

One Of Blue's Toughest Jobs

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Cops are not supposed to cry. They can't. If they did, they might be considered, God forbid, human. Dealing with death as a law enforcement officer has far more implications than most would believe, especially for the deputy or officer giving a death notification. It's a part of the job no one volunteers for. It's a part of the job few are ever ready for. It's a part of the job that causes more tears than anyone can ever imagine, than anyone has ever seen. These tears are kept tucked away somewhere in the tough part of their heart. They are tears which never dry and never go away, yet they remain as a life-

long memory.

As a former homicide detective, I despised, hated and dreaded every death notification that came my way. I simply disliked the fact I had to be the one to face the sadness, the sorrow and the questions, only one of which God could answer. Why? For a while, I questioned if this was punishment for something I had done wrong. But for some unknown reason, I think it was one of those strange callings for me. Teaching others, formally and informally, about the importance of delivering a death notification has managed to grip me. The funny part is, I don't know whom to thank or cuss out, the Grim Reaper or God.

Many years ago, I was invited as a guest speaker to one of our county's hospice centers. My audience consisted of husbands, wives,

mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers who had all lost a family member because of a homicide. My purpose was to enlighten the listeners about what it was like to be the law enforcement officer delivering a death notification. During these sessions, I would typically share the emotions I had experienced, the reactions I had witnessed and my personal philosophy on how death notifications should be performed. This would send everyone into a tearful flashback, causing the tissue box to make its way around the room.

What is confirmed each time I talked before these hospice groups is the lifelong impression a death notification left. It's a deep and penetrating scar that never heals. Never! As weird as it may seem, many cops, me included, almost feel respon-

sible for inflicting such a wound. Though that officer wasn't the cruel monster who pulled the trigger, they were the messenger who faced the victim and triggered the devastating reaction. Inevitably, each person in the group would tell the story of their notification. Some were sheer horror stories, while others were passionate, sincere moments they are still deeply grateful for. It's hard to imagine, but after most death notifications, someone on the receiving end would say "thank you" while offering a tearful hug. This is part of a law enforcement officer's job that the public rarely considers. God bless the men and women who perform this vital, life-altering function every day.

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