

Good Morning. I would like to begin by thanking Tracy Johnson and the Greater Cleveland Police Officers Memorial Society for the opportunity to speak today.

I am humbled to address so many selfless individuals who willingly put their lives on the line daily so that the rest of us can live in a safe community. Thank you.

It is also a privilege to be with other survivors who understand what the word "Survivor" really means.

This is an event that Andy held dear to his heart, which makes it all that much more of an honor for me.

Today I would like to talk about surviving and also talk about Andy. I hope that you leave with a better understanding of what survivors endure and also feeling that you know my son, as a policeman and a Marine. Today you will meet Andy Ace Nowacki.

When news that someone we love has been killed is delivered, it is devastating, life altering. Our hearts beat differently. The sun does not shine as brightly. The world looks different.

A vital part of our existence has been extinguished.

We think that we are in a bad dream and we will eventually wake up to our old, familiar life.

We do not wake up from that nightmare but, instead, we now have to learn to cope with our "new normal".

As survivors, we have to master how to live with a gaping hole in our lives. At first we can ignore that hole as people who want to help, surround us and we stay very busy.

We return the obligatory phone calls; we write the expected thank you notes, take care of everything else that is entailed in surviving from day to day.

Initially, we live one minute at a time, and then one hour at a time. Some move to one day at a time, and some cannot.

After time passes, there are no longer the daily voices of concern to distract us; there are no longer the casseroles and conversations that filled our days as others return to their own lives. We are now left alone to figure out how we will cope with our changed world; a world

without that someone who was such an integral part of our daily life. Conversation with Andy was as important and nourishing to us as drinking water. How do we go on?

We all seem to take a little bit different path to cope. Some prefer to not talk about their loved one and bury themselves in their daily lives. Some build memorials or visit the cemetery but my way to feel connected to Andy is to talk about him and share stories about his compassion, his humor and his courage.

This annual memorial event gives us a platform to freely talk about our loved ones, validate their existence to those who will pause and listen. Here, we can communicate to others who understand; that are willing to listen to us tell just one more story. I am now going to share some of Andy's story.

Andy was the type of individual that wanted to help people. He wanted to protect and serve so he chose to do that by becoming a policeman. Along with the routine police work, he would stop to help

those that were in need: he would shovel a driveway so that someone could get to a doctor's appointment; pick up stray pets and return them home or to the animal shelter so that they would not get injured; talk to all the kids so that they would understand that a policeman is their friend and not to be feared.

He also believed that as a police officer his role was to educate and not always to punish. I so clearly remember Andy telling me, "Mom, if I stop someone and ask them if they know **why** I stopped them, and they tell the truth, I give them a warning. If they say **no** and play dumb, I write the ticket."

I can attest to this, as there must have been 20 people that approached us after he was killed telling us that Andy stopped them on Route 44 **but did not** give them a ticket! They never forgot him.

Much to the Chief's chagrin, Andy never completed his first ticket book either.

Early in Andy's military career, he was training for 2 weeks with the Marines in California. He called to tell me what had occurred on the previous day.

Outside the base, there were protestors with signs. We have all seen protests similar to this, on TV or in person.

The signs were displaying anti military slogans and the usual "let's make peace, not war" sentiment which angered some of the Marines. Andy at first, was as irritated and upset as his fellow Marines and then he had an illumination that changed the whole situation for him. He announced to his comrades that they had become Marines to protect all Americans **including their right** to protest, to uphold the constitution even when they did not agree with what was being said. That was the reason that they were there, training in a desolate area away from their family and friends.

Andy believed in protecting and serving all the time and was not selective in his duty.

As a Marine, Andy displayed those same traits that made him such a good policeman; the desire to **educate** and to help people while

**keeping them safe.** He was still protecting and serving just in a foreign land and not in Lake County, in a humvee instead of a patrol car; with a 50 caliber machine gun and not a service pistol.

On his first tour in Iraq, Andy volunteered to make runs into town for ice. The people who lived in Nasriyah nicknamed him NOWICKI, The ICE MAN. Little kids wanted to talk to him and insisted that he write his name with a sharpie on their arms. What a sight that must have been- scores of little Iraqi kids running around with Andy Nowacki written on their arms with permanent marker! Their Moms were probably not thrilled either!

He also made friends with the adult Iraqis and would eat in their homes, even when he was not quite sure of what he was eating and did not understand everything that they were trying to say. It did not matter, as Andy was able to speak volumes with his kind attitude and beaming smile, a universal language.

He spent his first tour in Iraq with a lizard in his Humvee who he called Spike. Andy also added a few dogs for good measure and one in particular who followed him everywhere that he named Frank.

Ace also tried his hand at chicken farming: he traded 4 toothbrushes, 4 tubes of toothpaste and a bag of razors for 4 hens and one rooster.

Andy had high hopes for obtaining fresh eggs but chicken farming was apparently not something that he was very good at. All he found were baby chicks and not the eggs that he had been dreaming about!

Ace also impacted his Marine unit- not only was he the unofficial morale officer, the man that would find a way to lighten the mood, make people smile, even when there did not seem to be too much to laugh about but he was also the best gunner in the unit. As slow as he could be to write a ticket, he was lightening fast with his weapon.

Andy would not give up that position of gunner in the lead humvee.

He wanted to protect and serve his brothers, especially those that had families back home. Andy said that they had more to lose.

There is an email that I received the week after Andy was killed from the commanding officer of his battalion.

Col. Smith explained that Marines have a long history of being tough, not showing emotion, not even acknowledging one another in passing. That tradition of stoicism is a form of Marine machismo that Col. Smith had never seen violated, a rigid and inflexible unwritten code of conduct not to be broken...until February 26, 2005 , the day that Andy was killed.

Col Smith was pulled over with his officers, discussing the mission when he heard the approach of the truck unit, "heavy roller" as they were known. This was the truck platoon that Andy was a part of.

Here I will quote what Col Smith said: "At the head of the column was a Marine standing behind his gun in the turret, with the largest smile on his face that you had ever seen, and waving. Waving at every one of our vehicles that he passed at 5 mph as they followed their ground guide to the dismount point. I watched this and knew this was a Marine with a special heart! He was dispensing with the ritual. He had no need for pretension, no need for "badness". He was a Marine comfortable in his own skin, as it were, and among those

that he loved. He was living each day as his last and he did not want to leave any unfinished business". That Marine was Andy Ace Nowacki.

Andy lived every day of his life as if it might be the last. His joy of life and untamed exuberance would elevate those around him to a happier level. His mission in life was to make things better for others by protecting and serving along with making the day brighter.

It is the normal course of things for parents to teach children, bequeath to them their ethics, their wisdom of life. In our case, the opposite has happened: Andy has bequeathed us with his joy of life, his love of people; these are the things that he found valuable in this world not material goods.

We have learned from our son the joy in maintaining strong friendships and making new ones; the unrivaled feeling of peace when you reach out and help someone who needs assistance; an unquestioning loyalty to God, country and the human race. We have

been so very blessed by Andy. My hope is that you in some way will remember Andy "Ace" Nowacki `s story and that he inspires you to reach out and make this world a better place and in doing so, keep his legacy of hope alive. The endowment that has been created in his name at Lakeland Community College has already provided a community with a police officer with Andy's love of service and is now educating two more. Ace's spirit will live on through these fine young people and all others that swear to protect and serve. There will be a tiny bit of Andy in each and everyone of them.

Please take this message of hope to heart and do what you can to make this a better world to live in. Our fallen police heroes will be with you in spirit as you patrol our streets as Andy is with me every day.

Thank you for your patience and indulgence. God bless you all.

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