**GRADUATION SPEECH**

**FOR**

**JONATHAN O'BRIEN**

Hello everyone and thank you for being here at this year's graduation exercises for the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Police Academy. To all of you friends and family present today, thanks for your support, encouragement, and patience. Our newest law enforcement officers are blessed to have you in their lives..... And so far that was only for school! Now more than ever it is each one of **YOU** who will inspire the passion and call to duty that fuels these graduates in their chosen profession. To all of the faculty, administration and other distinguished guests present, the graduates are thankful and inspired by the thought provoking suggestions, experiences, and lessons you've shared. It is knowing that this world needs to be a safer place for those that we love and respect that drives us through those impossible scenarios we're bound to encounter. This road we've traveled for the past twenty six weeks has been rough and challenging but it's nothing compared to what the graduates will face as they progress to their actual assignments in the field of law enforcement and I think we all understand that there is no such thing as being over-prepared in any situation. To all of you graduates...get ready... The **REAL** learning is about to begin....

A couple of weeks ago Robert De Niro delivered a commencement address to the New York University graduating class of 2015. It was, as you might imagine, honest, gritty, and filled with truth. Basically he commended the graduates for finding their passion and trusting their guts to follow their paths to their chosen calls to duty. He then gave them the "good" news and told them that basically they were (**can you say screwed? Up the creek? Use an expression you feel is appropriate**). "Up the creek." (**wait for the laugh**). He went on to remind the class that they are about to face a lot of rejection but quitting is not an option. He may have been speaking to the graduates of the Tisch School for the Arts, but the message is universal. When one reaches the "real world,". .... And it doesn't get any more "real" than law enforcement, there is no back door and whether you face rejection, stress, the unknown, danger-you'll be in it knee deep and survival is the only option. No matter how diligently you studied, no matter the degree of attention you paid on the courses or in the classroom, you're all about to experience a critical shift. Circumstances will no longer be simulated or makeshift. Every moment you live in uniform - or out of it- may offer the prelude to chaos and life threatening situations. Training lasted twenty-six weeks and that training was not too far from Hell. From below freezing runs to the field of mud **(do you want to make a little joke and add something like**) to the cafeteria food (**or you can mention uniform fittings or something tedious like that - and wait for the laugh)** it seems like the hard time has been completed-but of course you know that was all just the dress rehearsal to prepare you for life as a police officer. Welcome to the never-ending world of a law enforcement professional.

You are all to be commended for choosing to enter the field of law enforcement. That choice is never an easy decision for anyone. You've made commitments and sacrifices far beyond what others might have chosen as they enter other professions. You have elected to live your lives in a precarious dimension and for that you are to be acknowledged. Your parents, friends and families have encouraged you and supported your commitment but at the same time we all know the unspoken communication of concern lingers just behind their encouragement and reinforcement - after all, **THEY** didn't choose a career in law enforcement, **YOU** did. It is a testament to their devotion to each one of you that they continue to encourage you while knowing the "what ifs" that exist as you join this profession. Graduates, never lose sight of the HUMANITY in what you are doing because you do it for your mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins, friends and neighbors. Many people you encounter while you're in uniform will challenge your judgement and cause you to question your commitment but remember those people in your lives that **REALLY** care for you. It is truly a gift to have such loving and selfless people in our lives to cheer us on and to calm us down and comfort us as needed, and their love, support, and sacrifices are as respected as those spent by you, the actual graduates. The stress is palpable especially in these times when there exists such a tenuous relationship between communities and their protectors. There is a fine line we all walk in order to maintain peace and order and only through hard work, awareness, empathy, wisdom and dedication will you, as police officers find the solutions to support your communities.

David Morrell, the Canadian American author who wrote the book, "First Blood" from which the character of John Rambo was born once said, "Some people might be surprised that 'Rambo's creator has a doctorate in American literature. One of my influences is Henry James, whose major theme is **awareness**. Whether I'm writing about military personnel or law enforcement, the persistent theme is **paying attention in a hostile world**." If there were one piece of advice that could not be overemphasized it is to **PAY ATTENTION.** Listen for clues. Trust your instincts. Stay hyper aware and consistently vigilant. Another key point to keep with you at all times is the analogy of the wolf, the sheep, and he sheepdog.

In 2004, in response to the conditions in the world post 9/11, Lieutenant Colonel David Grossman wrote a book called "On Combat." In it he described the analogy of these three animals. He said, "If you have no capacity for violence then you are a healthy productive citizen: a sheep. If you have a capacity for violence and no empathy for your fellow citizens, then you have defined an aggressive sociopath—a wolf. But what if you have a capacity for violence, and a deep love for your fellow citizens? Then you are a sheepdog, a warrior, someone who is walking the hero’s path." It is within the sites of all of us to walk the hero's path but we have to understand that perspective offers different views of what that path looks like. Even so, it is the duty of the law enforcement officer to maintain a safe environment that works to support each and all citizens. Grossman also goes on to further clarify, "If you want to be a sheepdog and walk the warrior’s path, then you must make a conscious and moral decision every day to dedicate, equip and prepare yourself to thrive in that toxic, corrosive moment when the wolf comes knocking at the door.” There's one more thing to consider in these instances.... We've all heard the fairy tales told to us as children, but what about the wolf in sheep's clothing? Part of dangerous and adverse conditions is that they are not always obvious. Sometimes the most serious circumstances are not revealed making them even more dangerous, which is why we must always trust our guts, keep vigilantly aware, and never assume a situation does not have the potential to erupt.

Graduates, over the course of the past twenty six weeks you have received the foundation and the tactical and procedural tools to begin your missions in the world of law enforcement. Everyone is aware of the noble sacrifices you are about to make and I am sure I speak on behalf of the members of the communities you will serve when I say we are thankful, grateful, and appreciative of your commitment to your new responsibilities. Trust your guts, maintain that vigilance, and keep your awareness at peak pitch. I wish all of you the very best as you enter the force and may you all make positive, compassionate, and inspired contributions to your families, friends and communities.

Thank you all!