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Welcome, Dawn |

Law must protect police officers

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Kill a cop and a world of hurt will come crashing down on you.

There can be no other way.

On Sunday and Monday in the Chicago Sun-Times, reporter Frank Main told the story of the murder of a Chicago Police officer, Kenneth Kaner, in 1970, and of the man who killed him, Bruce Sharp. For 34 years, the families of the two men have been locked in a struggle over if and when Sharp should be released from prison.

Sharp, who is serving a sentence of 30 to 125 years, has gone before the Illinois Prison Review Board more than 20 times since 1979 to request a parole, but he's never received more than five of the eight votes he needs.

"Enough is enough," says Tyrone Sharp Sr., arguing for his brother's release.

"Our feeling is that cop killers should never be released from prison," counters former police Supt. Phil Cline, director of the Chicago Police Foundation.

Never released? We can't go that far. Cop killers are not all alike. Judges are supposed to sort the stupid kids from the stone-cold killers and sentence accordingly.

But society must let it be known that anybody who threatens the safety of a police officer, let alone kills an officer, will be shown no mercy — for the sake of all officers. It is an officer's badge and uniform, far more than his gun and Kevlar vest, that give him authority and keep him safe.

Bruce Sharp was just out of college when he killed Kaner for nothing with a shotgun. He was, he explains now, an angry young black man caught up in the tensions of the times. Today, he is a model prisoner.

But we're troubled that Sharp continues to change his story, conveniently so. He used to say Kaner's gun was unholstered. Now he says Kaner was pointing the gun at him.

And we frankly don't buy his story that he never meant to kill Kaner, only to embarrass him and take his gun. Was Sharp's accomplice, who also shot Kaner, also seeking only to embarrass the officer?

A man full of remorse does not cling to self-serving fictions.

Forty-three years is a long time to be in prison. It is also, Officer Kenneth Kaner's family will say, a long time to be dead.

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