

THE 53

Cmdr. Mary E. Mathias #5025

Columbus Police Memorial Ceremony

May 23, 2014

Since the Division was established in 1816, tens of thousands of men and women have applied to be Columbus Police Officers. Only a small fraction of them were selected and took an oath of office to protect and serve the citizens of Columbus. We are gathered here today to remember and pay tribute to just 53 out of all those thousands.

- **The 53** whose names are engraved on this monument
- **The 53** from whom we can draw strength and courage
- **The 53** who hold a special place in our hearts and in Division history.

We who choose careers in law enforcement do so with the knowledge that our choice will at times put us in harm's way. We come into the job fully aware of the possibility that we could lose our lives in the line of duty. But we also understand that opportunities for the rewards that come with helping people and making a difference are far greater than the chance of tragedy. That is what calls us to this profession. Besides, none of us really think it will happen to us. **The 53** most likely thought the same way. But the awful thing that could only happen to someone else in some other city became reality for them and for their families.

Collectively, they are **The 53** who symbolize the best in us. Individually, they were different people with different personalities and interests but with at least one thing in common. For each of their families, they were **The 1**.

- **The 1** who was their child, their spouse, their parent, their sibling
- **The 1** who was so loved and is so missed
- **The 1** whose full potential was not realized, but of whom they are so proud.

To the family members of **The 53** who are with us today, we know that nothing can restore what you have lost – and you have surely lost the most. We come here with you to celebrate their lives and pledge to you that they are not and will not be forgotten. Yet we know that words and platitudes are of small comfort.

So, if words are not enough and annual ceremonies only last an hour, how can we assure you that **The 53** are not forgotten the other 364 days of the year? How do we fulfill the promise that their deaths will not have been in vain?

People who take jobs in Public Safety want to serve others and protect the public. We want to make a difference and in doing so give purpose to our lives. Most of us accomplish that in some small measure that typically ends when we retire. But the lives of **The 53** have permanent meaning. (Think about that for a minute)

Their lives have permanent meaning.

This monument and the names engraved on it will always be a source of pride and inspiration for every officer in the Division. Whether or not we personally knew any of **The 53**, we respect and honor their sacrifice and admire their courage. And because **their** names are on that wall and ours are not, we have an obligation to continue the mission and to perform our duties in a way that would make them proud.

Today, some of you will point to a specific name and say “he was my son/she was my daughter”, “he was my husband/she was my wife” or “he was my dad/she was my mom”. As years pass by, there will be a time when someone else points to that same name and says “he was my grandpa/she was grandma”, “he was my great grandfather/she was my great grandmother” or “she was my great aunt/he was my great uncle”. (Some of you are already there.) They will have heard the

stories passed down through the family of the wonderful ancestor who was a Columbus Police Officer. And even though they never met the person, they will come here to honor the family's hero they've heard so much about.

There will come a time when no one is left who knew any of **The 53**. But when we say we will never forget, we are also speaking for those who will follow us into this career. The traditions and their meanings will be passed down to future generations of officers and they will carry on. No one alive today knew Cyrus Beebe, the very first name on the monument. But today, he is given the same honor and respect as the most recently added name. And so it will be with each one who follows.

Pictures of **The 53** and the stories of their final acts of service are on permanent display in the Hall of Honor at police headquarters. Every recruit class makes a visit to that hall. Like those of us before them, the recruits learn there. They learn a little about what policing was like decades ago. They learn a little about the individual circumstances of these officers' deaths. And they learn **a lot** about what it means to be a Columbus Police Officer. **The 53** are still teaching and making a difference.

With that kind of legacy, how could anyone ever think that their deaths were in vain?

- **The 53** are owed a debt of gratitude from the citizens they served
- **The 53** have earned the undying respect of other law enforcement officers
- **The 53** will always be Columbus Police Officers and their lives have permanent meaning.