According to my mother, I have had the same career ambitions since I was a small child. I have wanted to be a police officer since I can remember. When most children were watching cartoons on television I was watching any television show that dealt with police work. Several family friends were police officers when I was a child. I would find myself interrogating them about their jobs. I don’t ever remember thinking of police work as the car chases or the gun fights. From the beginning I had a good understanding of the paperwork involved in the job.

Shortly after I turned sixteen years old it came to my attention that our local sheriff’s department had a cadet program. I was told that I could ride with the deputies in their cars, work in the jail and spend time in the communications center if I desired. It did not take long for me to submit an application. Once I was accepted into the program it did not take long for friends at school to dwindle in numbers. This was my first indication of things I may have to give up to be in this profession. I guess the whole idea of the program was to see everything involved in the police profession, both good and bad, then make a decision if this was really the career I wanted.

I was not able to just get into the deputies car and go with them on the job right away. I had, much like any officer, some training I had to take first. The most difficult thing for me was memorizing the codes that the deputies use on the radio when they communicated. These were called the 10 codes and I had to know them all. I had to go
through CPR and first aid training and I had to take a flagging class to learn how to direct traffic. We had a meeting every Tuesday night and often deputies would come and speak to us about the profession. We had corrections officers, detectives, and the sheriff himself speak at these meetings. We learned about our search and rescue unit so we could assist them if needed.

All of this led up to the first time I would get to ride in a police car with a deputy. I will never forget my first night on the road. I decided to ride with a sergeant at the department who was also a K-9 unit. His name is Bill Mahoney and he had been with the department for many years. He took me out to what is arguably the busiest road in the county. He started some small talk with me. I think he sensed my excitement and wanted to help me settle in. He asked me about my future goals and about my family. I remember Bill asking me, “Do you know your 10 codes?”

“Yes I do,” I proudly responded. I explained to him that we had to get 100% on our test to be able to ride along with a deputy.

“Good, because the radio is yours for the night,” Bill said. I have to admit this was a bit unsettling for me. After Bill told me I was responsible for the radio he began to do something that I later found to be a little uncharacteristic of him. He began to pull over every vehicle that had even the smallest violation such as an out license plate light.

I will never forget the first vehicle we pulled over. Bill turned on his emergency lights and the vehicle pulled over. He just got out of the vehicle and began walking up to the driver’s side. This was it, the chance to talk on the police radio. Bill’s identification number as an officer was 125. I picked up the radio and pushed the transmit button.
“One-twenty-five to one.” I said into it. When an officer says “to one,” he is talking to the communications center. My hands were sweaty and I was breathing heavily when the communications center responded.

They said simply “One-twenty-five.” This is their way of acknowledging your radio traffic.

I keyed the microphone and said, “I will be ten-seventy-one with Frank Nora Victor three-sixty-seven.” This is when I began to panic. I had told them that we had pulled over a vehicle and I even told them the license plate number but I had no idea where we were. I quickly rolled down the passenger side window, stuck half my body out and with Bills K-9 barking in the background, and yelled, “Bill where are we?” I was definitely in a panic as the communications center waited for the rest of my transmission. I could hear the communications center saying “One-twenty-five, what is your location?”

Bill had a very calming smile across his face.

“Tell them we are in the 4500 block of Ocean Beach Highway.” I relayed the information to the communications center.

I was a little bit embarrassed as Bill came back to the police car. Bill got into the car and explained how to quickly and easily find where you were at any time. I spent many hours in that police car with Bill in the future. He quickly became more than a mentor; he became my hero. He was everything I wanted to be when I became an adult. Bill taught me endless lessons about law enforcement. I am 33 years old now and to this day a 24-hour period does not go by where I do not think of him. He taught me not only things about becoming a police officer but about being a good person. I still use the quotes I learned from Bill in tense situations. One of the most powerful things I
remember about Bill is his ability to walk into a really bad situation and make everything ok in just a few seconds. He said to me once “Now listen up Todd. If you learn nothing else from me learn this. Forty five minutes talking a person into the police car versus five minutes fighting him into the car will be the best forty five minutes you ever spent.”

Bill Mahoney is now the Sheriff of that county. It was no fluke that he was so successful. Because of this one person in my life, I strive to be as good a person as I can be. He was not just an example of how to do law-enforcement, but an example of how to be a father and husband and citizen. I have never met anyone with the integrity of Bill Mahoney. If it sounds like I idolize the man, it is because I do. He is one of the biggest reasons that I find myself in college at 33 years old. He told me to never abandon my dreams. He is one of the reasons I will be successful in my life.