

M.O.S.

March, 1987

Dear John Q. Public:

I am a M.O.S. These three letters stand for "Member of the Service"; a semantic for New York City Police Officer, I am one of a thirty thousand man team which serve the City of New York - 24 hours, each and every day. I am a person like you, born from a mother and a father. I am made of flesh and bones and values and emotions. I am the front line to the public - the lowest rung on the ladder of New York City's finest; the "cop on the beat", the "man in blue". When the going gets tough and the stuff rolls down hill, all of its weight rests upon my shoulders. In light of the recent downgrade and criticism that we, New York City's Finest have unfairly received, I felt compelled to let you know how "We" as "Members of the Service" feel. Using "WE" I represent the 99.9% of our department who are out there every day doing the job right. I write this letter to you today to place you behind my shield, to let you imagine what it could be like, just for one moment to be a M.O.S. I ask you to try to understand me rather than criticize my actions and judgments. If the next time you start to speak to me, you remember what my letter is telling you, I can deem its message successful. I am not saying "WE" are above the law and are always right. I am saying just a little support will encourage us to maintain the pride and honor "WE" try to uphold, serving the City of New York as New York Police Officers.

I am a Member of the Service....

The day I was sworn in, I made a promise to uphold the constitution of the United States, to serve the City of New York, and to protect life and property. I was so caught up in the prestige of being a New York City Police Officer, I could not see the forest through the trees and truly understand the career I was fore taking and all of its endeavors. I acquired a new last name known as "The Cop". I lost most of my friends due to rotating work hours, a bit of jealousy towards what I now represent, and a bit of mistrust because of what my occupation is. Little do they know I am now a second class citizen having to give up some of the rights and freedoms I used to enjoy due to the scope of my employment. I am a M.O.S.....

I entered the Police Academy to train for the endeavors of the street. I learned through the dedication and experience of instructors who knew that when I left the security blanket of the Academy I was on my own, In no way could the training prepare me for the experience I will face in my tenure as a Police Officer. They taught me to perform my duty being governed by the law of New York State, narrowed my performance by obeying the rules and procedures within parameters of the N.Y.P.D. Patrol Guide, and tied my hands with interim orders opposing some rules and procedures dealing with controversial issues. I graduated the Police Academy with a sense of pride and accomplishment. In the back of my mind, I knew that over the next twenty years we all would not make our retirement. Some of us would be hurt, or sick, or quit. Some chosen few would be forced to give up their life in the performance of duty. To quote a caption written on the walls of the Police Academy, "I went forth to serve". I am a M.O.S....

Each and every day, I am forced to temporarily take on other occupations. I become marriage counselor to an arguing couple, a temporary doctor for the sick and injured, a shoulder to cry on for the distressed, or just an information center for a questioning citizen. I am supposed to know all, see all and perform with a smile. I am constantly seeing people in the most negative times in their lives. They call me when they are sick, robbed, lost or in danger. They never call me for happy times. Invite me to their birthday party or backyard barbecue. If I accepted, I would be labeled corrupt. I can never turn my back on them when they call. I must never show fear under the most hazardous situation. I must never cry or show emotion because I am their strength. I must notify them of the death of their loved ones when a tragedy occurs, and I try to console them as I must explain to them they must identify a person they so dearly love - who now lies in a cold and dreary morgue. Deep inside I know the horror they will experience seeing a member of their family being the innocent victim of crime or tragic accident. The sight of a bullet riddled or mangled body of a loved one will scar them emotionally forever. Little do they

know, it will be the highlight of nightmares that will keep me awake in the nights to come. I am a M.O.S.....

I have taken on a job that is like no other, To err is human for everyone else. If I make a mistake it may cost me my life or the lives of brother officers or innocent bystanders under conditions evincing split second decision making..If I make an administrative or procedure error, or forget to wear my hat as I exit my patrol car in pursuit of an armed perpetrator, or am caught smoking in public while in uniform, or just caught conversing with a fellow officer on a neighboring foot post and the conversation is deemed to be unnecessary, I am liable and can be penalized by my Department in the form of a Command Discipline. A command Discipline is feared by all M.O.S. because it means giving up income by forfeiting several hours or several days wages as penance for a minor infraction. I perform my job under an Upper Esculent of Commissioners, Chiefs and Supervisors that have shown to us, they are human also and have made errors too. They forget that they were once an officer patrolling a lonely street at night, doing the same job at a different time. They forget where they have once come from and will not support the split second decision an officer was forced to make in taking a life. Due to political pressure, they would much prefer to appoint a "Special Prosecutor" to investigate the matter; a civilian who plays "Monday morning quarter back". They prefer to hand down an interim order to further narrow down our performance of duty, or transfer us to another precinct so we must relearn of our surrounding thus further inhibiting our policing abilities. They can "pass the buck", and politically run scared, but "WE" know where their heart should be! I am a M.O.S....

I leave for work each day, with the same thought in mind as everyone else, to return home safely to my family. I don't open my eyes in the morning and pre-mediate the idea that I am going to shoot a 65 year old grandmother or take the life of another, because of their race, color or creed. I draw my weapon and butterflies take over my stomach. Under combat conditions, I don't have time to think and aim for an arm or leg as seen in the movies. I point my weapon, squeeze the trigger and pray I will hit an adversary whose intent is to terminate my life because of what represent. My name is not Starksy and my partner in not Hutch. I use my weapon as a defensive tool to stop deadly physical force. If I take a life, I must be subjected to the investigation of my Department and testify in front of a Grand Jury as if I were a wanted felon. I do not plan my tour of duty and the events that are to take place. I take necessary action and hope for the best. I am a M.O.S....

My job allows me to take away the freedom of people who violate the law, but in the same respect I am forced to help the same person who today attempts to harm me. If the person were to request my assistance at a later time, I must still respond. I put on my uniform and become an officer in blue - I have no race. I try never to take action based on the color of your skin, but by the crime you commit. When you try to harm me, I try to understand that it is not me you dislike personally, but what I represent. I counter- punch your actions and am put under a microscopic eye of 10 million New York City residents who have no idea of what it feels like to be put in fear of their life. They don't know me personally, but judge me based on someone else's opinion through critical media coverage and for what I am. I am a M.O.S.....

My career places undue pressures on my family and those who love and care for me. I entertain a job that bares high risk of suicide, alcoholism and divorce. On the job stress shortens my life expectancy to age 58. My family lives in the unending fear that they will say goodbye to me as I leave to begin my tour of duty, never to return home again. They are afraid of the late at night phone all when I am not at home and shiver at the thought of a visit by the Police Department Chaplain's Office to notify them of my passing while in the line of duty. I am a M.O.S.....

The hardest part of my job occurs not when I see the guts and the gore, or pain and suffering of people, or murders, rapes and assaults. It occurs at the end of my tour when I take off my uniform and hang it up in my locker. It occurs when I get in my car and take that long trip home. Now I must block out of my mind the violence and bloodshed and put aside all that I have seen within the last eight hours and thirty five minutes of my tour. Now is the time I must undergo the emotional change of going from Police Officer to a son to my mother and father, a brother to my brothers and sisters. I must now become a husband to a wife that worried and try not to make her the scapegoat of the negatives I have

seen all day. The hardest part of all is I must change to the person my children call "Daddy". I must protect their innocence and slowly introduce them to reality; the world in which I live and not take my job home to them. I am a M.O.S.....

So Mr. Public, the next time you criticize my actions, or spit at me because of what I represent, try to remember the cross I must bare. I must keep the greatest city in the world safe. If in the bottom of your heart, you feel I am not doing a good enough job for you, the next time you or a member of your family are in need of help, please do not dial 911. Please call upon your local gangster, burglar or junkie. See if they can give you better service.

I am a Member of the Service! I drive a company car, but I am underpaid and seldom thanked. My rewards in life are self induced and come from within. Despite the hazards and the pain, the critics and the crime, I know I am what you can never be. I am a very special person. I am a very special person because I have a God-given talent to grin and bare under the most grueling situation, a very special person because....I like this job so much I will be back tomorrow.....

Very Truly Yours,
Det. Louis A. Balestrieri, N.Y.P.D.
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