



2004

Fallen Officer Memorial (Officer Down)

lifesize bronze figures

City of Roanoke, VA

Words of Dedication: May 14, 2004

It is my intention that this sculpture, Officer Down, be an eloquent witness to the ministry and kinship demonstrated by Roanoke police officers when one of their number is struck down in the line of duty. May this sculpture be a source of comfort, strength, and inspiration to officers and their families.

It is my desire that this sculpture should be testimony to the ministry and kinship exercised by the Roanoke Police Department toward the citizens of the City of Roanoke. May this sculpture encourage understanding and cooperation between police and citizens.

Finally, it is my hope that this sculpture will be for all of us, officers and citizens alike, a reminder of our common humanity.

So with gratitude to City Council, and special thanks to Captain William Althoff, Lieutenant Keith Sidwell, and Carolina Bronze Foundry, I offer this sculpture to the Roanoke Police Department. May it be a fitting tribute to her fallen officers. And may it stand, for a hundred years and more, a symbol of ministry and kinship.

The Process

Proposals for a Fallen Officer Memorial to be placed at the entrance to the newly completed City of Roanoke (VA) police headquarters, were solicited in the summer of 2001.

The opportunity was attractive, and so I visited the site and talked with the proposal contact, to gather information. Searching for some means of "connecting" with the department and its officers, I asked if an archive of photos was available, and was directed to the City of Roanoke Police Academy, a few blocks away. In the lobby of the Academy was a memorial picture of Officer David Rickman, with a death date of April 12, 1986. A few minutes later I was invited in to see group photos of Academy graduates. Though not very revealing, I nevertheless looked them over with interest, gleaning as much information as I could. While doing this, I almost bumped into an officer standing nearby, who asked if I needed some help. As this was shortly after September 11, 2001, I felt particularly responsible to explain my presence, and mentioned the Officer Rickman picture. To my amazement, the officer, Lieutenant Keith Sidwell, then told me that he had been present with Officer Rickman at the time of the incident. Inviting me back to his office, the officer then related the circumstances of the shooting.

Moved, and grateful, I knew at once that this tragic episode--with the additional awfulness that Officer Rickman was still a rookie--should be the basis of my proposal. Not only did the incident dramatically and authentically encapsulate the danger all patrol officers routinely face, but it demonstrated the feeling of fraternity among officers--male and female. Furthermore, the picture of an officer down on his knees in the act of physically and psychologically assisting a helpless human being conveyed an aspect of police work I became aware from riding with an officer from "Charlie Company" one night a couple of months earlier: police officers are far more than "enforcers of the law"; often, they are simply counselors. For example, I watched Vince Haddox, of "Charlie Company" talk--or listen, more than anything--to a man whose wife had thrown him out of the house and called the police because in a fit of anger he'd broken a table in the dining room. The man wasn't drunk, or angry, just disconsolate about his life, and his marriage, and needed somebody to talk to. And Vince obliged.

I was impressed with Vince's behavior, and knew suddenly that his simple action, and that of other

officers like him, were a vitally important yet largely invisible "community counseling service." So I resolved to convey through the sculpture, as well as I was able, the qualities of "ministry and kinship."



Having found the subject and message for my proposal, I went about creating a 1:12 scale model maquette, not just of the officers, but of the pedestal, adjoining planters, and adjacent sidewalk, so that reviewers could get a good picture of the sculpture in context.

After a couple of meetings with the selection committee, I was chosen for the commission, and after lengthy delays due apparently to budgetary issues, I presented my maquette and proposal to City Council in November, 2002, and these were formally endorsed. After about two months of contract negotiations, I was able to actually begin work in January, 2003. Captain William Althoff was chosen as the department liaison for the project, and I could not be more pleased. Captain Althoff's assistance has been prompt and cooperative on every occasion. I should also like to commend Shelly Alley, spokesperson for departmental Public Relations. Shelly has been most cooperative in setting up "media events" from time to time during the process.

My first step was to arrange to have City of Roanoke Police Officers pose, based upon the maquette, and get these poses photographed from lots of different angles. Diane Goff of Blacksburg, whose work as a photographer I have always greatly admired, agreed to help with this, and so on a hot, sunny day in March of 2003, Diane and I drove into the Roanoke City police compound and set up for the "photo shoot." As Captain Althoff conceded, police officers are not usually the sort to seek attention, and it actually took a bit of coaxing to get them out into the open where, to the accompaniment of some good-natured ribbing, a pair of officers got into position, and Diane began moving around them with her camera, backing up (and even getting on a ladder) to take in the whole scene, and moving in for close-ups of faces and clasped hands. This consumed about four hours in all, as we repeated the process with three pairs of officers. Before leaving, I went up to the Supply Room, where the Supply Sergeant cheerfully fitted me with an official City of Roanoke police uniform, complete with protective vest and belt with holster, ammo pouches, etc. I specifically requested this, as I felt that simply getting into the uniform myself, getting the feel of its weight and stiffness, would give me a truer and deeper appreciation of how officers themselves feel inside their uniforms, for they are hot in summer, and with all the gear weigh upwards of 30 pounds, and significantly affect ease of movement.



About sixty black & white prints were the result of our photo shoot, which I arranged on a slanted tabletop in the studio, for reference while modeling the scale model in plastilene (synthetic oil-based clay). Photography is not simply a record of what we have seen, but a discovery of what we have missed seeing, and so I found that the pair of officers whose pose had seemed at the time to be least convincing, proved in the photo to convey a convincing immediacy. To my shame, I realized that I had overlooked this because, in point of fact, the officer had not seemed to me to be sufficiently "attractive." But the twist of his upper body as he leaned toward the fallen officer was handsome indeed, and this contribution I included in the scale model.



Once these pictures had been arranged and examined, I set about creating a 1/3 life size model. However, I was not satisfied that working from photos was sufficient, and so to ensure that the figures were truly lifelike--more than that, "radiant with human vitality"--I hired models to pose nude, first using a smaller man to pose as the fallen officer, and then a larger, more muscular man as the kneeling officer. Once I had completed the modeling of nude figures, I called upon the Virginia Tech Police Department, asking if officers (in uniform, of course!) might be able to volunteer to pose for me. Chief Debra Duncan graciously agreed to help, and so for a series of 6-8 sessions, VT Police Officers Boggess and Gates kindly assisted. This part of the

process also included a day at the City of Roanoke Police Department, again nicely arranged by Captain Althoff, when Officers Morrison and Scott posed in the meeting room, with other officers stopping by throughout the day to offer comments and suggestions. This was wonderful time for me; in fact, the project as a whole has been a unique opportunity to learn about what it means to be a police officer.

At this point, I transported the 1/3 scale model to Direct Dimensions, in Maryland, for digital scanning. The scan information, which was completed in mid-August, 2003, and then emailed to Kreysler Corporation, which scaled up the three-dimensional digital figures and milled them in #4lb polyurethane foam. In mid-September, the foam models were crated and shipped to my studio. When I opened the crate, I found that each foam model was in several pieces, which I assembled, following the instructions, with wooden dowel rods and over the next few weeks, I built up the dimensions of the foam models by first coating them with three successive layers of liquefied plasteline (brought to this state in a crock pot), and then patiently added further layers by applying #2 plasteline in small squares, quilt fashion. Eventually, I achieved a modeling thickness of at least ¼”, and in places, where I would be modeling deep fabric folds, for example, as thick as 1”. The portrait busts, and the hands, were for most of this time modeled separately.

Beginning on December 16, 2003, I took leave from my job at Virginia Tech to work full time on the models. Previously, in mid-August, I had moved the studio from an area graciously loaned to me by the Virginia Tech Art Department, and in particular, by Dr. Steve Bickley, to the back of the Virginia Tech Natural History Museum, again through the gracious assistance of museum staff, especially Lynn Sharp. Then in November, the building which had housed the museum was sold; fortunately, the new owner, was good enough to allow me to continue working in the temporary studio space I had arranged in the back of the building. However, distressed at the cost of heating the building, and with winter coming on, he shut off the heat, and the lights. The temperature in the building dropped into the thirties, putting an end to any further work on the sculpture. But I devised a makeshift shelter in one corner, and so my good friend, Hemant Yadov and I spent parts of three days rigging a very simple wooden frame draped with plastic and covered in cardboard, with a sheet for a door. With space heaters going, and lights clamped to the 2x4’s, I was back in business, and there, in that womb-like studio, inside the dark, chilly auditorium-sized space (it had been a movie theatre at one time), I spent six wonderful weeks, working full-time every day, in the dead of winter, riding my bicycle from home each day, patiently and painstakingly finishing out the sculpture to the –nth degree. Lord, how I loved that time!



On January 16, 2003, I invited the Blacksburg Regional Art Association to view the completed clay models, and spent a couple of hours talking about the “process”; this was for me a kind of “dress rehearsal,” for the formal review by the Roanoke PD, which took place one day during the week of January 26. Captain Althoff, Sergeant Fazio (who had also been present at the time of the shooting of Officer Rickman) Lieutenant Sidwell, and Shelly Alley stood in silence around the sculpture, and I

knew from this that the sculpture met with their full approval. Most meaningful, for me, was the moment when Lieutenant Sidwell extended his hand to me and said, simply, “thank you.”



On February 1, we loaded the sculpture on a rental truck, and the next morning, I drove it down to Carolina Bronze Foundry, in Seagrove, NC, about 30 minutes south of Greensboro. Naturally, I had had moments of panic and fear contemplating this trip, but all went well, and by the time I turned onto 220 South, for the last stretch, I was singin’!

I received, however, an unexpected shock when, after arriving at Carolina Bronze in a fine humor, I learned from Ed Walker, the owner, that his foundry had been shut down by OSHA regulators!! (Sorry for the double exclamations.) Ed assured me that he would be able to satisfy the demands of the regulators, and I left for home, sobered, but hopeful.



The next three months were anxious ones, as the planned date of unveiling, May 14, drew near, and little progress had been made on the sculpture, due both to continued difficulties with OHSA, and other matters. Really quite concerned that we would not make the unveiling date, and noting the increased anxiety in Captain Althoff's email notes, I spent a couple of weekends at the foundry, in late April, working on the wax positives, to help the process along. This time proved to be most beneficial, as I had the opportunity of really getting to know Ed, and to observe his meticulous and practiced mold-making methods.

When Captain Althoff came down for his review of the casting, and to choose a patina, about two weeks before the unveiling, Ed and his assistant were just at the point of welding the heads on, and it was at this point that I began to feel, with a great sense of relief, that indeed we would be finished on time.

On Monday, May 14, I drove a rental truck down to the foundry and spent the next two days observing the final stages of the casting process, and the steps in the application of the patina. This, too, was wonderful time, when I sketched, took digital pictures, conversed, and not least of all, enjoyed the "Duck Smith House," a wonderful B & B in Seagrove, operated by Sarah Herrick.



Finally, on Wednesday, May 12, I drove back to Blacksburg with the sculpture, and the next morning, drove down to Roanoke, arriving at about 8 am in front of the Police Department. I rolled up the back door of the rental truck for all to see, and to prove that I did indeed have the sculpture! A city work crew was on hand, but Lynchburg crane was delayed, and so I enjoyed the next 30-40 minutes simply in waiting, and watching the sights on Campbell Avenue (the old man, with his helmet on backwards, pedaling his tricycle with extreme slowness up the street). The crane arrived, moved into place, the sculpture was hoisted, positioned on the pedestal, lifted again, adhesive applied, the sculpture set down in place, straps removed, crane driven off—and then I returned home, and to work at Virginia Tech, which was just then involved in Commencement.

The next day, with that Great Lady Margo Sebba, I drove down to Roanoke for the unveiling (my wife Ann drove separately, escorting her parents). The morning was bright and clear, after days of intermittent rain; a horse guard was on hand, and Police Academy Cadets, and City Officials. The ceremony was fine, and moving, and Captain Althoff, recalling the day of the shooting of Officer Rickman, struggled to hold back tears. At last, sons of two Roanoke police officers who had died in the line of duty (one of them Chad Rickman, son of Officer David Rickman), drew back the veil, and a bagpiper played, "Amazing Grace."

May Officer Down remain an eloquent symbol of ministry and kinship for many generations to come!