



POLISHING THE BADGE

The Spawn Group, LLC

October 2016

Remembering a Police Officer

Officer Richard Sowa—Atlanta PD

By: Chief/Ret. Mark Spawn

It was 19 years ago in the City of Atlanta, Georgia—Officers Richard “Rick” Sowa and Patricia Cocciolone answered a call of a woman in distress. They found an intoxicated female, the girlfriend of the man who would soon turn on them. The officers escorted the woman to her apartment she shared with her boyfriend. He was inside. Unknown to the officers, the man was armed with an assault rifle loaded with armor-piercing ammunition. Also unknown to the officers was the fact that he had previously expressed hatred toward police. As the officers escorted the woman to the apartment door, she went inside as the boyfriend attempted to slam the door on the officers. Rick held the door to make sure that it was indeed the woman’s residence and that she would be safe. The man grabbed his rifle and went after the officers who retreated for cover. The man fired 15 times using armor-piercing ammunition, striking Rick five times in the back, buttocks and chest, and striking Patricia three times in the arm, head and buttocks.¹ Rick was killed instantly, and Patricia suffered extremely serious

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wounds, including a gunshot wound to the head. Those few seconds forever changed the lives of the officers' many family members, friends, and colleagues, as well as the residents and others in and beyond Atlanta. The officers tried to take cover, but had no time to react, evidenced by the fact that neither officer had an opportunity to draw their firearms.²

I recently asked Officer Sowa's mother, Christine Roth, what she thought Rick would be doing today if he were still here with us. She said, "I think he would have become an FBI agent. He had a friend who he went through the police academy with who went on to the FBI. I am sure that's what Rick wanted to do." She also told me that at Rick's funeral, a woman came up to her to share a story. Christine said, "The woman told me about how Rick came to her home because her young daughter was fearful of ghosts in the house." She continued, "Rick took the time to console her." There were also the ladies from a local doughnut shop that Rick frequented while on patrol who remembered Officer Sowa. Christine chuckled as she told the story because of the police-and-doughnut stereotype, but she fondly remembered how they spoke about her son, telling her that "...he was a very nice young man." Rick's mother also recalled that after the funeral, her daughter, Kim participated in a ride-along with Atlanta PD after the funeral and toured Rick's district. Some of the kids in the area recognized the police car and recalled to Atlanta PD Officer Byne and Kim about how Rick used to stop by and shoot a few hoops with them during his patrol. Rick's mother told me that Rick was always doing good deeds. She said, "He was doing a good deed when he got killed – escorting a drunk girl home... five minutes before the end of his shift."



Officer Richard Sowa
Photo: Atlanta Police Dept.

Did You Know

On average, one law enforcement officer is killed in the line of duty somewhere in the United States every 61 hours. Since the first known line-of-duty death in 1791, more than 20,000 U.S. law enforcement officers have made the ultimate sacrifice.

*National Law
Enforcement Officers
Memorial Fund*

These are just a few of the stories of which we are aware.

The shooting occurred on October 12, 1997. For almost two decades there have been trials, hearings and appeals. On October 3, 2016, the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear the shooter's last appeal, and the execution date was set by the State of Georgia for October 19. As I write this, the execution date is looming. This is not a story about capital punishment. It is a tribute to two police officers who proudly served their community.

Law enforcement can be challenging, rewarding, and dangerous. Cops never know how a person will react, but they have a mental preparedness to be ready for any eventuality. In spite of that, we cannot control certain dynamics, particularly human behavior. For my colleagues in law enforcement, be careful, cautious, and deliberate in everything you do. For the public, please realize that dedicated public servants just like Officers Rick Sowa and Patricia Cocciolone are in your neighborhood. They are tasked with a difficult job. They need your support and cooperation to keep your community safe.

Editorial note: The author has chosen not to identify or refer to the defendant in this crime by name.

¹ Lawler v. Warden; U.S. Court of Appeals 11th Circuit, Case no. 14-12389; 631 Fed. Appx. 905; December 10, 2015.

² Ibid.



Jeanna Spawn



Mark A. Spawn

Who is The Spawn Group?

Hollywood Meets Law Enforcement

Jeanna Spawn is an Executive in Charge of Production in Hollywood. Mark Spawn is a former Chief of Police from upstate New York. Together, they are The Spawn Group. Their projects have included telling the stories of law enforcement—for the police community and for the public. They tell stories of bravery, courage, and compassion. Some of Jeanna's projects have included *Crisis Point*, *Moments of Impact*, and *Most Shocking*—television shows which have showcased inspirational and dramatic stories from real police officers. Mark spent 24 years in law enforcement, including service as a street cop, detective and police chief. He has been a consultant on projects ranging from general policing to sex offender management and harm reduction. Together, Jeanna and Mark have produced several audio and video productions about police officers, officer safety, public health, sex offender management, and more. They have both consulted on television and movie productions, lending their combined experiences for genuine portrayals of the men and women behind the badge. Learn more about them at spawngroup.com.

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