

EPILOG

Often in life, those who spend a considerable amount of their time dedicated to the welfare of others have as their reward only the self-satisfaction of having made a difference. More often than not, the recipients of that kindness and attention simply move on, never taking the time to say thank you or even acknowledging that someone had touched their lives. This is not a condemnation of those recipients, just the nature of the beast in a fast paced world with many distractions. Fortunately, it is rarely if ever a cause of frustration or reduction in passion for the giver, for they derive their happiness by giving.

Thankfully, every now and then there is an open recognition of their gifts and when such a recognition comes, it is at first surprising, then embarrassing (gosh, I really didn't do much!), then humbling and finally there is a palpable uplifting of one's spirit and heart.

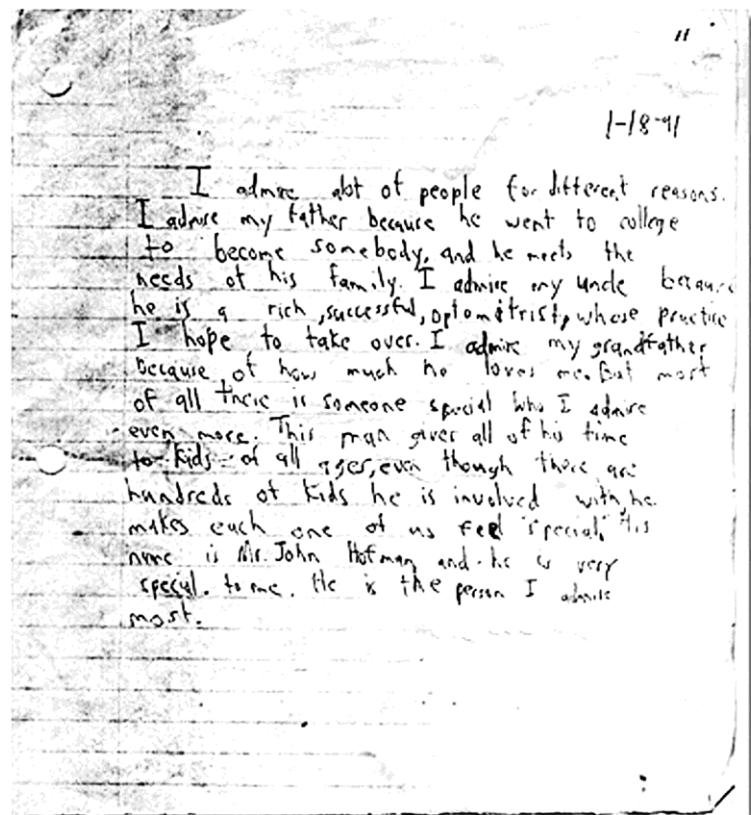
When you hear it expressed by a child, as honestly as only a child unencumbered by adult pressures can do, it has twice the impact and it is a memory that will be with you forever. You tend to keep such moments to yourself since by sharing it with others you fear they may think you a braggart or a softie. And that, for this author, is sad, for those individuals are far from braggarts; they are role models for the rest of us. And we need role models, everywhere.

In that spirit John shared a few stories and memories that he carried close to his heart. Other than a brief description of the context, these events require no explanation or comments. They stand entirely on their own.



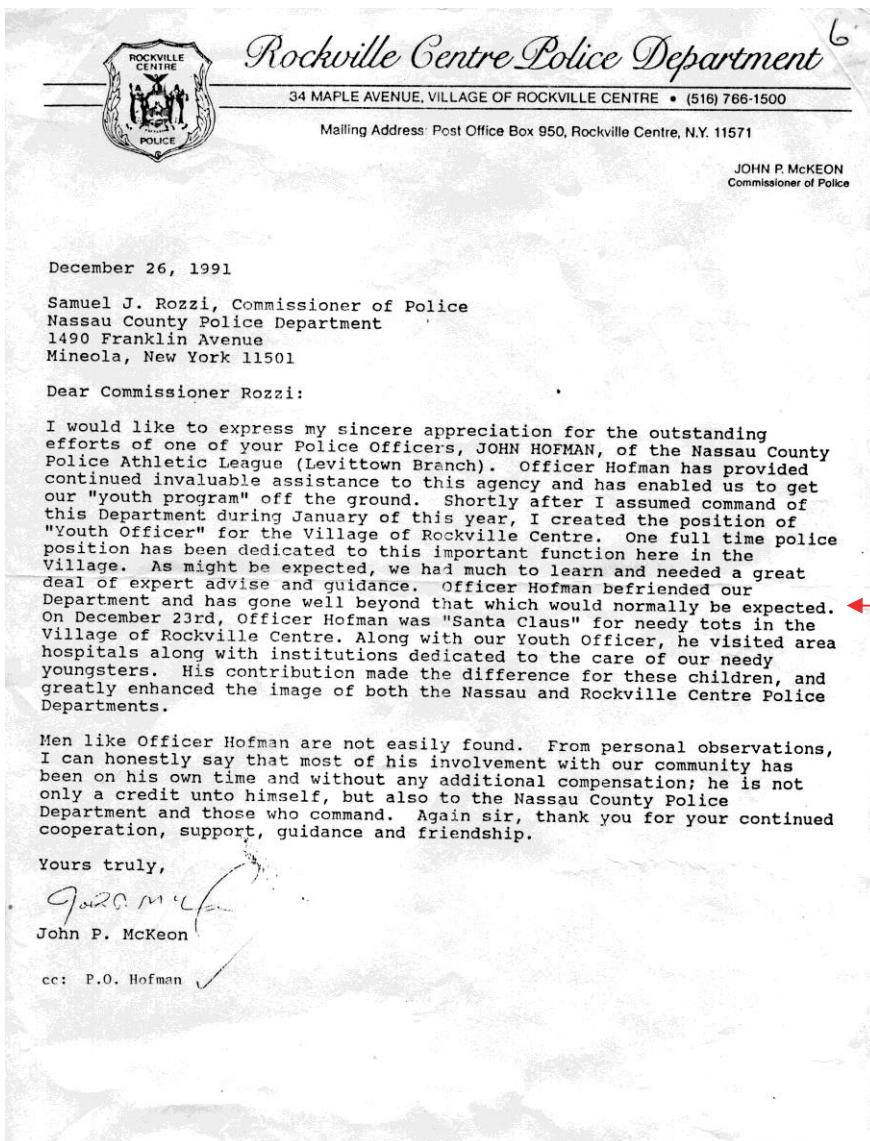
The National Association of Police Athletic - Activities Leagues (PAL) was formed to prevent crime and violence utilizing a recreation-oriented juvenile crime prevention program that relies heavily upon athletic, recreational activities and education to help kids go right and stay right. John began his work with the PAL (Police Activity League – formerly the PBC, Police Boys Club) in February 1975. That work continued for twenty-five years.

In 1991 one of the young boys John had worked with was given the traditional school assignment to write an essay about someone he admired. This is what he wrote –



When John first donned the Santa suit for the children at the orphanage in Salzburg, Austria, in 1962, he was hooked. Remembering the "familiar" Santa our family all grew up with, John was everywhere, every year. The only things that limited his efforts were the number of minutes in the day and the time and ability to travel from place to place. Anyone along the way who gave him a second glance would also be blessed with a visit from Santa and good memories. He would never know many of these people, but they would always remember him.

A letter from the Commander of the Rockville Center Police Department written the day after Christmas in 1991 tells it all. Commander John McKeon was expressing his appreciation to the Nassau County Commissioner of Police, Samuel J. Rozzi, for John's tireless help in launching Rockville Center's youth programs. But the letter went further –



Just another day at the office for John and totally consistent with his commitment made at the orphanage!

On January 10, 1993, just after Christmas, another young boy, ten-year-old Brian Messina, wrote an essay about something he had discovered about two very important people in his life – Santa and his friend, Mr. "Hoppman". As you can from his writings his discovery did nothing to diminish the magic of the moment or the man –

Another year, another Santa visit.

A week before Christmas as Santa Claus, along with the Karate Kids, McGruff the dog¹ and the karate instructor Anthony Sodano, John went to the Nassau County Medical Center to visit many of the sick children. In one of the rooms they entered, there was a young Asian girl. She was so red and her face was so swollen she was unrecognizable. They talked for a while and she managed to give them a slight smile. They gave her a gift then John left the room.

The girl's mother was sitting in the corner and saw the PAL patches on the Karate Kids uniforms. She stopped Anthony and asked "Are you from the PAL program?"

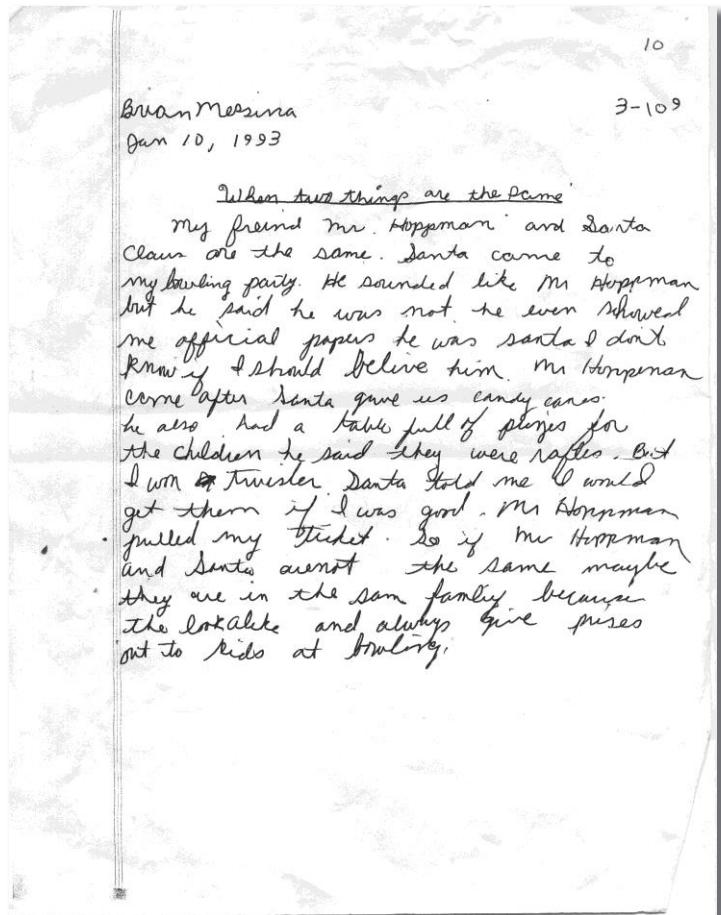
Anthony said yes, they were, and she said, "This is wonderful. I can't wait to tell John Hofmann when I see him."

Before they left the hospital Anthony took John back to the little girl's room and when John saw the mother he realized the little girl was part of the PAL volleyball program he had organized and run. The mother looked at John still in his Santa suit and beard, thanking him so much for cheering up her daughter.

She turned to Anthony and said "I promise to tell John how great you guys were."

Anthony pointed to John and said "You just did!"

In recounting this moment John said, "I think her chin hit the floor just as we left the room, and our spirits soared."



¹ McGruff Club is a crime prevention and safety education program for children who are between the ages of six and ten. Through McGruff Club, children become engaged in their communities and learn about safety while having fun with their friends and adults who care for them.

RETIREMENT

When Police Officer PAL Director John Hofmann retired from the Nassau County Police Force in January of 2000 after a very fulfilling 35-year career, he expected to move on quietly – what person of humility would think otherwise. He expected no more than the obligatory retirement dinner roast and good wishes but there would be a number of surprises both at the dinner and out in public long after.

Using the MC's notes from the retirement dinner as an outline of the evening, here is an encapsulation of the career, and life, of John Charles Hofmann.



"Good evening. I'd like to welcome everybody to the celebration of John's retirement, and in essence a celebration of his un-selfish commitment to the Nassau County Police Department & Levittown PAL Unit.

A special welcome to John & Patty and John's daughter Dawn - who is here from Denver to celebrate her Dad's retirement with us, to John's son John and his wife Kathy and to members of the Levittown PAL Civilian Executive Board....

Well John, it's been a great run. As I was preparing what I was going to say this evening, I decided to illustrate the influence you have had on the children of Levittown and surrounding communities the past 26 years by identifying some staggering statistics:

John, over 27,000 children have participated in programs you have managed.

You started in Levittown PAL with 40 Boys playing Softball & 25 Girls & Boys in Track. You operated from the back of a station wagon and later the infamous RED pick-up.

Well John, we grew a bit since then. This year (2000) we have over 2200 children participating in 15 Activities. WOW - What a success. You probably had something to do with this growth!!!

In 1996, we moved into our present headquarters – Thus, abandoning your homes foyer, spare bedroom and shed.

Patty could now stop inviting people over, just so you would clean up the PAL stuff.

A sampling of commendations awards John has received:

- *1991 PTA Honorary Life Award from the Levittown Council of PTAs and commendation letter from the Nassau County Police Commissioner. The letter and the PTA's awards dinner write-up of your accomplishments captures the essence of who you are and you still had nine more years of service ahead of you.*

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HONORARY LIFE CANDIDATE: JOHN HOFMANN

John Hofmann was born in Plainview and as a kid he loved baseball. He became a Nassau County Police Officer April 16, 1965. On September 8, 1967 he married Pat. By 1969, they had begun their family with the birth of Dawn. Shortly after their second child John was born, they moved to Holbrook where they still live today.

It was April 29, 1974 that John became involved with PAL activities in the Oyster Bay Unit. Almost instantly, he realized how much he cared about helping children develop a good self-image through sports.

In April 1980, John took over leadership of the Levittown Unit. He assessed the needs of the community and offered appropriate new programs which led to increased enrollment.

Over the past 10 years thousands of youngsters have participated in baseball, bowling, girls softball, karate, track, basketball, roller hockey, and lacrosse. These are just some of the many programs that owe their existence to John.

John directs the annual county-wide track program which is held on Saturdays from early April through mid-June. Due to John's effective leadership, 13 PAL units participated -- more than any other year.

John was instrumental in getting L.I. Trust, now the Bank of N.Y., to sponsor the track championship meet. Even now, he is in the process of setting-up a roller hockey rink behind Levittown Memorial H.S. I'm sure he will accomplish this goal as well.

John's philosophy is that children are here to learn, have fun, and become better sportspersons -- encouraging each other to do their very best. The game is never more important than any child!

John is unselfish. He's always around checking on "his kids." He makes sure everything runs well and that the leaders selected are caring and competent. John's standards for leaders are tough, but he can be counted on to help as much as possible to develop leaders with good self-images too.

John takes all kids into his programs, even those whose parents can't participate. John is understanding and approachable. He is part of the solution. You couldn't ask for a better man.

He has earned the respect of his co-workers, leaders, family and "kids." John has never considered what he does for "his kids" as work, it is his love. John's interest is not limited to sports performance. You can find him in the schools checking to make sure "his kids" are working up to their potential.

His "SAY NO TO DRUGS" program has helped many students stand up to peer pressure. His encouragement and genuine respect for the kids he works with, enables them to grow into responsible teens and adults.

The Levittown community is a better place because of John Hofmann. According to an article reprinted in PTA Today, "Leaders empower and help liberate others. They enhance the possibilities for freedom--both for people and organizations. They engage with followers in such a way that many of the followers become leaders in their own right."

"Leaders are individuals who help create options and opportunities -- who can help clarify problems and choices, who can build morale and coalitions, who can inspire others and provide a vision of the possibilities and promise of a better organization or a better community." Thank you, John Hofmann, for being our leader.

- *1996 National PAL - Juvenile Crime Prevention Specialist of the Year, Phoenix Arizona.* The National Crime Prevention Association (NCPA) and National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC), in partnership with the Bureau of Justice Assistance of the U.S. Department of Justice, establish a certification program and recognition program, nationwide.
- *1997 International Narcotics Enforcement Officers Association Commendation Award, San Diego, California.*
- *1998 International Narcotics Enforcement Officers Association Special Award of Honor, New Orleans, Louisiana.*



Now I'd like to show some memory lane slides of John's life.

Slide #1 - John at 2 ½ waiting for his dad to come home from the war in 1944:



Slide #2 - John 1961 - They let him guard President Kennedy when he visited Germany in 1963 - What a man!!!!



Slide #3 - John 1965 - Nassau's finest!!



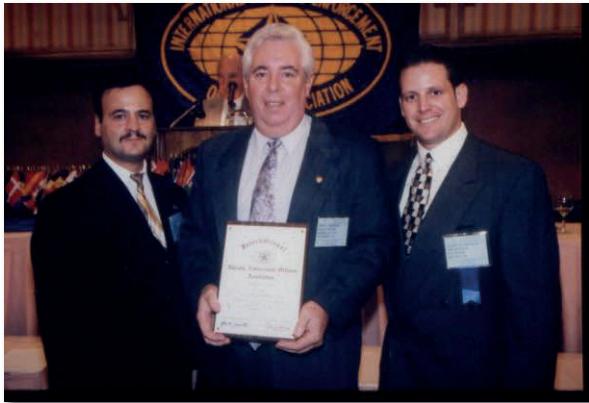
Slide #4 - 1966 - John & Patty



Slide #5 - Is that Elvis in the back ???



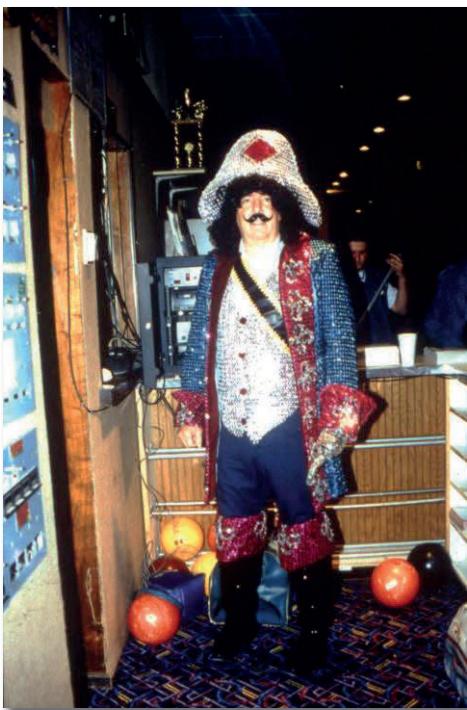
Slide # 6 - Receiving another award - Patty gets another trip!!!!!! This one Arizona



Slide # 7 - John announces PAL cross dressing program.



Slide # 8 - This photo prompted an emergency email to Dawn. This redefined commitment!!

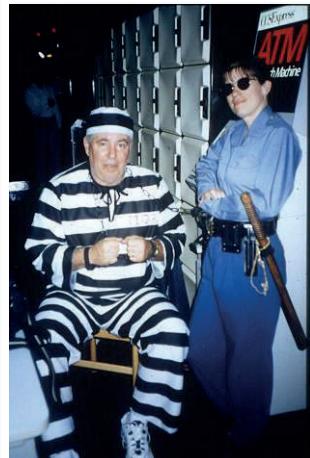


Slide # 9 – And if you are going to be Captain Hook one year you might as well be Tinkerbell the next shown here with PAL ex treasurer - Dotty Malone. Shortly after this was taken - Dotty moved to Las Vegas and was never heard from again!!!! I wonder!!!!



John, you will be sorely missed by the Nassau County Police Force, all of those you have touched in PAL, your fellow officers, colleagues and many, many friends. Best of luck in your retirement."

... and a few other memories.



It is fitting to end this biography with one last story –

Patty and John were walking from the shopping mall to their car when they heard a scream,

“Mr. John!” (That is what all the kids called him in the PAL.)

They turned and saw no one then heard it again, “Mr. John!”

This time they saw a young man with a young lady in hand running through the parking lot towards them. John recognized him. His name was Jimmy. He had met him years ago as a tough kid in and out of trouble at school. John had gotten him involved in PAL programs and visited him at home just to see how he was doing.

When he and the young lady caught up to them, he gave John a big hug and said, “This is Marla, my girlfriend. Marla, this is the man who kept me out of trouble when I was younger. Mr. John I just wanted to say thanks and to tell you I finished high school and I am now in college studying criminal law to become a police officer just like you.”

As was said earlier in this Epilog, on the rare occasion of a genuine thank you for the gifts you have given, your heart is touched as deeply as ever. John tried to hold back the tears but he could not. He told him he was so proud of him, asked about his family and, of course, thanked him in return.

They said goodbye and went on their way but the memory of an impromptu meeting in a parking lot lasted a lifetime.

To close with an old cliché – John, you done good. We miss you ...

