

## A Mug, A Memory, and the Meaning of Family

Sometimes, the smallest things carry the greatest weight.

For Carol Liddle, it was a coffee mug.

It wasn't just any mug—it was her late husband Walt's Ohio State Highway Patrol Retiree's Association mug. For years after his passing, it had become part of her daily ritual. Each morning, she would pour her coffee into it, wrap her hands around its familiar shape, and in a quiet way, feel close to him again. It was more than ceramic and paint. It was comfort. It was memory. It was him.

Then one ordinary morning, everything changed.



The mug slipped from her hands and shattered on the floor.

To anyone else, it might have seemed like a simple accident. But to Carol, and to her daughter Shelley, it felt like losing a small piece of Walt all over again.

Shelley knew she had to try.

As the daughter of retired Lieutenant Walter Liddle, Shelley had grown up surrounded by the Highway Patrol family. She remembered the camaraderie, the stories, the laughter, and the deep respect officers shared for one another—not just as colleagues, but as brothers and sisters. Hoping that connection still lived on, she reached out to the Ohio State Highway Patrol Retiree's Association.

She wasn't sure what to expect. Perhaps a suggestion. Maybe a lead on where to purchase a replacement. At best, she thought she might find something similar.

What she received was something far greater.

Colonel Richard "Butch" Collins, Retired, responded warmly. He shared that Colonel Tom Rice had volunteered one of his own Retiree's Association mugs—not an exact replacement, but one

filled with the same meaning and belonging. And more than that, Colonel Rice offered to personally deliver it to Carol.

He didn't hesitate. He didn't ask questions. He simply gave.

It wasn't about the mug.

It was about honoring Walt.

It was about reminding Carol that she was not alone.

When Shelley shared the news with her mother, Carol's face lit up. She immediately recognized the name Colonel Rice and softly called him "her friend." In that moment, the years fell away, and the Patrol family was right there with her again.



Shelley was overwhelmed—not just by the gesture, but by what it represented. The Highway Patrol wasn't just an organization her father had served. It was, and always would be, family.

In the days that followed, Shelley reflected on how something so small could carry so much meaning. The mug would never replace Walt. Nothing could. But it didn't need to. It served as a reminder of the life he lived, the friendships he built, and the legacy he left behind.

Most importantly, it reminded them both that Walt's story didn't end with his passing. It lived on in the people he served beside. In their kindness. In their memories. In their willingness to show up—decades later—when it mattered most.

For Carol, the next cup of coffee would taste a little warmer.

For Shelley, it was proof that the bonds forged in service never break.

And for the Ohio State Highway Patrol family, it was simply what they had always done—taking care of their own.