

RON RYAN JR.

DAZED ST. PAUL MOURNS RYAN ON "LONGEST DAY"

There is little rest for those grieving St. Paul's two dead sons.

Officer Ron Ryan Jr. was buried Tuesday morning, flanked by columns of officers who then assembled a few hours later to view the body of Officer Timothy Jones.

Jones, 36, will be buried today.

"It's depressing," said Police Cmdr. Larry McDonald as he stood in line Tuesday evening at the visitation for Jones. "You're going from just burying one, to a wake, and we're burying one tomorrow. Jesus, when will it end?"

The city's long day of mourning began at 7:30 a.m. when officers under instructions about the limited parking turned away early arrivals at Presentation Church in Maplewood.

"We're with the Ryan family," one woman protested.

"Everyone who came in told us they were friends of the Ryan family," said Officer Mike Schwab.

Eventually the church doors opened to 2,000 of those friends. Bagpipes wailed as an additional 2,000 mourners stood at attention, all of them law enforcement officers. They came from Chicago, from Des Moines, from up North in Polk County – and from Mason City, residence of Guy Harvey Baker, who confessed to shooting both men.

The officers stood in lines eight deep, their faces impassive and bodies at attention. The civilian mourners had no such restrictions. A row of women, all spouses of police officers, stood and locked arms, openly weeping as they watched Ron Ryan's widow, Ann approach the church doors.

The young woman, a bride of little more than a year, took a deep breath, smiled ever so slightly and glanced at the sky.

The service was an attempt to remember Ronnie Ryan's life, not the way he died. And the way he lived was with humor – like the running gag he had with a supervisor who couldn't help but notice how the rookie's uniform buttons were always sparkling.

Somehow, the supervisor always ended up with those buttons on his own uniform. Finally, Ronnie, the rookie brought an extra set of polished buttons to work.

Ryan's record needed no polishing. The young cop earned two commendations in less than a year.

"Ron Ryan, Jr. was one of the best young police officers this department has ever seen," Finney said, his voice breaking. "In just a few short months he made this department very proud."

The procession of squad cars – which stretched for miles – passed along a route lined with neighbors and children, waving flags and holding homemade signs: "God bless officers Ron Ryan and Tim Jones." Men held caps over their hearts; Boy Scouts stood at attention.

Rows of blue guarded the Ryans at the cemetery. The farewell ritual was the same for the officers who filed by the casket – men and women doffed their caps and then brushed fingers or hands along the polished wood.

Ron's survivors found it harder to say farewell.

"I don't want him here," cried Kelly Ryan, Ron Jr.'s mother.

She placed a rose on top of the casket and then hugged the coffin: "He's supposed to be home with Annie. He's not supposed to be here."

An hour later, another somber roll call began.

A thousand friends and colleagues mourned again – this time in two lines outside the Adam Bradshaw Funeral Home, waiting to greet Jones' three sisters and his wife, Roxanne.

"I knew him since he was a fat little kid," said St. Paul Police Sgt. Melvin Carter. "He'd always tell me how much he could bench press and how fast he was."

Jones the kid grew up and became an avid softball player with a killer slam in volleyball, his friends said. As a canine officer, he worked so closely with his dog, Laser that the animal became as aggressive as he.

"He'd been known to stay at crime scenes after other squads leave, waiting with his dog." Bradley said. "Sooner or later the suspect would come out."

Those who hadn't know either officer came to the visitation simply to pay their respects.

"I'm just an ordinary citizen," said one.

Among those at the visitation was Robert Hill, whose East Side home was tear gassed on Friday by police during the search for the suspected killer.

"I just wanted to pay my respects," he said. Jones was shot in Hill's yard.

Bradley and his colleagues were still in shock Tuesday night, trying to save their emotions for Jones' funeral this morning. After that, Bradley said, the private grieving begins.

"I've had a big knot in my stomach ever since last Friday," said Hennepin County Sheriff's Deputy Jim Bayer. "You don't know if it's ever going to end."

By Lisa Grace Lednicer, staff writer
St. Paul Pioneer Press
Wednesday, August 31, 1994

PRIEST BRINGS HEARTFELT PICTURE OF RON RYAN JR. TO LIFE

In the middle of a remarkable day of communal cleansing, a Catholic priest – flip, frank and borderline outrageous – gave to the memorial of a slain young policeman what had not been heard or seen for four days.

He gave the mourners Ron Ryan Jr. in the flesh.

In doing it he edged into shaky ground occasionally visited by club comedians. It was a pretty nervy undertaking. He did it in a solemn requiem mass honoring a man who has become a martyr to the violent times that consumed him and a fellow police officer at ambush. They were murders so mindless and grotesque as to produce solidarity of grief rarely witnessed in these cities.

But the picture he drew of a young Ron Ryan was altogether inviting.

Wisps of humor you expect in a funeral homily. They humanize the departed by exposing a random quirk and wart. But this was a day of gravity that took shared sorrow and carried it into a deeper dimension of unity and dignity. The day itself, gray and drizzly, was melancholy from end to end. The faces of the uniformed officers were taut and respectful and tearful, the family stricken but proud.

And here, to begin his recollection of Ron Ryan Jr. in the midst of solemnity was the Rev. Jack Long, telling the congregation and hundreds of thousands who watched on television that Ronnie would have eaten this up.

Ron Ryan's pals and family might have been ready for that. As a watcher on TV, I admit I wasn't. But the camera at that moment mercifully came in on the young policeman's cop-father, who was nodding his head vigorously in approval of what his son's friend and teacher and free-winged confessor was saying from the pulpit.

It meant that two of the men who knew this young man the best were on the same frequency.

For the average viewer, it might have taken awhile. Jack Long took his reminiscences of Ron Ryan off the top of his head and from the beat of his heart. He took them from a tavern in the University of Minnesota's Dinkytown, where they talked about life and young Ryan's sudden escapes from adolescence into some of the crazier chaos of young adulthood.

He took them from the supper table at the rectory where the will-o'-the-wisp kid unblushingly invited himself "to talk" but actually came to eat. He took them from the class annual at Hill Murray High School where Ron Ryan Jr. popular and brash, vowed to be happy, no matter what. He took them from wild and burlesque swatches of conversation in which the kid announced his full intention to become famous and so rich that he could buy his clothes at Dayton's. The congregation laughed. You probably did the same if you were watching.

Ironically, it made the loss even tougher to take because here was a young guy who must have been a beaut.

Those days collided, Jack Long said wryly, with what he has heard and read in the last few days about the young man wanting to become a cop since childhood. That must have come later, he said. The fact the kid wanted to make money pretty much ruled out a career as a policeman.

Bud it didn't, of course, and the more Jack Long talked the more Ron Ryan became true and palpable, both more and less than the brass plated icon that has been built by well-intended tributes to him.

This one seemed fresher and better. They were chums. They drank beer together and talked, the priest said, about faith and women in the young man's life and about doubts. Some of those doubts the priest brought to the requiem. He tried to put his friend's death into a canvas he could understand and possibly interpret for others. The priest didn't talk about the advancing maturity of Ron Ryan Jr from the finger-snapping adolescent to a man serious about being the best cop he could be, about serving and his young marriage.

He didn't have to. His growth was there in the citations and in his wedding pictures.

But the priest also came to muddle with his conscience. He pumped out his dilemmas and those of some in his audience without pausing much for theology. He wanted to forgive. We're all taught to forgive, presumably to forgive the killer on this day. That was hard for Jack Long. It was hard for anybody. Revenge to him seemed to make as much sense as forgiveness. That should not be a surprise. The dilemma has been there fore evangelists and humanity from the beginning. But he wasn't sure why his church spoke against the death penalty, a thought that might have belonged and might not have, but at least it was in his mind. And then he became the community's Everyman, leading applause for the thousands of law enforcement people who came to mourn Ron Ryan and Tim Jones.

A woman sang "The Lord's Prayer." For all that was revealing and punchy in Jack Long's talk, it was the words and her voice that asserted the reality of this extraordinary day and seemed to bring some kind of reconciliation to it.

The Lord's Prayer speaks not only of faith but also of the frailness of the human being and the human's need for forgiveness and guidance. Those thoughts are nobler than revenge.

But at the same time it was breathtaking to realize that while a wholesome young man lay in a casket in a church and another will today, a few miles away their accused murderer is in the grip of warped delusion about being militarily precise in how to go about killing; how according to this man, he was "taught."

Taught what? Millions of men and women went through the same training. They do not kill police at ambush.

But all of this was part of the emotional and pathological junk that have immersed these cities nearly a week, an astounding week we learned we are closer to each other when, as a French philosopher said we look outward together, in the same direction. Looking outward together here was in grieving for good people who died in service.

The final service that Ron Ryan and Tim Jones performed is the eulogies to them. He was young a police officer said of Ron Ryan, he was at that age where he felt invincible. Nobody is. One way or another we came together, in the presence of those two caskets, to see into our own mortality and to be humbled by it.

When the homilies end and "the story" recedes, we will simply remember that two me died brutally, serving their neighbors.

That's life and that's death, and somehow we're not going to forget Ron Ryan and Tim Jones and what they did for these people, both in life and death.

By Jim Klobuchar
Star Tribune
Wednesday, August 31, 1994