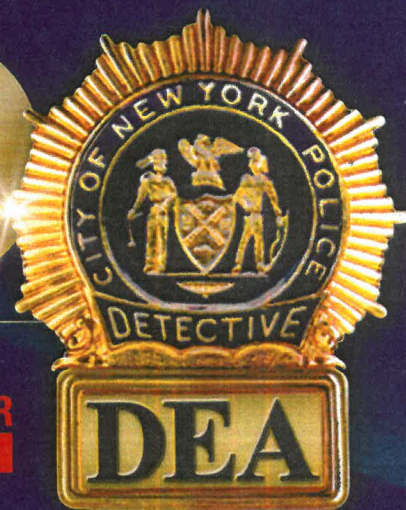


THE GOLD SHIELD

WINTER
2021



The Union Representing the Greatest Detectives *in the World*

DEA *Remembers*



Det. Raymond Abear



Det. Robert Cardona



Det. Cedric Dixon



Det. Christopher B. McDonnell



Det. Jack Polimeni



Det. Jeffrey A. Scalf

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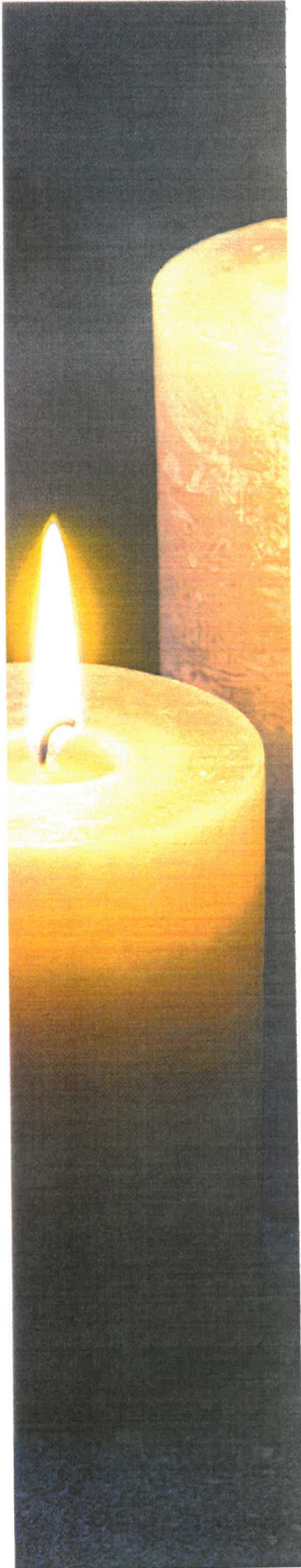

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The DEA Remembers




Through the tremendous efforts of our union, and our work with City and State legislators, on May 29, 2020, the COVID-19 Line-of-Duty Death Benefit bills (S. 8427 and A.10528) passed both the New York State Senate and the New York State Assembly; and on May 30, the Governor signed the bills into law. This provides line-of-duty death benefits to our active members who died because of the coronavirus. This devastating pandemic, which has wreaked havoc on the entire world, struck in full force in February 2020, and, by mid-March, both New York City and State were in lockdown with businesses shuttered and shelter-in-place orders mandated throughout the State.

But the work of our members never slows down; and, in fact, it increased exponentially as the City also erupted into a frenzy of social protests, including rioting and looting. Amidst this chaos and disorder, the DEA lost six active Detectives to COVID-19, while many others became seriously ill. The May passage of the Death Benefit law ensured that our LOD families will remain financially stable and be provided the health benefits they richly deserve as they deal with the devastating loss of their loved ones in this frightening, unpredictable, and unprecedented era.

On July 20, 2020, NAPO notified us that Congress, which originally contemplated two different versions of a coronavirus bill, worked together to pass S. 3607, the Safeguarding America's First Responders Act, which establishes a presumption under the Public Safety Officers' Benefits (PSOB) Program that an Officer's death or disability due to contracting COVID-19 is deemed in the line of duty. On August 14, 2020, the President signed the bill into law.

This is a big victory for NAPO. More than 125 active Law Enforcement Officers in the United States have died from COVID-19, and now their families will get death benefits. To qualify for the presumption, an Officer must have engaged in a line-of-duty action or activity between January 1, 2020, and December 31, 2021, and received a diagnosis of COVID-19 (or evidence indicates that the Officer had COVID-19) during the 45-day period beginning on the last day of duty for the Officer. For death benefits, evidence must indicate that the Officer had COVID-19 or complications from COVID-19 at the time of death.



Det. Raymond Abear



Det. Raymond Abear was born in Manhattan on December 12, 1976, during the end of the nation's bicentennial. Fittingly, his parents had emigrated to the United States from the Philippines the year before. In 1979, they started their first business, a small restaurant, and bought their first home in Queens, where Raymond eventually graduated from Francis Lewis High School. He

earned his Bachelors of Science degree in criminal justice from St. John's University. But it was the part-time job he had while growing up that influenced Abear's career choice.

For ten years, while he was in school, he worked in a shop in Queens that sold aquariums and fish. It was there that he developed two passions: one for the sea life in the tanks, and secondly for the idea of a career in policing. The man who owned the store was a retired cop and he inspired Ray to join the NYPD. During his time as a Cadet, Abear was assigned to the 111th Precinct and was appointed to the force on July 1, 2001. Barely two months into the job, the U.S. was hit with the worst terrorist attacks ever suffered on our nation's soil, and like the rest of the Academy class of July 2001, it was a startling introduction to the New York Police Department.

By March of 2002, Abear moved to the 112th Precinct where he worked with Det. Brian Benedict.

"I had more time on the job than Ray," Benedict says, "but we were patrol cops together." The pair worked in the 112 Anti-Crime Unit for eight years. "Ray was a gentle giant. And he always had a smile on his face. He would

do anything for anybody," Benedict says. "I don't want to sound like this is a cliché, but he would give you the shirt off his back. That's the type of guy he was."

Eventually, the Detective track was where Abear wanted to land, and in October 2014, Abear transferred to the Queens Special Victims Squad where he met Det. Daniel Cruz.

"I thought Ray was the funniest person I ever met," Cruz says. "Sometimes being the new guy in a Squad is difficult, but Ray was a great ice breaker. It made the whole transition to a new office easier.

"At first we weren't working together, but a few months later, we were put on the same team and eventually we were partners. Ray and I look alike so they called us 'The Olsen Twins.' He was Mary Kate and I was Ashley," Cruz laughs, remembering the time he and Abear were on a case in Orlando, Florida, and spent some of their spare time going to Epcot Center. "Everywhere we went, we put on a costume and took a photo," Cruz relates. "We dressed up as Vikings, in sombreros, in Chinese garb. It was hilarious."

Det. Rocco Biondo worked with Abear for six years, once Abear "transferred upstairs," explaining the QSVS room is also in the 112 stationhouse.

"We were good friends," Biondo says, echoing Cruz's sentiments that Abear had a great sense of humor. "Ray always had funny stories. Everywhere we went he knew someone.

"And he was one of those guys you can't believe actually existed on the job. He was very, very caring about the victims. I know it's clichéd to say 'he went above and beyond,' but that's what he did. He did things that we are not required to do: like buy people food, or drive them where they needed to go. I can't tell you how many times a victim would come in wearing his jacket. He knew the severity of what had happened to them and he was so attuned to it."

Biondo tells of the case of a 76-year-old woman whose home was broken into and she was sexually assaulted. Abear, Cruz, and Biondo caught the case and were so relentless that they solved it in 24 hours. "The family was distraught about what happened to their mom," Biondo explains, "and Ray was so sensitive with the victim that the family wrote to the Commissioner and Mayor thanking them for the work that Ray did. He was so dedicated."

Biondo also notes that for all the care Abear took with their crime victims, he also exhibited the same with his colleagues and friends. "He would ask if you were okay. He could spot if you weren't feeling well or were feeling down, and might need to talk."

During Christmas 2015, Abear became formally engaged to his sweetheart Catherine Lucatorto.

"Ray and I knew each other for 12 years," Catherine explains. "Ray's sister, Lichele, is married to my brother, Christopher. They met when one of Lichele's sorority sisters at Stony Brook started dating Chris' friend. After they met and fell in love, they got married. Through the years, our families became very, very close. We would spend all of our special occasions together — Christmas, birthdays, and the like.

"I always thought Ray was so handsome and so funny, and I had a crush on him, but ... you know ... we were dating other people. But separately, Ray and I were each asked to be Godparents to Lichele and Chris' first born, our nephew Gavin." Two years later, Chris and Lichele Lucatorto welcomed baby Jenna.

"Then, in 2015, Ray sent me a text message wishing me a happy birthday. It was the first time he ever sent me a text. We started messaging each other. Finally, he asked me if I wanted to meet for dinner. I was so surprised, but I immediately accepted.

"We had an instant connection. He was a prankster and he was funny. He had a great laugh and a great sense of humor. He even took me to the Aquarium on a few of our dates. At first, we hid our relationship from

the family. We didn't know how they would take it. The family dynamic was so close. Everyone was together all of the time. We wanted to be sure everyone would be okay with it. But little did we know, behind our backs, our mothers would talk about fixing us up. They had been constantly scheming, hoping we would get together. We had no idea!

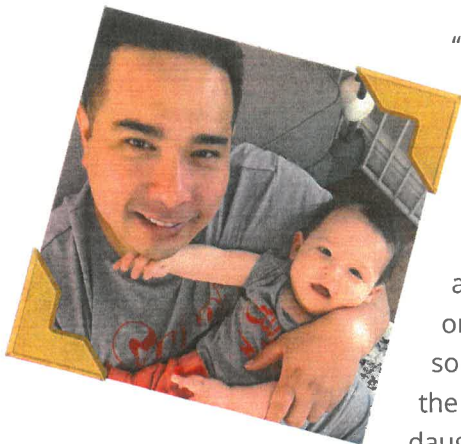
"We finally told them and got engaged around Christmas time. And within six months, we were living together. Everyone was so thrilled, they couldn't have been happier about it!"

While Ray continued his police career, Catherine also kept working in retail. For six years, she had been a store manager for Swarovski, the 125-year old Austrian glass company, at their Roosevelt Field Mall store in East Garden City, Long Island.

Things could not have worked out better for the Abear and Lucatorto families, and on May 2, 2016, good fortune smiled again when Ray was promoted to Detective, and the couple started planning their wedding.



Det. Raymond Abear



"We wanted something small and intimate," Catherine says. They rented a house in the Hamptons for a week in June 2017, and had an immediate-family-only celebration. Their son Jackson was born at the end of the year, and daughter Stella was born

two years later. Once Catherine started having children, she stopped working and stayed home to care for the babies.

Abear kept up his passion for fish by putting a big aquarium in his home's finished basement. "Ray just loved to look at fish. He would sit in front of the tank and hold the baby, and be so relaxed and at peace. He had a very stressful job, so he loved to watch them. We would all watch together. Ray really loved all animals." When their nephew Gavin turned three, Abear also gave his Godson a big fish tank for his room, too.

Another of Abear's passions was going to restaurants, something confirmed by his former partner Cruz who noted how much they both loved to eat.

While Catherine is of Irish and Italian heritage, Ray's native Filipino cuisine has a centuries-old mixture of Indian, Chinese, Spanish, Malaysian, and Indonesian influences, and, says Catherine, Ray made it a point to scout out all the secluded places in the City for "the best" of everything they enjoyed. "He just knew of all these hidden little spots that had the best fish, or best tacos, or best whatever. He had a place for every type of food. So we loved to go out to new restaurants and try new dishes. I hear so many stories from people about Ray and his knowledge about all the different restaurant locations.

"And he also loved to cook. My favorite thing that he would make was a really delicious skirt steak. Ray loved to barbecue. He would barbecue almost every day. And

he had a 'famous' potato recipe that he would make and bring to people any time we went to someone's house. Everyone just called it 'Ray's potatoes.'"

Benedict points out that Abear served as Godfather to, "about eight different kids." Some of the children were family and others the off-spring of friends. "But that speaks volumes," says Benedict, "about who he was."

In June 2018, at the Delegates' meeting before the DEA Picnic, the union honored Abear, along with other members of his Squad, for their work in closing out several horrific rape cases during a four month period of 2017.

"In August 2019, just last year, we were investigating a rape case and had to interview a victim, and we went up to Vancouver," says Cruz. During their free time, the partners went out on a boat and into the ocean to fish. Abear liked his fish on the end of a line, as well as in the tank.

Cruz remained partners with Abear until this past February 2020, when Abear was transferred to the overnight Night Watch shift. "Ray placed a fish tank in between our desks," says Cruz. "I've had to become an expert really fast, because I take care of the fish now and it's a more complicated salt water system."

Biondo believes that Abear went to Night Watch because it was going to be his last year on the job and he wanted it to be a little less stressful. "You don't keep cases in Night Watch," Biondo explains. "In the morning, the Squads take over. You don't have the stress of taking the case to completion or making the collar. So, it doesn't weigh on you as much." But Abear's plans for a less taxing final year didn't work out the way he imagined.

"Even after the pandemic hit," says Biondo, "We were responding to the hospital. We were being cautious. But when doing child abuse cases, you get it all — shaken babies, bad strangers. And Ray was still responding and I think that's how he caught the virus."

And an odd thing happened on Abear's last shift. According to Biondo, after Abear finished for the evening, he stopped into the Squad room to feed the fish and clean the tank.

As he started to walk out the door, he paused, turned around, and told his colleagues, "I love you guys." It was not something anyone remembered him doing before.

"He seemed fine, but it was almost as if he had a premonition, or subconsciously knew something was going to happen. Because a week later, he was gone."

"Ray started feeling ill around March 30th," says Catherine. "He came home from work after a Night Watch shift and said, 'I think I might be sick.' He went to our basement, which has a kitchenette, shower, and bath. He quarantined down there. Within 24 hours, he had 102 fever and chills. He spent about ten days in quarantine. He never had any other symptoms except the high fever: about 103 or 104. He took Tylenol and cold showers. He had 'tele-health' visits. No one could see him, because of the symptoms. There was not a lot of knowledge about the virus at that point. They only warned him that, if he felt short of breath, he should go to a hospital.

"I would bring him food and drink, and check his temperature. One day, I went downstairs and he just seemed to me to be short of breath. I got scared and called an ambulance. He needed to go to the hospital. His oxygen level was too low. Before this, he was able to be active and even sweep leaves outside. But we got him to the hospital on April 9th. The doctor was pretty surprised that he could walk in and get up on a chair. He was only in the hospital for three to four days. He passed away on the overnight, in the very early morning on April 13th."

Raymond Abear was 43 years old.

"Ray and I were like big kids together," adds Cruz. "We would argue and then joke. We were like brothers. He made coming to work a lot of fun because of who he was. After 13 hours at work, we would still text or call each other when we got home. And I just miss it."



Biondo can hardly retain his emotion when reminiscing about Abear. "He was a really, really good guy," he says, swallowing tears that hardened Detectives feel they aren't supposed to shed, but, of course, should. "It's been hard to wrap my head around this. This virus is so random. And no one has a chance to have a proper goodbye."

Her husband's passing has been "incredibly hard," says Catherine. "I am so sad for our children. Stella is only one year old. Jackson's only three. Ray and Jackson had an amazing friendship." Abear's shift left him off duty on Sundays and Mondays, so he and Jackson had a standing date to see the fish and other wildlife at the Bronx Zoo every Sunday; and, every Monday, Abear took his son for a horseback riding lesson nearby. "Ray didn't ride," says Catherine, "but he took Jackson to learn. The stable had a special horse for Jackson to ride, and Ray loved to watch Jackson be so happy."

Everyone who knew Abear recognized how much he loved his family and his kids. "Ray and I were only married a few years ago," Catherine says. "It's incredible how much you can love a person and learn about them in a short period of time. I am so sad for our children. They aren't going to have a special bond with their dad when they are growing up, like we had with our parents."

"Ray was a great cop," says Benedict, who retired from the 112 Precinct on March 31, 2020. "And he was an even greater friend. As big as he was, his heart was even bigger."

Biondo adds, "Ray helped so many people. Most people will never touch the amount of lives Ray did, or help the amount of people he did."

Catherine has remained comforted by the devoted friends and colleagues her husband met on the job.

"It has been tremendous what the police fraternity has done for me and the kids," she says. "Every single person, from Paul DiGiacomo at the DEA, to Ray's colleagues, to everyone else. They answer any questions I have. They show up for me and never let me feel alone." Catherine describes the fraternal support from the NYPD for her line-of-duty status as, "a family that you never sign up to be a part of, but I am so grateful that Ray had a legacy and that people loved him. I am so grateful for all of them, especially his Special Victims team. They drove

Det. Raymond Abear



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us where we needed to go, they brought us food, and they just never stopped assisting us," she said. Her comments, ironically, bore a similar resemblance to what Abear was known for when he was assisting crime victims.

"Ray was such a family person," says Cruz. "He talked about finishing his career to become a stay-at-home dad for his kids. He also wanted to take care of his parents by moving to Palm Coast, Florida and buying a two-family house or a big home." Ray's parents had moved south in 2013. Catherine's parents still reside in Queens.

"We are all still very close," she says. She notes how proud her husband was of his immigrant parents who went on to have successful careers: Dorothy Abear retired from St. Joseph's College as a senior auditor for the school; and Abear's father retired as a civil engineer who built and repaired bridges, including the Tappan Zee and the Verrazzano-Narrows.

"They worked so hard," Catherine notes, "It's where Ray got his determination and his strength. He was such an honest and good person.

"Chris and Lichele recently celebrated their tenth anniversary together," Catherine adds, "but we were just starting out and we were robbed of our happy life. I miss hearing Ray laugh. I miss his jokes. He was a wonderful husband."

In August 2020, the Queens Special Victims Squad held a plaque dedication ceremony in Abear's memory. "The Inspector, Caroline Roe, donated a fish tank," Catherine says.



"The Squad officially named the tank after Ray and put it by his desk. Ray was so passionate about fish that it's even how his Squad chose to memorialize him."

They also added a large, stuffed teddy bear. Biondo and others now take care of the fish. Near the tank memorial, Det. Cruz hung up copies of the photos they took in costume down in Orlando.

"When you see it all," says Catherine, "you just feel the love."