

“Maryland Law Enforcement: A Commitment to Community”

By: Caitlin M. Wilson

The horrible images of that day will forever linger in my mind. I remember watching the buildings plummet into a heap of anguish and dust, greedily taking with them the verve that illuminates so many people. I remember watching fellow souls depart as people jumped from the building windows out of desperation. I remember people running through the street in the attempt to escape suffocating ashes and dust. Most of all however, I remember the people that were there after all the dust had settled and the destruction was revealed; the police officers and rescue workers.

I was only 13 years old when the September 11 attacks took place. I was at a young and naïve stage in my life. However, on that day I finally began to realize the vulnerability that exists everywhere; within everyone and everything. It initiated my individual growth as a person and I became truly thankful for those persons who are so much greater than myself. I began to reflect on all of the influence that police officers have had on my life, and what a difference they make everyday.

As a whole, I think I can say that it is not often people here within Maryland sit back to thank police officers for all of the positive influence they have on the community. The first interaction I had with a police officer on duty was when my father got a minor speeding ticket with my brother and me in the car. My brother and I were young at the time and although my dad seemed annoyed with the fine the officer had given him, my brother leaned over and said “Hi!” in his high-pitched, eight year old voice. My brother did not view the officer as an enemy, but rather his fellow friend.

That is what police officers are: devoted, caring individuals who have dedicated their lives to serving others and the community. My father deserved that ticket, but it wasn't because he was speeding, it was because the police officer was concerned about the safety of everyone, in and out of the car.

The next time I met a police officer was in sixth grade during the D.A.R.E. drug program. I clearly remember our designated officer, Trooper O'Bryant. He was extremely outgoing and charismatic; you could tell right from the start he loved his job. Everyone instantly took to him, said "No to drugs!" and bought a D.A.R.E. T-shirt making the program an immediate success. However, not only was it successful in drug prevention, it allowed my fellow students and I to develop a close relationship with an officer. I remember one of my incredible artistic friends, Abby, making Trooper O'Bryant a caricature statue in imitation of him. Trooper O'Bryant was so gracious and remarked on what an incredible artist Abby was. On the last day of the program, Trooper O'Bryant presented Abby with a stuffed animal, in appreciation for what she had made him. He was a strong role model and encouraged her to continue with her artistic talents by letting nothing stand in the way and saying "No" to drugs. Next year Abby will be attending a prestigious art college on a generous scholarship.

Police officers are still everywhere within my life, influencing it in the most positive way possible. Trooper Hill still stands up in front of our high school every year and passionately advocates to everyone the harmful effects of drugs. And his efforts are not wasted, nor are any officers'. The constructive mark an officer leaves on society everyday is never without rewards.

One of my close friends' stepfather is a retired policeman. I still remember all of the exciting stories he told me about his days on duty. Once, he gravely told me the story of when he saw a man shoot himself in the head while being pursued. At that moment, grief overwhelmed me. I felt a consuming sadness for the victim and then I began to lament for my friends' stepfather. I never realized the struggle that every officer faces and experiences when simply performing his day-job. Most of us complain about working behind a check-out-counter being bored, while officers watch people throw their lives away everyday to things like drugs. I guess that is what makes police officers different; while I stand back and watch passively, they take action. They seem to do everything within their power to impede the self-destruction of people with such potential.

Anyone who devotes his/her life to the betterment of the community and the people who dwell within it are ten fold the person I am, and I have the utmost respect for such individuals. They are heroes.

And so as I watched the dust clear from the buildings, I saw a piece of humanity lying dissembled on the ground. Then I saw heroes in front of it, ready to step in and begin to reassemble the pieces.