

LETTER: The Flag Flies at Half Mast

I first learned the significance of a flag flown at half mast at the tender age of 8, when President Kennedy was assassinated. Seeing any flag flying at half its normal height has always reminded me of that sadness, whether the flag is flying outside a government building, fire hall or police station.

Since 2008 when my oldest child became a police officer, a flag at half mast, particularly outside a police station, has taken on new significance. It represents all the fears I have for my son as he carries out his duties.

I watched with pride at both his graduation from the Police Academy, and the presentation of his badge later that year at the Regional Police Centre. I was proud of my son for his hard work and for the dedication he had shown in achieving his goal. However, the speeches by a couple of the senior officers gave me cause to really stop to consider the career my son had chosen.

Although I had tried to reconcile myself to the danger he might face by telling others that there were many other professions of equal or greater danger ? the armed forces, firemen ?even long haul truck drivers ? their speeches made me reflect on situations he would encounter.

What horrors would he face? Would he be first on an accident scene or fire and risk his life to save one of those in danger? How would he face the first time he had to confront the death of a child, or be the police officer to tell someone that their loved one would not be coming home? How would he steel himself for the shock of a gruesome murder scene or a horrific car accident? Tears filled my eyes as I imagined these scenarios.

My hands went cold and a shiver ran down my spine as I imagined him being the first to arrive, drawing his gun, as he entered a dark building with the alarm blaring. Would he be able to protect himself if he had to break up a fight or a domestic situation? Would a routine stop of an automobile result in tragedy? As a mother, the fear, and need to protect my child welled up in me.

But he was not a child, he was a man, and I had to face that I could not protect him. He had chosen to protect me, his family and friends, and all those other people he had never met.

He had chosen to be one of the heroes who serves and protects us every day. He patrols the streets in all kinds of weather ever mindful of his duty to watch for people and situations that might cause danger. He has become one of the many men and women that we rely on to keep us safe.

It has also changed the way I see those I used to think of as symbols of authority. I am more apt to smile at an officer and greet him or her. When a police cruiser whizzes by with the lights flashing I say a little prayer. And, I don't like using the acronym ?Cop? anymore.

And today, when I see the Canadian flag flown at half mast outside our police station, I cry for the families of the latest police officers who have died while on duty. And I cry because I fear for my son and the others who I watched graduate, and for all those who do this job every day. And I pray for their safety?. oh how I pray for their safety?

Angie Carnegie

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