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**In the Line of Duty**

**REFLECTIONS FROM NATIONAL POLICE WEEK  
by Craig W. Floyd**

Thousands of police officers on motorcycles had just completed the 2003 “Law Ride” to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial. It was Sunday, May 11, and this was the official kickoff event for National Police Week.

After the speeches were done and most of the motorcyclists had left, I did what I love to do best during this special time of year—I walked the Memorial walls. A number of personal mementos had already been placed: framed newspaper clippings, photographs, a note to “Daddy” from a young child, police patches, and other poignant reminders of the 16,000 fallen heroes honored there.

Even more special than the mementos I saw were the people I met. A group of police officers from Atlanta were there. They introduced me to the husband of Sherry Lyons-Williams, the first and only female Atlanta officer to be killed in the line of duty. I remembered the story. On April 4, 2001, Officer Lyons-Williams was shot and killed during a drug raid.

A few moments later I passed a family sitting on the bench across from the east wall of names. I did not want to interrupt their reflective moment so I walked on by with only a nod. One of the women in the group came up to me, though, and introduced herself. She was the mother of Michael Nickerson, a Centreville (MD) police officer who was shot and killed on February 13, 2001, along with Queen Anne's (MD) Deputy Jason Schwenz. The two officers had been responding to a loud music complaint when the culprit opened fire on them. In a strange coincidence, especially considering the thousands of people who visit the Memorial during National Police Week, I had met Michael's brother after the Law Ride event the previous year. Like so many other police survivors, the Memorial was where they wanted and needed to be during National Police Week.

As I continued my walk around the Memorial grounds I had another chance meeting that I will remember for a lifetime—one of those memories that sends a chill down your spine. The man's name was John Lesemann. He told me that in 1991, when the Memorial was dedicated, he was a police officer with Brick Township (NJ). He attended the dedication ceremony and was one of 128 officers selected to formally unveil the Memorial walls. His job was to pull the blue drape off of panel 32 west. After he performed his duty, he kept his piece of blue cloth as a cherished souvenir of the experience, folding it and putting it in a special place in his home. "The Memorial," he said, "was a very special place for me." It became even more special nine years later. That is when John's son, John "J.J." Lesemann was added to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial. Only 21 years old at the time, and following in his

father's footsteps at the Brick Township Police Department, J.J. died during a training exercise on August 30, 1999.

It was an emotional moment and it was a story I would repeat over and over that week as a powerful example of the Memorial's growing importance. In fact, to emphasize the Memorial's special place in his life, John ended our conversation by rolling up the sleeve of his shirt and displaying a full-color tattoo of the Memorial shield and rose logo on his arm.

Similar experiences would occur for me and others on the Memorial Fund staff throughout the week. On the evening of the candlelight vigil I met at the Memorial Visitors Center with Diane O'Grady and her son, Ed, a graduate of the Naval Academy and now a lieutenant and helicopter pilot in the United States Navy. I had met Diane and her son many years earlier when young "Eddie" was just 15 years old and had joined a group of New York police officers in a 300-mile run to Washington, D.C. from Nyack, New York to raise money and awareness to help build the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial. The run was in honor of Eddie's father, Sergeant Edward J. O'Grady Jr., and another Nyack officer, Waverly L. Brown, who were both shot and killed during a Brink's armored car robbery on October 20, 1981.

Now, more than 20 years later, Diane and Ed had come to Washington for the candlelight vigil, but also to ask for help. Joining me for the meeting was my former boss and mentor, U.S. Rep. Mario Biaggi (Ret.), the founder of the National Law

Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund. Now 85 years old, Congressman Biaggi returns each and every year for the candlelight vigil—another wonderful Police Week highlight for me and many others. The Congressman and I listened to Diane tell us that one of her husband’s killers, Kathy Boudin, a self-proclaimed revolutionary, was up for parole. Diane wanted help from the Memorial Fund to get the word out and keep a convicted cop killer behind bars. Diane emphasized that while it may appear she wanted vengeance, “We only want justice.” We pledged our support and had a very special visit with old friends.

Lisa Travis, my executive assistant, went a step further. She made arrangements for Ed to attend the May 15 “Peace Officers Memorial Day” service at the U.S. Capitol. President Bush spoke that day and afterwards met with some of the survivors. Lieutenant Ed O’Grady, beaming in his Navy whites, had a chance to shake the President’s hand. He said, “Sir, I am a survivor and a Navy Lieutenant. I am proud to be here.” President Bush replied, “Son, your Mom is proud of you, your Dad is proud of you, and I am proud of you. Keep the faith.”

Ed also brought some good news of his own that day. Kathy Boudin had been denied parole on May 14, but another hearing was scheduled for August.

On Monday, May 12, Mary Ellen Barringer, our director of major gifts, greeted a woman at the Visitors Center named Rita Rice. She held a black and white photo in her hand of her mother, Alice Moran, a Josephine County (OR) matron who was killed in the

line of duty on November 17, 1971. Rita talked a little more about her mother and then she paused for a moment with tears in her eyes and said, “My husband is going on the wall this year.” Ironically, both Rita’s mother and husband, Deputy Thomas E. Rice, worked for the Josephine County Sheriff’s Office, and both were killed in aircraft accidents more than 30 years apart.

Later in the week, after the ceremonies and grief counseling sessions were over, Rita returned to the Visitors Center and told Mary Ellen that she was glad she had come. Rita commented that when her mom died in 1971, there was no Memorial, no survivors’ support group, and no ceremonies in our Nation’s Capital. She said that all of the support she had received during the week was very comforting.

Rita’s comments were echoed by many others, including the family of Theodore R. Zorsky, an officer with the Village of Key Biscayne (FL) Police Department. Officer Zorsky died after an automobile accident while on duty on January 8, 2002. His family attended the candlelight vigil and other National Police Week activities. They wrote to us afterward, saying, “It was our first trip to the Memorial and the candlelight vigil. It was the most amazing thing we have ever experienced. We will definitely be there next year. Words cannot express how overwhelmed we were with all the support we were getting from your organization and [the many others] involved.”

As we work to prepare for next year's Police Week, and travel the country to generate support for the National Law Enforcement Museum we are building, those are the stories and comments that will inspire and energize us.

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*Craig W. Floyd is chairman of the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund. Visit [www.nleomf.com](http://www.nleomf.com) for more information about law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty.*