

Why I Wear the Blue
By: Chatham Police Officer Scott Williams

My first real and meaningful contact with law enforcement was when I was 8 years old. I didn't know it at the time, but this event would greatly influence my career. Several of my friends and I would get off the school bus and walk home. I would get home and be there by myself for a half hour before my parents or older brother arrived home. That day, like most, I approached the front door and unlocked it. I had no idea what I was about ready to walk into.

I entered the house and walked downstairs. I immediately saw broken glass all over the floor along with a large log. I saw our property thrown about and items missing. I knew right away our home had been broken into. But I had no idea if the suspects were still there or not. I froze for a moment and then I ran upstairs and out the front door. I ran to the neighbor's home for help. Later, I learned that my neighbor's house had also been broken into, and the suspects were still inside my neighbor's home when they arrived home. When they heard my neighbors walk in, they ran out the back of their house and fled into the woods.

The Springfield Police Department - Illinois was called to our homes. Personnel from the Crime Scene Unit also responded. Our property and the damage to our home were itemized as part of the police report. The Crime Scene Unit took photographs and processed items inside our home for fingerprints. After the initial report and investigation was complete the police left.

The insurance company was called, and our broken window was boarded up. I remember thinking:

- Why did the suspects choose our home?
- Will they come back?
- Will the suspects be caught?
- Will we get our stuff back?
- In the future, will I not be scared to come home alone?

These feelings didn't feel good at all, and I didn't want anyone else to have to feel the same things.

It was later discovered that while burglarizing our home, the suspects had taken food out of our refrigerator and had stopped to eat in the woods behind our home. My friends and I started searching the woods. I discovered a "piggy bank" lying on the ground that was determined to belong to my neighbor.

The Springfield Police Department's Crime Scene Unit was called back out to the scene. This time, things were calmer, and I remember watching the detective process the items for fingerprints. I remember the detective using a small brush and powder to look for them. The detective told me that no one else has the same fingerprints as I do.

After a time, the feelings of fear went away but my interest in what the police officers and detectives did that day did not. As a matter of fact, it grew.

When I was in high school at Lanphier, I joined the Springfield Police Department's Explorer Post. I also joined the Key Club which helped teach me how rewarding it felt to help others.

After high school, I attended Lincoln Land Community College. I obtained my associate's degree in Law Enforcement Administration. During that time, I worked as a security guard and a private detective.

In 1996, I graduated from the Illinois State Police Academy as a municipal police officer. During my career, I have held both supervisory and non-supervisory positions. I am currently a Patrol Officer for the Chatham Police Department, with the specialty position of Property and Evidence Specialist. I have worked for the Chatham Police Department for over 20 years now, and much of my career has been in forensics and evidence management. I am a certified Crime Scene Investigator and Crash Reconstruction Specialist. I have advanced training, knowledge, and skills in evidence management and various forms of forensics. One of the highlights of my career was when I received the Sons of the American Revolution Law Enforcement Commendation Medal in 2013 for exemplary police service.

I have been a police officer now for 27 years total and I've been asked many times why I do the job. In the past, I have always given a short answer for various reasons. I am now nearing the end of my career and that has caused me to think more about the question of, why do I really do this job? I hope this sheds light on my career and gives others that are in this profession or that are thinking about entering this profession, aspects of the career in law enforcement to contemplate. It has certainly been rewarding.

During my career, I have responded to calls that are as simple as a dog running loose and all the way up to murder investigations. I have watched a human life come into this world, and I have watched human life leave this world. I have been thanked from the bottom of a person's heart, and I have also had people want to do great harm to me. Throughout it all, I have feelings of great happiness in my heart from some of the good interactions I've had with people, but also images of horrible things that no one should ever have to see from some incredibly difficult calls for service. Some of these encounters are burnt into my mind, and I cannot unsee them, no matter how hard I try.

Despite the challenges of this job, I know that I have to go home at the end of my shift, take off the uniform, and leave some of the experiences behind. I want to provide for my family by being a good, caring husband and father. They have to come first when I'm not working.

A career in police work has taught me many things, including:

- In general, most people have good in them. That is not to say monsters don't exist, and there is true evil walking around in this world, too. I have seen that up close and personal on this job, and I have looked it in the eyes.
- Everyone makes mistakes.
- Always tell the truth.
- Treat people like you would like them to treat you.
- Listen more than you speak.
- Be kind to each other.
- Don't take a moment for granted.
- Don't assume.
- Never stop learning. Be open to new ideas.
- Don't judge.

- There is a lot of ability in disability.

There are two ideas that have influenced my career greatly. I believe both ideas have truth in them and must be considered carefully.

- Does a real police officer choose their career, or does it choose them?
- It is better to serve others than one's self?

In the end, is it worth it? Everyone has to answer that question for themselves. My answer is a resounding YES. As a Christian police officer, I want to serve others and I will continue to be there for them when they call for help. Here I am...send me.

I couldn't have done this career without the love and support of my wife and children, and I love them very much.

Yours in service,
Chatham Officer Scott Williams
Badge #020