

## **21<sup>st</sup> Annual Peace Officers ' Memorial Service**

**May 15, 2002**

### **National President Steve Young ' s Memorial Speech**

Today I stand before you with a great burden of responsibility. It ' s the responsibility of one voice to speak for thousands. One heart to connect with millions. One brief moment to tell it all. Law enforcement is a fellowship of honor. A tradition of remembrance. And so we gather at an important time. A time to honor. A time to remember.

For when the men and women of my profession die on duty, the question on every mind is...why? And no matter how often we ask, the answer eludes us. Yet, still in deference to the unseen hand of Providence, we must gather our strength and use the passing of our fallen colleagues to honor officers both here and gone. And no time is more appropriate for such a remembrance than now.

For history will remember what we all know so well. When America was attacked, the first responders wore blue. Of the 233 police officers killed in the line of duty last year, 72 of them were lost in the attack on America. While that day did not define police heroism, it did put it front and center. As we must not forget that in the year we mourned the heroes of September 11, many other heroes fell as well.

The common thread among all these brave officers is not how they died, but rather how they lived. As the families here today can tell us, every officer we lost was special. Listen to their stories, and sense the heartache of the son whose name will be called at graduation...and mom won ' t be there to hear it. Grieve for the daughter who will walk down a wedding aisle alone, or with someone other than her Dad. Feel the anguish of the widow who still wakes at dawn and reaches across the bed hoping—for just a moment—to find her husband quietly sleeping after the midnight shift. These few faint notes make out each family ' s song of sorrow.

Yet our grief does not divide us. The blue fabric of law enforcement is woven tightly together, and never so tight as when one of our own is torn away. The darkness of that loss cannot—and must not—place a shadow on the remembrance of these officers. For these brave individuals will have an eternal shining presence with their loved ones and Americans everywhere. That ' s because the men and women of law enforcement share a common bond behind the badge.

We choose a career on the front line—squaring off against those who do battle with society. We willingly place ourselves in harm ' s way—because that ' s the American way. The tradition of a well-trained police corps risking danger to protect and serve is ingrained in all shades of blue...and brown...green...white or whatever the color of the uniform. Which is why the Fraternal Order of Police supports House Resolution 218 and

its Senate companion bill, S. 2480—the “Law Enforcement Officer’s Safety Act.” At a time when so many of our own have fallen, giving all officers the ability to carry their weapon wherever they go just makes good sense.

Today we act in their name and memory. We humbly gather to speak for those who upheld the law and kept it well. And so we honor...and remember. The Lord surely commends to a very special honor roll our brothers and sisters who acted so unselfishly.

Every street cop who ever broke down a door to answer a scream for help—never to come out alive—is named on that honor roll. Every road deputy who intervened in a deadly situation, only to become its final victim, is named on there. Every officer who ever pinned on a badge at the start of a shift and never came home to take it off is surely named on there. And every one of the officers who answered their last call on September 11 can be found there as well. As are all the officers we honor today. For those who heard the call...For those who answered it selflessly...For those who shall not...cannot...and will not return to us. We honor you. And we remember.