

## Chapter 11

### Honoring a K-9 Officer Who Served with Honor



*Above, the stage is set to honor Bo and his amazing work with the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department.*

I had just picked up a precious little Shih-Tzu named “Norman Rockwell” that had belonged to police Sgt. William Berger with the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department.

As I drove, I was thinking about how creative people can get in naming their pets. “Norman Rockwell” was even cuter than I could have imagined, and when I arrived at my center, I placed a call to Sgt. Berger to let him know that his Norman was safe with me. When I got him on the phone, however, I could immediately tell that something else was wrong.

He said, “Coleen, not one minute before you called me, I just heard on the scanner that we just lost a police dog in pursuit. Lt. Benny Diggs and the department need you right now to help with this dog that just got shot. Please call him.”

My heart sank as I realized that a four-legged officer lost his life doing his job. I also knew that this wasn’t the first time that the department had to cope with such a loss. In September 2006, a police dog named Arco was shot and killed in the line of duty. At that time, I had the honor of serving the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department during a very tough time, and as sad as I was to hear the news that another dog had died in the line of duty, I was ready to help in any way I could.

I picked up the phone and called Benny, commander of the department’s canine unit, and he picked up almost as soon as it started ringing.

“Benny, I was on the phone with one of your guys, and he heard what happened on his scanner.

What's going on?" I asked.

"We lost one today, Coleen," he said. "It's Bo. Officer Johnson is OK, but Bo took the bullet for him. We were in pursuit, and the guy just turned and shot him. We're going to need you, Coleen, but I have to go be with our police officers right now."

"I'm here for you, Benny. Call me when you can," I said.

I immediately put the team on notice that we were going to be assisting with another canine police officer. I had conducted another such service two years earlier, so I knew what the department wanted and how it liked to operate in setting up these services. I waited to hear from Benny.

### **Recalling Arco's Service**

As I waited to hear more details, I thought about the last police dog service I had handled for the Indianapolis Police Department. In 2006, Arco was shot and killed in the line of duty. I had reached out to Lt. Diggs after hearing about Arco's death, and the first thing he told me was that he wanted to be sure that Arco's handler would want a memorial service.

While Benny hadn't specifically sought out my services, he was pleased to get my phone call offering help. "I always kind of felt we never recognized these dogs' heroics as much as we should have," he said. "Dogs also die in the line of duty. And although we had some things done for these dogs, it was nothing like the real memorial service that we held for Arco," he told me later.

Arco's handler, Officer Mark Archer, was grieving deeply for his lost partner, as was his family and the entire force. Arco had taken a bullet in the head to protect his handler. Several officers asked me on more than one occasion: "What more can you ask of your partner than that?"

When I handled Arco's services, I felt as though I were engaged in a bit of a courtship. I was trying to get to know the department and Benny, and he was trying to get to know me. We worked together to ensure we created a service that respected Arco as a K-9 officer without disrespecting human officers and their importance in protecting the community. I did my best to honor the wishes of the department, but I also found that the officers in charge didn't really know what they wanted because this was the first service of its kind that they had ever overseen.

I learned from them and followed their lead in areas where they had ideas, and then guided them in areas where I knew what needed to be done. This was certainly a learning experience for me – and I knew that, heaven forbid, if I had to do this again, I would do a better job leading them. I made sure to take copious notes along the way so that I'd be duly prepared if

my services were needed again. I hoped this wouldn't be the case, but I wanted to be prepared nonetheless.

One of the great things we did at Arco's service is that we honored two other K-9 dogs that had earlier been killed in the line of duty. As people walked in to honor Arco, they passed a table that had photos of all the dogs that had been killed along with plaques and candles that honored their service. Benny commented to me on more than one occasion that it was interesting how the handlers of these dogs were still "not over" the deaths of their K-9 partners, even all these years later.

Planning the service as well as being there for Officer Archer and his family took up the days leading up to the memorial. People across the city were intrigued by this service, and every news station in town was ready to bring the trucks.

The day of the service rolled around. I had made sure the participants were ready, the color guard in line, the honor guard prepared, and that the community had come out to show their support. Still, I was a nervous wreck because I was afraid I'd missed a detail somewhere.

The service was amazing, filled with eulogies, readings, tears, and much emotion. After the service, much like any other funeral service, members of the Marion County Sherriff's Department shared an intimate dinner, giving themselves time as a department to come together for support and to share their own stories of Arco.

### **Officers and Their Dogs Share a Strong Bond**

I knew from previous conversations with Benny that he believes honoring these dogs not only helps the officers that work with them but also members of the community that they protect. "When you harm an animal, especially a service animal, people become very upset," he said. "A memorial service brings closure to the whole incident and the violent death that a dog had. It brings closure to the occurrence and makes everyone feel a little better."

I'd gotten to know Benny well during the time he and his fellow officers dealt with Arco's loss. He is now working with his fourth police dog that is due to retire soon. I'd spoken with him at length about the bonds that officers share with their dogs. "They are in the car with you every night, and you find yourself talking to them," Benny told me. "Anytime you spend seven or eight hours a day with a person or dog, you develop a pretty significant bond."

All of Benny's dogs have died because of old age, but losing a dog is always hard, he said. "I think the toughest one was my first patrol dog," he told me. "He lived to be 10, and I replaced him when he was 8. He was probably the dog that was closest to me, and I remember when he passed away that he couldn't get up and walk or anything like that; we had to have the veterinarian come to the house and give him a shot to put him out of his misery. Sometimes,

you question whether or not you waited too long to do the inevitable because you don't want them to pass away."

Benny said he thinks many officers develop their strongest bond with their first dog. Each officer chooses to handle his or her dog's death in their own way. "There is an area here in Indiana where they will take the dog's remains, and all of my dogs have been sent there," he said. "I haven't kept the remains in urns or anything like that, but that is just me and just the way I like to do things. But some officers would prefer to keep their dog's ashes where they can see them on a daily basis."

Typically, a police officer will get a service dog around age 2, and the dog will be kept in service eight years or so. "You spend more time with these dogs than anyone else," Benny confided. "I just think you get so involved with them that you want to be sure that when they pass away, you can remember them. You will always remember them in your heart, and I have pictures of all my dogs."

### **Bo's Heroics**

I would later learn from Officer Scott Johnson, Bo's police dog handler, just how heroic his canine partner was when he met a deadly criminal May 10, 2007. Bo, a big German shepherd, was chasing burglars when he was shot and killed.

"I was kind of running with the dog when I could tell he locked onto the bad guy," Scott told me. "The guy was 75 yards or so ahead of Bo, and I saw both suspects disappear. I heard a couple of gunshots, and then I see this guy standing there after coming around the corner; he was standing up and pointing his gun at the dog. I holler, and he points the gun at me."

Scott paused and continued: "Bo is still alive at this point, and the guy takes off running, and Bo still keeps chasing him. I can tell obviously something is wrong because he's not catching the suspect. So we run down the street, and the suspect turns again to try to shoot. I shoot him and hit him at the end of the street. Bo is still chasing him, and the bad guy tosses his gun and falls to the ground. I call Bo to me, and he's gotten really slow. He's coming back to me, and he gets back to me, and he pretty much just falls at my feet."

Tears started to fill my eyes as Scott continued telling me his story. "(The criminal) would have ambushed officers instead of the dog," he said, referring to Bo's heroics. "Bo comes back to me, and he just falls over and is just looking at me. And I'm just looking everywhere, and I knew he was probably shot, but I couldn't tell where. I put my hand underneath him, and I could feel blood, and he's just looking at me. That's the hard part. My wife and I don't have any kids – we had Bo and two other dogs that stayed in the house with me at the time. So I scooped him up and tried to run back to the car with him to try to get to a veterinarian. And then I looked down, and he was already gone."

Scott told me that he had the pleasure of being with Bo for six precious years. “All officers are close to their dogs,” he told me. “I know guys who are some of the best policemen and the toughest guys I know who were crying that day, and it’s been singlehandedly probably the most life-altering thing I’ve experienced yet, and I’ve been a policeman for 16 years. The canine guys spend more time with the dog than their wives. Bo stayed in the house with us, and he’d lie in bed while we were watching TV. He went to work with me every day, and there wasn’t much time we spent apart.”

### **Moving Forward**

When Benny called me back with details on Bo’s service, he agreed that this was one heroic dog. Bo was doing what he was trained to do, what he had done hundreds of times before, in pursuing a criminal. He had a record a mile long of bad guys that he had brought to justice through his tenacity, his strong jaws and his fierce appearance. He was one of the top dogs in the department.

A short amount of time passed before Benny called back. Bo had been taken to the coroner’s office. With the K-9s being looked upon as officers, the coroner’s office needed to pronounce the death and to rule the cause of death as well. This would be used in court against the criminal. This guy had killed an officer and would face the full force of the law. Benny also told me that the officers at the site of the shooting had rallied around Scott and Bo to lend their support. As they took Bo to the coroner’s department, they took one last ride by the police department.

One last ride for Bo.

One last ride for Officer Johnson and his now deceased partner.

When Benny relayed this story to me, his voice cracked, and I cried.

### **Waiting and Preparing**

It would be a few days before they would release Bo’s body as they needed to complete the autopsy. We anxiously awaited the call and began doing what we could to prepare for the upcoming memorial service.

Benny maintained a sense of strength and calm during this very emotional time, and Scott took some time off to mourn his loss. Since Scott and his wife, Kathleen, had no children, Bo and their other four-legged pets, Sasha, Brianna, and Racer, *were* their children. This was going to be a tough loss for the entire family. Kathleen was certainly going to go through her own grief journey and also need to help her husband cope with losing a partner that was with

him 24 hours a day.

Scott was never apart from Bo for five years, and when they were away from work, Bo was just like any other member of the family when he was at home. He was such an essential and accepted part of the family unit that he was often found being chased around the house – by the cat! Yes, at home, he was just one of the kids. Oh, this grief journey was going to have many people involved.

I began to think about all the details that would need to be handled, the questions I needed to ask and the phone calls I needed to make. I'd need to order flowers, service folders and take care of other details. Also, I'd need to contact so many people who would want to participate and honor Bo and be there for Scott.

As I continued to think about everything that needed to be done, I flashed back to a conversation I once had with Sgt. Allen Tuttle of the Marion County Sherriff's department. Sgt. Tuttle had been an incredibly valuable resource to us during the first K-9 memorial service that we held for Arco. He had brought things to us that we would need, he called attention to details and he was the go-to guy who made coordinating the service seamless.

After Arco's service, Sgt. Tuttle had stopped by the center to finalize some details for the department. As we were reviewing the service, he said, "You know, Coleen, some people, including myself, were worried about how this service was going to come off – was it going to be weird? Were others going to think it was weird, and ultimately 'cheesy?' We all had a bit of trepidation. But, I have to tell you, from the way that your team handled the crowd, the service, and all of the details of the event, it was the classiest and most caring service that I have been a part of. We as a department were so proud of everything."

I had always remembered that comment as it had made such an impact on me. Now, here we were again, in a position of wanting to make this service as beautiful, as classy and as memorable as the service we had done for Arco. It was such an honor to be helping the police department once again.

### **Planning the Service**

Benny finally called when the coroner was ready to release Bo's body. I sent Brian over to get him and to begin the process of getting Bo ready for cremation so his remains could be returned home to his family.

The next few days were a blur. We made a decision that the service would be on May 31 at a local high school auditorium. Given the number of attendees at Arco's service, we knew we needed to be prepared for a large crowd. Now it was a matter of pulling together all of the details and making sure that not a stone was left unturned for this service.

Being a very detailed person, I still had the notes and information from the last service. As a result, my conversations with Benny were much more succinct and action-oriented as I focused on getting all of the specifics in line. One of our first tasks was to meet with the administration team, Scott and Benny at the Franklin Central High School auditorium to begin the planning process. With the looks of the facility, I knew that we had the right venue for this service. The space was large enough to handle the turnout and accommodating enough to handle the professionals, the bagpiper, the dignitaries, the color guard and the many other officers that would attend.

I began making phone calls to get the various participants in line for the service. As expected, everyone was more than willing to participate, and much like myself, honored to do so.

Meanwhile, Brian began to work on finding an appropriate urn for Bo's remains and also began working with a local digital artist to create a portrait. Both pieces turned out just beautiful and were such special works of art. We also began working with Scott and Kathleen to extract Bo from their family photos in order to put together some classy art pieces.

As the day for the service quickly approached, the details were coming together. We were also blessed to have our pet-loving friends call and volunteer their services to assist with the event. Kate Edick and Sandra Braun were such life savers – both darling pet moms that wanted to do their part in making sure the Johnson family and Bo were honored for all that they had done for the community.

All parties were lined up for their specific roles within the service. A retired officer had volunteered to have a dove present at the service, a bagpiper was commissioned and the bugler was ready. Throughout all of these preparations, I made sure to not forget the reason for this tribute – the loss of Bo and the grief journey of his human family, both personally and professionally. I made sure to be there in every way that I could for the department and Officer Johnson and Kathleen.

### **Honoring Bo**

The day arrived for Bo's service, and everything was in place. As we approached the front of the auditorium, we walked by a classic "fallen officer" unmounted horse, with the officer standing at full attention next to the horse and the boots positioned backwards. A few steps later, we found ourselves next to Scott's patrol car, where he and Bo spent hours upon hours, making the streets safe for everyone in the Marion County area. The car was wrapped in black ribbon, with paw prints adorning the complete band around the vehicle.

Making our way into the auditorium, there were tables full of sympathy cards and notes from

people all over the world. The most touching letters, pictures and notes were from the children, who expressed such love, caring and innocence. Peppered among the letters and cards were special items of Bo's, from his harness to his favorite ball from home. The tears began to flow as people looked at the pieces of a life that Bo so selflessly gave to others.

As the attendees made their way into the lobby, there was also a DVD playing that Scott's brother-in-law put together. The footage included Bo in action and photos. There were also newspaper articles on display that recounted Bo's heroic life. The stories focused on how Bo gave his life trying to protect his handler and pursue the bad guys. There was also a table with service folders and a register book. Families took their time as they looked at the cards, watched the DVD and spent time with others.

One particularly poignant moment was when Officer Mark Archer, Arco's handler, made his way through the crowd at the service. It had only been a few short months ago that we had all come together to honor his dog, also killed in the line of duty. Officer Archer quietly and respectfully approached Officer Johnson, offering his sympathies and internally, remembering his grief as well.

The time of the service had come. Forty cadets in training and dignitaries that were in attendance were seated. Then it was time for Brian and me to assemble all of the K-9 officers from throughout the state with their wives. We brought in this group from both sides of the auditorium and sat them together in the center of the room.

The bagpiper was positioned in the rafters of the auditorium, and he began to play Amazing Grace. Brian and I began the processional with the officers, who remained standing for the seating of the officials on the stage, the posting of the colors, and the posting of the honor guard. Being in task mode, I was fully engaged with making sure that everything was going okay. However, when I looked up at the stage and saw the honor guard standing at attention, saluting Bo's portrait, and then ceremoniously cocking their guns, my eyes could no longer hold back the tears.

The service went beautifully. Each one of the speakers and their messages, the music, the soothing and cooing sounds of the dove on the stage and all the other pieces contributed to an incredibly moving ceremony that honored Bo. During the service, a poem about police dogs written by an unknown author was read aloud. I'd like to share it with you:

***The Life of a Police Dog***

*You brought me home*

*One sunny day*

*With you for years*

*I would surely stay.*

*I met your pack*

*Children and wife  
I began to love  
My new-found life.*

*I slept on your couch  
At the foot of your bed  
You looked at me lovingly  
While petting my head.*

*We trained for months  
And our bonding grew  
We were both partners  
Buddies in Blue.*

*We did school demos  
And I never did wrong  
Over all the years  
My love for you grew strong.*

*How I loved to work  
To stand up and bark  
In the back of our car  
From light until dark.*

*We went call to call  
Having fun all the way  
Until the call came  
On that one fateful day.*

*A man with a gun  
The dispatcher did say  
I jumped from my car  
When it pointed your way.*

*Before leaving home I was told  
"Keep him safe" by your wife  
I knew at that moment  
For you I would give my life.*

*The bullet struck hard  
Steady and true  
The bullet struck me instead  
Of striking you.*

*When you go home tonight  
Tell your wife I did good  
Strong, Tall and Proud  
On the ground that I stood.*

*I'm dead and gone now  
This much is true  
But I've done my job well  
Of protecting you.*

*Thank you  
Loyal partner,  
Faithful friend,  
You will be greatly missed.  
—Author Unknown*

### **Many Tears Are Shed**

The service concluded with a bugler in the rafters of the auditorium, playing taps. It was a phenomenal conclusion to a service filled with emotion, pride and many tears. As the service wended down, the officers went to the back, and the rest of the congregation followed. My team spent the next few hours making sure that everyone's needs and requests were handled, and we paid special attention to Kathleen and Scott.

The evening ended, and my team made sure that the building was clean and orderly. It was time to take my team out for a dinner of gratitude for all of their hard work. I know that each of them had poured every bit of energy and emotion into this evening, all to make sure that Bo's life was honored and his death was given every ritual that it deserved.

This service was certainly a small, small token of my appreciation for Officer Scott Johnson, K-9 Officer Bo and all human and K-9 officers for what they do on a daily basis for me and everyone else in my community. My role continues to be to safely hold up their grief, be a companion to them in their grief journeys and help them as needed. I hope that people will one day think of me much like they remember Bo when they read the inscription on his urn – *“Served With Honor.”*

### **In Conclusion**

After the service, Benny carefully monitored the community's reaction to Bo's service. “There was one person who wrote a letter to the editor saying, ‘It was just a dog; people are killed all the time. Why are you making such a big deal out of this police dog being killed?’ And if that's their point of view, that's their point of view,” Benny told me. “I look at our police dogs as members of this force. They may not be sworn members, but these are members. All these dogs

care about is going out and looking for the bad guys, drugs and explosives.”

Benny concluded, “These dogs are trained in a specific way, but when you get that opportunity to be so used to them and be with them so much, they become more than that. They become members of the unit and department, and a good deal of the officers feel that they are police officers just like anybody else.”

The loss of a police dog and how it affects human officers can vary by department, Benny added. “We are a large department and have 34 dogs,” he said. “I think a lot of times, smaller departments take it even worse than we would take it because there are only a few officers.” Officer Scott Johnson also had time to reflect on events. “It was nice to see so many people you never met in life to come to the service of a dog and for policemen that they didn’t know,” he said. “Some people just came up and said some remarkable things. A lady at the service gave me a St. Francis on a cross medallion, which was interesting because we are Catholic anyway, and I’ve carried it every day since then. I will never forget that.”

Bo’s death and the community’s response helped show Scott that the work he puts in every day is really worth it and appreciated. “It’s also nice to have a nice little plaque and the urn we keep Bo’s ashes in,” he said. “I also received a nice paw impression they took. A lot of things I wish I could have known about and done for my first dog. He didn’t die in the line of duty, but he died while still in service. It’s good that pet memorial services are bringing to light how much these dogs really sacrifice and do for the community.”

Scott now has a new dog named Tex. “I got him two months or so after Bo died, and at first, it didn’t seem quite right,” he said. “We had two other mutt-type dogs that stay in the house that we had adopted, and they loved Bo to death and would play with him. He was their buddy and brother and everything else. When we’d found them, we’d just gotten Bo, and they would go and stand by the car every day after Bo died waiting for him. They’d also stand by his crate in the house.” Even the family cat acted a little weird for awhile, he said.

But Scott’s other dogs started feeling better when he brought Tex home, and so did his wife. “It took a little time at first, but it helped because it got me back to doing the job,” he said. Scott also has a second police dog that works in the department’s bomb unit. This dog, he keeps outside. “A lot of how you reward detection dogs is through a ball and praise, and she’d be a 70 pound lap dog if I let her in the house,” he explained. “All she wants is attention.”

These days, Bo continues spending time with the family on a shelf where the urn containing his cremated remains sits. “It’s where we watch TV because he always watched TV with us,” Scott explained. “The more I talk about it, I think the better it makes you feel just because you get to let it out instead of trying to bottle it all up. This is an important part of the process of letting go.”

### **Lt. Benny Diggs Speaks About the History of Canines at his Department**

*The day-to-day work of these police dogs has always been intriguing to me, just like others. I had a chance to talk with Lt. Diggs about the history of the K-9 department. The following information comes directly from Lt. Benny Diggs, who explains the many meaningful contributions police dogs have made to the Indianapolis Police Department. While our department here in Indianapolis has its own intricacies, I'm sure our K-9 force looks like many across the United States. Below is some information straight from Lt. Diggs on the history of the department.*

The Indianapolis Police Department first started its canine unit in 1960. It received initial training with the St. Louis, Mo., Police Department.

The Marion County Sheriff's implemented its canine unit in about 1965, and its officers were trained by the Indianapolis Police Department. Both the Indianapolis Police and Marion County Sheriff's Department started their individual canine units with two dogs each. As the years passed, it became evident how important a well trained canine unit can be when it comes to reducing crime. Each department added dogs to their respective teams.

In August 2006, a consolidation of the canine units at the two departments occurred. It was completed Jan. 1, 2007.

Since 1986, both departments combined have lost six dogs killed in the line of duty. One dog was killed by an automobile while attempting to apprehend a suspect who had escaped from jail in another jurisdiction. Five others were shot and killed. Three of those dogs lost their lives while saving their handlers or the lives of other officers.

The Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department trains its dogs in criminal apprehension, tracking, area searches, narcotics and bomb detection.

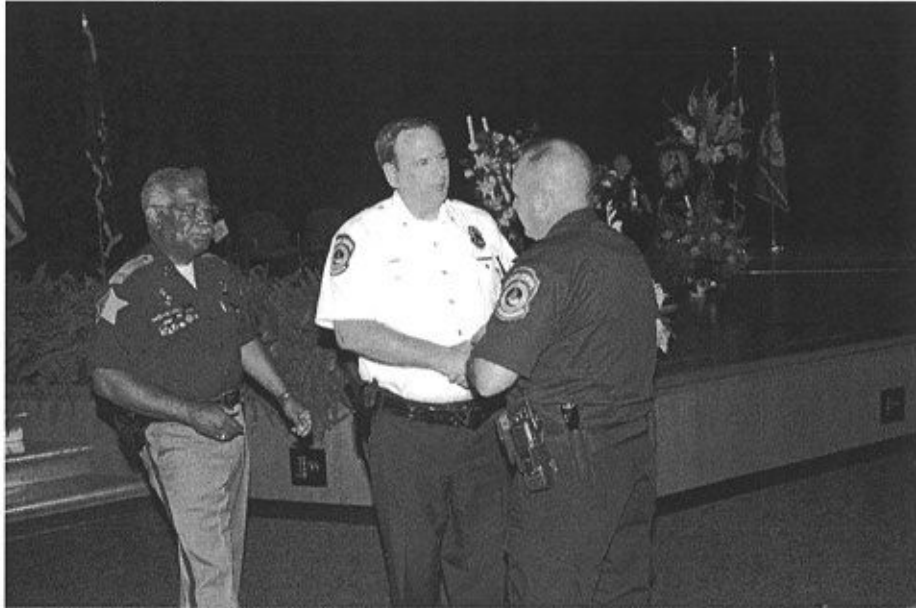
The most important part of any canine unit is the dog selection process. A Police Service Dog (PSD) has to have a certain drive to do its job effectively. Regardless of how much the dog is trained – if the dog doesn't have specific drives that are needed to do a certain task – the dog will never be able to do that task at a level that is necessary to be an effective PSD.

Training improves the skill level of dogs' drives, and training provides confidence to complete a task. Proper training will take a particular drive or drives and teach the dog to effectively do a certain task. While training a PSD, we take a particular drive such as the ability to play, retrieve and search and turn those drives into the ability to be a detector dog. Regardless of what people may have heard in the past, we do not give our dogs any narcotic substance to enhance their ability to find narcotics. Nor do we give a dog substances that would enhance their ability to find explosives. This training is completely done by play, retrieving, repetition and motivation.

One thing that the public needs to recognize is that a PSD is a well trained tool in criminal apprehension. That PSD may deter criminal activity or the dog itself may apprehend a criminal or locate drugs, explosives or bodies.

The most important part of a PSD is its nose, which in my opinion is at least 90 percent of what makes a dog such a useful police tool. A dog's ability to apprehend a criminal is also very important. When I was on SWAT, I will never forget having a murder suspect who was hiding in a warehouse after killing an employee. A PSD who was assigned to a SWAT team officer was deployed, and within two minutes had located the suspect who had taken his own life.

Any police department's canine unit is only as good as its dog /handler team, training and an ability to use PSDs in daily situations.



*Officer Scott Johnson receives condolences and an award for Bo from Sheriff Frank Anderson and Police Chief Michael Spears.*