Officer Joseph Brian Gomm

MCF-Stillwater Corrections Officer Joseph Gomm gave the ultimate sacrifice on July 18, 2018 while protecting the citizens of Minnesota. Joseph was a dedicated officer who served with the department for 16 years and cared deeply about others. This has been a devastating time for his family and friends, as well as his Department of Corrections family. We will never be the same without him, but his memory will forever be in our hearts.

Officer Gomm was laid to rest with a full honors service on July 26. More than 3,500 mourners, including correctional staff and peace officers from around the country were in attendance.

Hundreds gathered along the nine-mile procession route from North Heights Lutheran Church in Arden Hills to Roselawn Cemetery in Roseville. Yards, sidewalks, and bridges were filled with people holding American flags and signs. Many of those showing support had their hands over their hearts or saluted to those in the procession.

Buses full of DOC staff from across the state were in attendance, along with honor guard members from across the country, and Canada.

“I can assure you, from the very bottom of my heart, Joe will never be forgotten.”

-Chaplain Martin Shanahan
OVER 3,500 PEOPLE CAME FROM ACROSS THE COUNTRY TO HONOR OUR FALLEN HERO
Love is so complex, that it would take a lifetime to study its characteristics, to study its value, and to study its power. As complex as love may be, I know that love is easy to define. At its essence, love is to will the good of another. That’s it. I’ve seen it played out in Joe all the time. Joe had this way, when I asked him for help, he would always answer with ‘whatever,’ so I never quite knew if he was saying yes to it, or no to it. But then I got to realize that that was Joe’s love language. ‘Whatever’ to Joe was really that—whatever. Whatever you need, Shawn. He was willing my good.

I’ve sat with the family, and I was rocked to the core when we asked what they needed during this time. They said that they need to know that the staff at Stillwater are okay. If they want to come and celebrate Joe’s life with us, surround us and be with Joe, that if they had the opportunity, they would come. In their hurt and in their suffering, they reached out, they were willing our good—they were loving on us. This humble family, making a humble comment, about a humble man, said that Joe wouldn’t want a huge memorial service. I disagree. I think that Joe would’ve said ‘whatever.’ Whatever it would take for you and the community of Stillwater to heal, he would put himself through. Joe’s ‘whatever’ is a lack of limitation. It is forever. That is love.
In the days before his death, Joe Gomm delivered a pair of injured birds to the University of Minnesota Raptor Center after the chicks had fallen out of their nest on prison grounds.

On the last day of his life, Joe emailed the Raptor Center to inquire of the status of the two American kestrels, the smallest and most common type of falcon in North America.

On July 25, the day before Gomm’s memorial service, the two birds were released outside prison grounds as a living tribute to Joe’s heroic legacy.

Officer Gomm Rescues Two Jail Birds

One of the kestrels that Gomm rescued. Photo courtesy of the Raptor Center.

Stillwater staff came together to watch the two birds be released back to the wild (bottom left of photo).
JOE TOUCHED THE LIVES OF SO MANY
He always had a smile, or something funny to say. As the saying goes...

'He was a Good Joe.'

- Officer David Ferguson
I started working with the DOC just a couple of years ago. Being new to the DOC, I was always seeking advice and had so many questions. Gomm (and Joel Ecker) worked in the education bubble and were invaluable to me. I would call them every day, multiple times a day. They would come down to my classroom and chat with me, and they never made me feel anything but confident and supported. A few months into my job, my dad got sick and later passed away. I would often need to come and go, lay in my classes last minute, or call in for a sub. Through it all, I knew the education bubble had my back. Gomm was such a kind and friendly presence, and I was so glad to be able to have him greet me with my keys and radio each morning.

Joe had a great sense of humor. Shortly after I started working at Stillwater, I noticed that his name tag said “Hey CO.” I asked him about it and he replied that it was what he had been called every day by offenders, and that was what he decided his name tag was going to be. He didn’t always have that name tag on him, but every time I saw it, it put a smile on my face.
Joe was taken from us far too soon.

- Sergeant Tom Chronakos
By Sergeant Scott Gary  

When I was asked to share a story about Joe, many came to mind, but the one that always stands out, and I will never forget, shows Joe’s true caring side. Joe knew me well. He not only hung out with my kids and I, he helped us move, shared many laughs, played online video games with me, and was my best friend inside and outside of this institution. He understood “Bro Code” and kept the fact that I was flat broke when going through a terrible divorce and custody battle a secret. He listened as I shared with him how I felt like less of a man and a terrible father to my daughter because I was low on cash and food. He never judged me, but instead on one Christmas Eve, showed up at work early in the morning and caught me in the parking lot. He used discretion when he brought me to his trunk and showed me a giant box filled with meat. There were ribs, steak, hams, chops and ground beef... and tons of it. Joe filled my freezer to the top and would not accept no for an answer. In fact, he stated that he would follow me home if I did not take it, and make me take it from him there. He did not judge me, only wished me a Merry Christmas. We screwed around and had a good time on duty, but had a friendship bond that I will never forget. The world lost a great friend, and a compassionate man. RIP and SEE YOU LATER MY FRIEND, YOU WILL NEVER BE FORGOTTEN. - Your Friend, Scott
CITIZENS LINED THE STREETS
ALONG THE 9-MILE PROCESSION
A horse-drawn caisson carried Gomm’s flag draped casket from the hearse at the cemetery to the burial site where thousands had gathered in his honor. During that portion of the service, bagpipes were played, a gun salute was performed, a helicopter fly-over occurred, and a bell tolled, all in Joe’s honor. An End of Watch tribute was broadcast for all to hear – “Godspeed, Joe, We’ll take it from here.” … “Take care Joe, you’ll never be forgotten.”
When Joe worked in A-shop, he always waited for me to come down from F-shop at lunch and at the end of the day. Joe wasn't the only one to wait for me from A-shop, but what sets him apart from others is that when Joe moved to M & P Shops, he would, more times than not, still wait for me on the sidewalk outside of Building 20 watching to make sure I came out. As I walked up the sidewalk he would say "I'll wait for you, Rob." As many people know, I was usually the last officer out of the buildings and the last one to turn in my keys from the shops. Joe waiting for me meant the world to me, and made me feel safe, and that someone had my back. Joe always looked out for others. I will never have that again and I will miss him standing there waiting for me.

By Officer Robert Cardinal
Joe Gomm and Sgt. Joel Ecker were the officers assigned to the Education Bubble for a couple of years after I came on board as the MCF-Stillwater librarian. They were a good team, and us staff in EDUC knew we were in capable hands with them minding the security in here. They had very similar working styles—on task, a sense of humor, a calm demeanor, firm when necessary, but always focused on maintaining a good rapport with the offenders.

I remember one afternoon a couple of years ago conversing with Joe Gomm in the EDUC hallway. We got to talking about our mutual interest in genealogy and family history. I noted that I had been deeply involved with researching my ancestors for several years. Joe then mentioned that he had traced some of his own family history, and was related to Francis Carr Gomm, who was the administrative chairman of the London Hospital in the late 1800’s. This was the place that took in the severely deformed gentleman named Joseph Merrick, otherwise known as “The Elephant Man.” The dejected Merrick was taken in by the London Hospital, under the watch of Carr Gomm, and after the story of Merrick’s plight was published in the London Times, so many donations came in that Merrick was able to live the rest of his short life in comfort and with adequate medical care.

I thanked Joe for sharing that story with me, and asked him to fill me in as he learned more about his family heritage. It was a delightful conversation, and I was so pleased to have found this shared interest in our ancestors. How I wish we could have talked of it again.

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When I first started doing education orientation, Joe volunteered to come in, every Tuesday morning, and talk to the new education students about the rules of the education department. His presence brought a calm authority to the orientation.

When I began subbing in the classrooms, Joe told me not to hesitate about calling the bubble with any questions or if I needed any help. He repeated this whenever I subbed in a classroom.

One day, to cheer everyone up, Joe put craft google eyes all over; on staplers, the shredding machine, the bathroom signs.

Joe and I liked to talk about food, one of our favorite topics. I said that I had never made a pie crust from scratch. Joe said that he would give me Grandma Gomm’s pie crust recipe if I promised not to give it to anyone. He told me that he hadn’t even given it to his brothers (it’s delicious by the way!).

Joe and Sgt. Ecker bought us sushi platters for lunch one day.

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By Librarian David Coward

By Teaching Assistant Joan Joswiak
We helped each other through dark and troubled times. We enjoyed some pretty great times too. Although Joe was a quiet guy, he touched everyone’s heart who he met. He was loved and respected by many and I cannot begin to express how much I miss him. Even though Joe is gone, his memory will live in all of us. Joe, I appreciate your friendship and I’ll never forget you. May your memory be eternal.

By Sgt. Tom Chronakos (excerpt from the eulogy Chronakos delivered at Joe's funeral)
Special Thanks

Law enforcement and other public service agencies offered their services from all over Minnesota, along with corrections agencies from across the country and Canada. Thank you to all the law enforcement agencies, fire departments, and emergency service organizations that attended and helped with his Service of Remembrance and Celebration of Life. We also thank everyone who came out to honor Joe, and to all the people who sent cards of condolences, donations, and flowers.

Honor Guard Representatives

National Honor Guard of the Correctional Peace Officers Foundation (NHGCPOF)

Minnesota DOC
Oklahoma DOC
Michigan DOC
Delaware DOC
Georgia DOC
Oregon DOC
Vermont DOC
Idaho DOC
Nebraska DCS
Washington DOC
North Carolina DOC
New Jersey DOC
Utah DOC
Wisconsin DOC
North Dakota DOCR
South Dakota DOC
Pennsylvania DOC
Nevada DOC
Texas DCJ
Correctional Service Canada

The photography displayed throughout this memorial was generously donated by LEMA member Lynn Cronquist, Julie Larson from Engage Me Photography, and David Pierini. Photography also provided by DOC staff Jeremy Hermann and Alan Baertschi.