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FAMILY SURVIVORS OF POLICE SUICIDE

One Woman's Courageous Struggle to See Her Husband's Suicide Recognized for What it Was--in the Line of Duty.

Like many departments around the country, the Massachusetts State Police do not recognize police suicide as having been caused by the job. Can't happen, they say.

The job isn't that bad.

In fact, says Janice McCarthy, the survivor of a police suicide, they don't even recognize PTSD as a work related injury for state troopers. "Can't happen," they say.

The job isn't that stressful.

But Janice McCarthy isn't one to take "No" for an answer. Not when it comes to the memory of her husband, Captain Paul McCarthy, and how her children will remember this dedicated, 21-year trooper in the years to come. Janice is fighting to have a bill passed through the Massachusetts State legislature declaring her husband's suicide a "Line of Duty Death." To her, it's a question of honor, something that is supposedly high on the list in the ranks of law enforcement.

Nor is she stopping there. Once done, she's heading to the National Law Enforcement Officer's Memorial Fund (NLEOMF) to ask that this line of duty death be placed on the memorial wall.

None of that will be easy. Janice McCarthy isn't doing this for her own family alone—she's doing it to set the record straight for the many other families across the country that have lost loved ones to the terrible trauma of the law enforcement life and suicide.

This is the story of a dedicated State Trooper whose greatest sin was that he overcame his physical injuries from a horrendous on-duty accident and, after two years of surgeries and painful therapy, courageously met all the requirements to return to the job. Although he overcame his physical injuries each time, his department resisted his efforts to receive adequate psychotherapy for the one thing that would ultimately cost him his life--his PTSD.

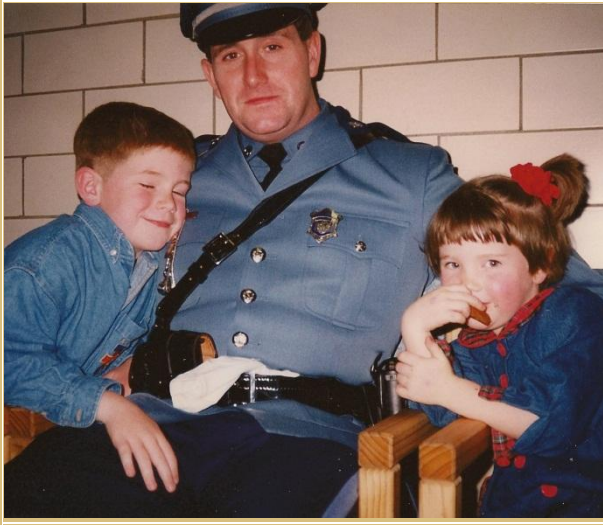


portrait of a police suicide survivor



FOR SURVIVORS OF LAW ENFORCEMENT SUICIDE: VISIT OUR [SPECIAL RESOURCE PAGE](#).

There is probably no more classic an example of a “Line of Duty Suicide” than Paul McCarthy, who became a trooper in 1985. He immediately established himself as an outstanding officer, known for great integrity and a willingness to work day and night to solve the most difficult cases. Coming from a long line of police officers, he excelled in everything he did, received numerous commendations and awards, and was working towards his Masters degree.



FIRST ACCIDENT: Shortly after promoting to sergeant, life suddenly changed for Paul McCarthy. An out of control bus ran over his parked patrol unit in 1993, crushing his legs and leaving him with multiple other injuries. It took fire crews almost an hour to cut the vehicle apart and remove him, and it would take six surgeries and two years to walk again. He could have retired, but he was determined to overcome the pain of his injuries and return to the job. It was an agonizing struggle and return he did—fully able to perform his full duties.

What no one thought about was the emotional toll the horror of that nighthad taken on Sergeant McCarthy. He remembered one of his fellow troopers staying with him and choking back tears while he was trapped. Other memories were fragmented, but came back in bits and pieces. He became depressed, cried in frustration over his crippling injuries, isolated himself, became angry at the world, and

wondered at times why he hadn't just died.

SIGNS OF PTSD: 1993 was the beginning of the end for Trooper Paul McCarthy—not because of his physical injuries, but because of the emotional injuries that went ignored by everyone. The Massachusetts State Police, says Janice, do not recognize posttraumatic stress as a work related injury.

When Trooper McCarthy returned to work in 1995, he was displaying clear signs of PTSD: hypervigilance, insomnia, isolation, difficulty thinking, phobias, and exaggerated startle responses. He remained fixated on the bus accident, wondering, “Why didn't I die?” He distanced himself from his family.

SECOND ACCIDENT: In 2000, Paul McCarthy had now promoted to Lieutenant and was struck and injured by a wrong-way driver. This required more surgery and triggered his PTSD even more severely. He withdrew further. The department removed him from duty and sent him for a psychological evaluation but, at this early stage he was afraid to show “weakness” and, so typical of police officers, he masked his symptoms and was able to pass and was cleared again for duty.



In 2004, Paul was trying to arrest a drunk driver when the driver suddenly sped off, dragging him alongside. He re-injured his legs and again triggered his PTSD, displaying poor judgment at work and home, as well as terrible nightmares and insomnia. He was next involved in a training exercise that went out of control and ended with another officer beating him and breaking several of his ribs.

Then a high school friend and police partner died. Paul McCarthy's behaviors now became, in addition to his other symptoms, aggressive.

THE ENDING: In 2006, Trooper McCarthy's personal decision making had finally gotten out of control. His wife found that he had been playing dangerous trades on the stock market and that their finances were in ruin. He refused her pleas to stop. His other symptoms had worsened. His wife, with a home life that had collapsed and now in desperation (and herself diagnosed with PTSD since his initial accident), had no choice but to take the children and flee.

In the month before his death, more tragedy battered a mind already overwhelmed by untreated PTSD. He crashed his cruiser, and his father died. Finally, feeling hopeless and seeing no hope for help from his department, Massachusetts State Police Captain Paul McCarthy took the only option he saw left for him. On July 28, 2006, he drove to a remote area in his patrol unit and shot himself in the chest.

His wife, Janice, was blamed for the suicide.



To see how you can help, go to
[Can police work cause suicide?](#)

Join our growing group of "pipers!"

In a letter found by his wife, Janice, written shortly before his death, Paul McCarthy lays out his thoughts on PTSD and police suicides.

"The Massachusetts State Police do not recognize Post Traumatic Stress as an issue that affects the employees of the Mass State Police. A trooper assigned to handle dead bodies on a daily basis turned to alcohol and stopped coming to work. Rather than treating the underlying symptoms, they labeled him as an alcoholic and stopped paying him."

"Another trooper had witnessed several traumatic incidents...[an] investigation was halted under politic [sic] pressures and he was assigned to lesser duties. He was continually pressured until he terminated his own life."

"The symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress are wide and varied from trooper to trooper."

"The trooper should be offered a pension if they desire to have one. They should also be treated for this disorder so they can continue on with their lives as a productive member of society."

"It is the opinion of this officer that I am a protected class under the EEOC based on the nature and severity of line of duty injuries but not limited to Post Traumatic Stress."

"A conservative estimate of police officers that suffer from some form of Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome would be 15 percent. Dr. George Early, a note researcher on emergency services stress, estimates that at any given time, 15 to 32 percent of all emergency responders will be dealing with a reaction to Post Traumatic Stress and that there is a 30 to 64 percent chance they will have a reaction to it during their lifetime."

Not long after writing the above, Trooper Paul McCarthy found relief from his torment, not from his department, but from a bullet to the heart.

But Trooper McCarthy didn't die from the bullet to his heart. He died from the nightmare of that night in his patrol car 13 years before. Officers would die far quicker deaths over those 13 years, from hearts attacks and even preventable causes, and be rightfully honored as "heroes" on the National Law Enforcement Memorial Wall.

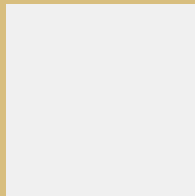
Paul McCarthy would be banned from any honors. His wife and his three children would be cast out and shunned forever by his former "family." There would be no bagpipes, no folded flag for his sacrifice or their suffering.



It's called "honor" by the police family.



Paul with sons Paul, Jr. (center) and Christopher



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