duty was impressive. This type of



response is what family does when there is a tragedy in the family. That is when it hit me, fellow police officers are a second family, and the people that he risks his life for are not strangers, just people who are in need. It is truly a calling to a life of service and it is that calling that binds these individuals together in a way that most of us will never honestly understand. The promise I made to myself that day was to never take for granted those who do risk their lives for all of us, and when given the chance I would make sure to say thank you whenever possible. Perhaps that is why I am writing this essay.

The State of Virginia has a wonderful group of dedicated professional police and sheriffs and I consider myself very fortunate to live here. There is no doubt that these individuals have a broad concept of what community is, and they are not bound by the idea of only helping those that they know. Their community is global and they will go wherever the need exist. Their dedication to the community is not just a job; it is part of who they are. Their high level of compassion and dedication to their fellow man is what gives these individuals the ability to put themselves in harms way to protect a stranger.

Another aspect of the police and sheriff group that demonstrates their commitment to community is the way that they take care of their own. When Rodney died, the other officers do not forget his family. If anything the commitment to that family is even stronger. This can be seen throughout Virginia. The officers who help the widow with home repairs or lawn moving, or the one designing a coin to sell to raise money for the expenses that the family will incur all live the phrase "commitment to community". They do not just give lip service to the phrase.

While it is easy to feel moved when a tragedy happens, these individuals do everyday mundane things that make Virginia a better place to live also. The police

officers who go into the schools and teach young people about the dangers of drugs, and alcohol, or the ones lecturing young kids about staying safe with McGruff, or the officers who talk to teens about drinking and driving, all these have a collective effect of making our community a better, safer place to live.

It can be argued that many different professions make the community a safer place to live, from those who provide us with safe drinking water, to those who repair our highways. What establishes law enforcement as a class above the rest is the real possibility that their job may lead to the ultimate sacrifice. Yet these officers continue to serve our communities with honor and pride. Virginia indeed, the world community is truly a better place, because of the service of these law enforcement officers.