

**Parents of Murdered Children (POMC) National Conference
Wyndham Milwaukee Airport
Thursday, August 04, 2011**

Good Evening Ladies and Gentlemen, and welcome to Milwaukee County. I extend the regards of over 1300 members of the Milwaukee County Sheriff's Office.

As a lifelong resident of Milwaukee, I expect that if you explore our city's downtown and historic neighborhoods, you'll find that there are few better places to enjoy an American summer than here, on the shoreline of Lake Michigan.

In this, the silver anniversary of your national conference, I am proud to see my hometown join the impressive list of locales, including Philadelphia, Houston, Miami and Chicago, where you have chosen to gather. Your gathering has at its core, both great tragedy and the promise of redemption.

The American poet Wynstan Auden observed that, "Murder is unique in that it abolishes the party it injures, so that society has to take the place of the victim and on their behalf demand atonement or grant forgiveness; it is the one crime in which society has a direct interest."

We have come together tonight as a society of sorts; a group of people who, once strangers, have been bound to each other through immense hardship. An organization built on loss, but divining hope.

As a 33-year cop, this evening is not my first experience with the important work of your organization. My first 24 years were spent with the Milwaukee Police Department, starting when I took my oath of service in 1978.

1978 was the same year in which Robert and Charlotte Hullinger of Cincinnati experienced the same pain, isolation, guilt and seemingly endless grief that so many in this room have felt. The murder of their 19-

year-old daughter, at the hands of one whom they had trusted, set in motion the ponderous, impersonal and seemingly uncaring gears of a justice system that too often seems to value the rights of the accused over the rights of the victim.

But among the many emotions the Hullingers would experience, and which the families of the cherished and lost so often bear, the emotion of helplessness would dissipate. It would be replaced with resolve and the formation of a community that was badly needed. From tragedy would come hope--from helplessness, action.

As is generally the case, it started small. The Hullingers reached out to three other parents whose children had been murdered: A meeting, in a home, where survivors of the wreckage found comfort in each other's presence. And through determination grew a national organization.

Now, over 30 years later, look about you and see what has been built. An organization that is desperately necessary, but that no member would ever seek to join; Parents of Murdered Children has emerged. Over 100,000 members have found solace in its embrace. But in admission, too steep a cost is paid.

A look at the losses borne by the Board of Directors alone reveals the scope of the unceasing grief that exists within the ranks: A brother; a niece; a mother, and a husband. These, and so many more, ripped from the hearts of those hearing my voice tonight.

Recent national headlines would have us believe that violent crime is down; that as a collective, the quality of our lives and our safety is steadily improving. But many enjoy the privilege of misreading the sorrow behind the statistics. Violence is a wicked flame that consumes the best among us.

As strong a voice for an improved society that I have met during my time in office, the great comedian Bill Cosby understood the effect of violence on our culture when he observed that, "The main goal of our

collective future must be to stop violence. Too many, I'm afraid, have grown addicted to it."

As a longtime homicide investigator with the Milwaukee Police Department, I have seen the almost unspeakable results of murder. I have also witnessed the desperate need for the passionate services that your organization provides. Our system of justice, while often successful in levying a requisite toll, is too often hostile and uncaring, and leaves our survivors sensing that they live in a world that blames the victim.

Our criminal justice system embraces criminal perpetrators, and has the audacity to see *them* as victims as well...victims of poverty, racism or some other external force. It sickens me. Take note that none of them are here tonight to witness what has been left behind in the wake of a senseless homicide.

While surviving family members grapple with issues of inadequacy and guilt for not having protected a loved one, our courts offer only unending process. We too often repay suffering with a shocking lack of information. As a detective, I have seen the strain on marriages and family relationships. Murder has many victims, and its impact is carried through generations.

As a senior elected official in law enforcement, I rail against the leniency of a numb judiciary that fails to apply the weight of society until the criminal action becomes horrific. I speak with citizens every week who voice to me a shadowy fear that has caused them to lose faith in our American justice system.

In 1775, in his famous call to "Liberty or Death," Virginia's own Patrick Henry testified to a powerful truth among mankind: "We are apt to shut our eyes against a painful truth, and listen to the song of that siren till she transforms us into beasts." He said that, "For my part, whatever anguish it

may cost, I am willing to know the whole truth; to know the worst, and to provide for it.”

The survivors of murder have known the worst. Their circumstances have forced upon them a knowledge that few can bear, and from under which none emerge unchanged. But instead of receding into a shell of silence and solitude, you have emerged to provide comfort to those who join your regrettably unending line. You take the power of your loss, and turn it into a strength that nourishes others. And in doing so, you nourish yourselves.

As for me, I have always been a man of great faith. But as a man of faith, I am also a man of this world, and of our amazing abilities to affect each other in the Lord’s spirit. We become, each through another, the vessels of our own strength. Through the work of POMC, you take the unimaginably difficult steps toward emotional growth, though shattered by acute grief, toward an altered but still valuable future. In doing so, you have my admiration and gratitude, but more important, my love and my prayers.

I stand before you today as the humble representative of a profession that seeks to apply the power of the state to punish the worst among us. You appear before me as the group that has the greatest reasons in the world to become bitterly withdrawn, but who find the strength not to. In that, you are the stronger force. You become the power that makes me believe that some day, “Not One More Name. Not One More Needless Victim.”

Thank you, and may God continue to bless you and keep watch over you, and ease your continuing pain.