

Will I see my family tonight?

By JSO Officer Ken Jefferson

This is a question police officers ask themselves every day, not knowing what dangers lie on the streets for them. They are men and women who are sworn to protect and serve the many strangers they see every day. And every day when they wake up and prepare for work, there is a constant thought that rings in their minds: "Will I see my family tonight?"

Because of their commitment, dedication, determination [and training], the thought changes to, "I will see my family tonight." It is this kind of inner confidence that allows these officers to speed to homicide scenes, robberies, burglaries in progress and tragic traffic accidents without even thinking about the danger that may be around the corner.

These officers do not look for gratitude or praise; they are not looking for special recognition. You see, this is what they signed up for, knowing that it comes with a hefty price, even if it means having to pay the supreme sacrifice. The secret word is choices. Divorce rates of police officers are astronomical. Some families just don't survive the day-in and day-out pressures that come with being married to a police officer.

Being a police officer really is a calling to serve others in such a way that the officers can make a positive impact on a community and city. These officers are fathers, mothers, sons and daughters who have families who love and worry about them. These family members pray for the peace of the city and most of all for the safety of their loved ones. They worry about getting a visit in the middle of the night from someone telling them their loved one will not be coming home tonight. And they are excited and happy when their officer walks through the door.

Certain people have a dislike for law enforcement officers for various reasons. Some have had a bad experience with police after being stopped for a traffic offense, or

the police may have been called to their home to settle a dispute between husband and wife, and the outcome was not favorable. Or some folks just disagree with or do not like authoritative figures.

The Apostle Paul said it best in his letter to the Romans: "For he is God's servant for your good." (Romans 13:4 Amp.) Police officers exist to enforce the laws of the land to avoid anarchy. Wrongdoers abhor that which is good and opt to do evil and commit crimes. When a person [breaks the law, he may face] severe penalties and consequences when apprehended. Officers are taught and trained to be proficient in protecting themselves and others.

When someone tries to penetrate that protection, officers are trained to stop the threat. They must make split-second decisions as to what their actions should be when they are being physically accosted by someone with a weapon. In a possibly deadly situation, officers do not have the luxury to deliberate over what should be done next. They are spat upon, cursed at, threatened, physically attacked, and, yes, even shot at.

We have had officers shot by suspects with the intent to kill them, yet some say police should not have stopped the very threat to kill them and anyone else in the way. I raise this question: If a law enforcement officer prevented you from becoming the victim of a crime, or prevented you from being killed, would you still have anger and hostility against him? I submit to you that you would not.

Will I see my family tonight? I pray to God that I will.

- From *The Star*, April 2008

(Ken Jefferson is the only Public Information Officer in the state of Florida to receive PIO of the Year for two consecutive years. The award is given by the Florida Law Enforcement Public Information Officers Association. During his many years serving as PIO in Jacksonville, Jefferson had ample opportunity to witness first-hand countless criminal acts resulting in death, injury and loss of property. No one knows more than he the toll crime exacts on everyone involved.)

Shootings...

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patrol officer, a college-educated young person "who wanted to make a difference in the lives of people. I am appalled by the lack of respect so many show police, when they are stopped for breaking the law and know they are guilty. My child has been cursed, spit on, and deals every day with people who are shooting and stabbing each other, abusing their children and otherwise breaking the law.

"These people have no regard whatsoever for human life; juveniles are in court like a revolving door; they're hardened criminals by the time they get in the system. But officers like my child took an oath to uphold the law and feel an obligation to help anyone who needs it. They are someone's son or daughter, husband or wife, mother or father, and they want to go home to their family at the end of their shift."

Judith Chapple, a grieving mother whose 23-year-old daughter was murdered in September 2007, feels very strongly about criticism leveled at the police department. She wrote in her blog: "God bless the men and women who keep us safe. These officers take their lives in their hands every time they even try to give a simple speeding ticket. Like the men and women of the military, it is a thankless job - unless the crime comes close to you or your family.

"The criminals on these streets are NOT throwing rocks; they are shooting real guns, with real bullets. Are the police supposed to say, 'Please don't shoot at me, Mr. Criminal, and allow me to take you

to jail, if you don't mind.' Or 'please put down that semiautomatic gun you just used to put two bullets in the back of the head of that 23-year-old child so you could steal her car, which is, by the way, the only reason I am here to arrest you, sir.'

"Is this the type of exchange [we] expect from our police officers while criminals hold the city hostage? I expect the police to use deadly force when deadly force is being used against them or to protect the life of a citizen. I don't want them to hesitate or even be cautious when they feel they are being threatened. I don't want police on the street second-guessing themselves or their actions. The people who need to think twice are the criminals."

Again - it's all about individual choices!

Attend JSO Citizens Academy

Some groups question police use of force and propose a citizen panel to monitor police activity. The officer's mother who called believes it is every citizen's duty to know what is going on in the community. She says, "If you are going to complain, you should be on the front lines to see what the officers deal with. You can have an opinion about what the news gives you, but it is a totally different story when you are actually out on the street and see what's going on." She highly recommends attending the JSO Citizens Academy to learn about the life of an officer.

City Councilman Stephen Joost wholeheartedly agrees. He says, "I

recently completed an abbreviated version of the JSO Police Academy, and I am very satisfied that the police are being properly trained. They go through real, live situations through the simulator at the driving and shooting centers. They are taught how to track crimes and deploy resources, how to seek peaceful resolution in a conflict, how to keep their eyes on the situation and how to protect themselves.

"Having gone through the Academy, I have a better understanding of the way officers are trained, a better appreciation for them and the professionalism these individuals display. They are people, just like us, who really care about the community, and they want to go home at the end of the day.

"JSO is doing everything it can to teach officers to peacefully resolve potentially violent situations without using deadly force; but, unfortunately, if someone pulls a gun or knife on them, if they won't respond to a command to stop or if they make a quick threatening motion, the officers must make a split-second decision to defend themselves.

"Obviously, we don't want any police shootings, and each one needs to be thoroughly reviewed to ensure proper conduct. No one wants anyone to be shot by police, but at the end of the day, I believe the issue of police-involved shootings is more a reflection of our overall society than it is of our police department."

It's all about an individual's choice!

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Christmas Angels



Merrill Lynch



Once again this year, employees at Merrill Lynch outdid themselves preparing huge food/gift baskets for nearly 30 victims. Employee Services Coordinator Sue Drier says, "As in previous years, Merrill Lynch could not let the holiday season go by without a "Holiday Food Basket" drive for the families under the care of the Justice Coalition. The employees did an excellent job as they donated 29 baskets of all shapes and sizes, filled with goodies to ensure a Happy Holiday Season for those not as fortunate." L. to R. in the picture are: Sue Drier, Holiday Angel Linda Howard, Volunteer Coordinator Yaniv Rubina and Kora Crowder, representing many more wonderful employees.