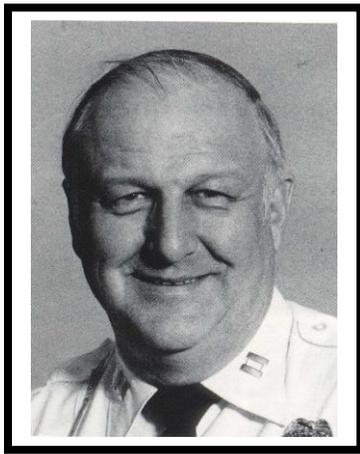
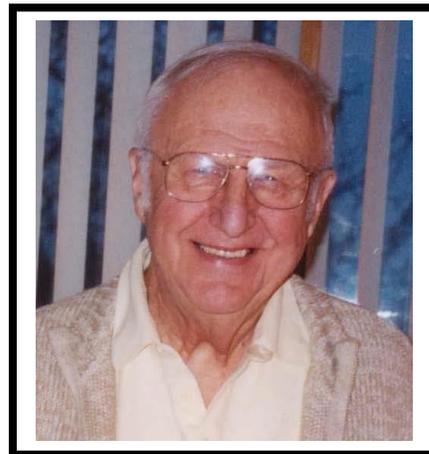


Transcription of Saint Paul Police Oral History Interview with

# Captain Wilfred O. Jyrkas



1984



2006

**Saint Paul Police Officer**  
**July 27, 1949 – August 28, 1986**

November 18, 2005

By  
Kate Cavett  
at

HAND in HAND Productions' office in Saint Paul, Minnesota

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All photographs are from William Jyrkas' personal photo collection or from the Saint Paul Police Department's personnel files.

 **Saint Paul Police Department**  
**and**  
**HAND in HAND Productions**  
**2006**

# ORAL HISTORY

Oral History is the spoken word in print.

Oral histories are personal memories shared from the perspective of the narrator. By means of recorded interviews oral history documents collect spoken memories and personal commentaries of historical significance. These interviews are transcribed verbatim and minimally edited for accessibility. Greatest appreciation is gained when one can read an oral history aloud.

Oral histories do not follow the standard language usage of the written word. Transcribed interviews are not edited to meet traditional writing standards; they are edited only for clarity and understanding. The hope of oral history is to capture the flavor of the narrator's speech and convey the narrator's feelings through the timbre and tempo of speech patterns.

An oral history is more than a family tree with names of ancestors and their birth and death dates. Oral history is recorded personal memory, and that is its value. What it offers complements other forms of historical text, and does not always require historical corroboration. Oral history recognizes that memories often become polished as they sift through time, taking on new meanings and potentially reshaping the events they relate.

Memories shared in an oral histories create a picture of the narrator's life – the culture, food, eccentricities, opinions, thoughts, idiosyncrasies, joys, sorrows, passions - the rich substance that gives color and texture to this individual life.

Kate Cavett

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Wilfred O. Jyrkas was appointed patrolman  
for the saint Paul Police Department  
July 29, 1949

Promoted:

Sergeant August 11, 1960  
Lieutenant December 14, 1965  
Captain November 29, 1971

Retired

August 28, 1986.

KC: Kate Cavett

WJ: Wilfred Jyrkas

KC: It is Friday November 18, 2005. We are in HAND in HAND's office. I'd like you to introduce yourself to me with your name and your age and the rank that you retired from the Saint Paul Police Department.

WJ: My name is Wilfred Jyrkas<sup>1</sup> and I'm seventy-seven years old, in two months I'll be seventy-eight. I was born January 18, 1928 and I went on the Saint Paul Police Department July 27, 1949, and retired in 1986, thirty-seven years and held most ranks in the Department, worked primarily in uniform and I was a senior captain at the time I retired.

KC: What were you doing when you applied for the police department?

WJ: I was working as a cement laborer. It was the old fashioned way of mixed cement by hand and the cement blocks were seventy-five pounds a piece

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<sup>1</sup> Wilfred O. Jyrkas (January 18, 1928 - ) was appointed patrolman July 29, 1949; promoted to sergeant August 11, 1960; lieutenant December 14, 1965; captain November 29, 1971; and retired August 28, 1986.

and I worked for block layer and while it made me in good shape, I didn't necessarily think I was in a lifetime job.

A neighbor suggested I take the police test and I kind of said, "Who, me?" because I kind of thought of myself and a couple of my buddies as being a little bit on the wild side in our neighborhood and I didn't really see myself as being a law enforcer. Although, I have to back up and say, if we played cops and robbers, I always wanted to be the cop. Going back even younger, all of my little heroes were cops, so, maybe that was destined to be.

KC: Do you remember what it was that attracted you to the Department?

WJ: Well, after World War II there was a spurt—of course, all the veterans came home that survived the war and had to get their jobs back, and I didn't seem to ever have any problem getting work. I got work all the time, but it was at the laborer level or beginning factory help. One day I left the house and had three jobs during the course of the day. That was how hard it was, you could walk out of one plant and walk right into another one and offer yourself. But the strange thing was if I got the job they told me, "Show me your hands," and they ran their hands over your hands, if you had calluses you got hired. Calluses on the hand, not on the brain. So, I was a little tired of this moving around, so when Harrington<sup>2</sup>, it was a Harrington, Charlie Harrington, who was a patrolman, offered me a chance, he said, "Why don't you take the test." That's the first I

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<sup>2</sup> Charles A. Harrington was appointed reserve patrolman April 29, 1941; military leave January 15, 1942 to November 23, 1945; and retired August 31, 1976.

really thought about it and I did, I took the test and passed it and went on the Department.

KC: In 1949 and how old were you?

WJ: I was twenty-one, I was probably one of the younger officers that went on.

KC: And you were a veteran.

WJ: I was a veteran. At that time I was a veteran of World War II, I had veteran status. I had been in the Naval Air Corps briefly, I enlisted in V5, which was a pilot program and then I had gone to, what they call a V12 portion, which was a college, Muhlenberg College [Allentown PA] out east.

KC: You came in as a veteran and when you got on, what was your training like?

WJ: Well, we had two weeks of training. It was primarily lectures, probably the only really strong classes we had were taught by the FBI. We had an old G-man, I mean a G-man, not an FBI agent, who taught us. The difference between a G-man and the current agents are the G-man carried fifty dollars, which was a lot of money in those days, in their wallet. And their instructions were, if you see a wanted person, you stay with them until you can contact us, and that means follow them onto a train, a plane, a bus, whatever.

I remember some of his lectures very clearly. The primary one, which became kind of a, well, I think, a real motivation, is try not to hurt anybody, but remember it's better you go on trial for their murder than they go on trial for yours. It's just a job. So, that was one thing you kind of

filed away and put in the back of your head. We had two FBI agents and the other guy's name was Anderson, I believe, and he taught me a lot about cars and auto theft and robberies. But old Sam Hardy, he was full of stories, he knew a million stories and, of course, they were all from the old bootleg days and gangster days, a very interesting man, but philosophically a great cop, just wanted the things to be right.

KC: What made him a philosophical great cop?

WJ: Well, just the drive to take and make the community better, I think. It's hard to put into words, but, you know, you constantly zero in on how you control these 10, 15% of the public that won't obey the laws and will take advantage of every other human being they come in contact with. He left a mark on them. In that two weeks, we also had a little time in the gymnasium and practice come-alongs holds and things of that nature and take downs. What else did we have?

We had some traffic control, a little practice out on the street, which kind of caught my attention, I saw it as a good tool to control a lot of situations and I preached it all through my years when I was an instructor and I can use it today. I can shut a room down so it's absolutely silence in a matter of minute if I use a police whistle. And, sometimes just projecting my voice and I've got control, they don't have control.

KC: After two weeks you're out on the street, did you have a field training officer or just you're out on you own?

WJ: I guess, we did work with a veteran officer for about a week or maybe two. I remember stopping the first fellow for going through a red light

and my partner says, "You might as well get your feet wet, go on up there and write him a tag for going through the red light." I was shaking so bad, I didn't know if I could do it. I probably wrote more tags than anybody else on this Department later on, because that was my specialty, traffic, but the first one was tough. Keep yourself composed, 90% of the people that I came in contact with after the enforcement event, said thank you. The only thing they could really thank me for was trying to treat them like a human being, because I tried to follow that once I got over this first hump.

But the first time, I think it was at the end of two weeks, Joe Renteria<sup>3</sup> and I got assigned to a car. He was a brother rookie, we came on the same time, and we went out and we got our first accident call. We never investigated an accident before, so we had to go all the way through. It was kind of funny because we were asking each other, well, what do you think we should do next, and ta, da, da, da. But the elements of an investigation are the same whether its an accident or burglary, robbery or even homicide, basically they're the same.

KC: You said they'd say thank you because I treated them with respect. How were you taught to do that? Where did you learn that was something that Saint Paul Police officers did?

WJ: I don't know if I can tell you exactly that. I know that you kind of pick your own models, at least in our day. And, you've got to remember we

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<sup>3</sup> Joseph A Renteria was appointed patrolman July 25, 1949; and retired July 24, 1979.

were on the tail end of the days when they had been dealing with bootleggers and they had been dealing with the past criminal history of Saint Paul.

So, you'd start to do something, and I remember a number of times a detective touching me on the shoulder and turning me around and said, hey, kid, watch yourself when you go in on this one, this guy is bad or he needs to be watched. And conversely a number of them told me, okay, this guy is a little off base now, he's a good solid person most of the time.

And then you'd see officers, some of them were, well, tough, I guess is the word, they wanted to be very authoritative and they ended up with a fight every time. Then you had others who did just a little more talking, maybe believed at least part of the story that they were hearing and would accept that. But then would tell them, you still are in violation, I have to take you in or I have to write you a tag, or whatever the case might be. And, they got by without a fight or if they had one it was very short lived. It just seemed like it was better to try to talk your way out of some of these things rather than fight your way out of it. We ended up fighting with some of them whether we talked or not, but at least we made the attempt most of the time.

KC: You referred to being at the end of what is often referred to as the gangster era. We know that in the 1930s Saint Paul had a well earned reputation for not being the most honorable, ethical police department in the nation. What was the culture? Did you experience efforts to changing

this? Where there standards? What did you hear about the '30s, about the Dillinger time and how were things changing?

WJ: Well, you know, you listen to these stories and like I say there really seemed to be, thinking back on this, seemed to be probably several groups within the Department itself. We had the old time detectives, some of them who had no time for you and I couldn't tell that they really did any investigative work. They had another group that [when] they showed up there you always got help and they always seemed to take your case seriously and do something with it, those are the ones we tried to give cases to. And, there was a few that came in and even stole your arrest away from you and you quickly learned not to call them if they were on duty, because there was no profit in that.

But there was some, almost like an underground thing. I remember going out to work, 308 District [which] used to start at Seven Corners and most of the time it went all the way to Fort Snelling, everything below the Bluffs. The area from about Seven Corners all out to about Smith Avenue, I remember my sergeant telling me, "Okay, you work out here kid, you got to remember one thing, almost every address you go to, these people have been to prison and they're not easy to work with," he said, "The only thing I can tell you is be fair, be positive, if you say something stick to it, and watch your back." And he said, "other than that can't do it, and you'll get along fine." Well, I tried that, the next thing I know I found myself working that district all alone, because we worked a lot of solo cars in those days. But I still saw things that I thought needed cleaning up.

Then I kind of started a system where I warned people almost all the time before I actually started an enforcement action, unless there was violence going on.

There was a few places where you really had to watch your back. I remember, I got so I wasn't real happy walking into the Twin Light Tavern, for instance, on Leech Street, that had the reputation of having every convict in town gathered there to visit with his pals. There were a few more around, but that was probably the worst one. You knew you were the minority, you walked in there and everything quieted down, but they didn't have nothing but eyes for you, no friendly hellos or hi or anything like that.

There were some other places, too, we had an island on the west side. The Flats they used to call them, the Flats, State Street, Filmore and some of the streets there. Then there was an island that went out in the Mississippi that isn't there anymore, it's about where the Comcast building is, the big glass one.

There was no law on that island, literally. I don't think anybody had a phone, it was all squatters, lots of dogs, and there was one guy who called himself Scotty and he tried to kind of be the cop. He'd call us every once in awhile and we'd go down. When you got out of the car, you got out of the car with a nightstick in your hand, because you usually had to whack a stray dog or two to get to find out what was going on. There's a lot of

weird things happen. One day they caught Scotty and tied him to a fencepost with barbed wire, we got the call and went down there and freed him up, but it was his pals. They were all alcoholics and kind of that day's homeless people, except they had these shacks and hovels and they would exist by taking this spoiled and damaged fruit and vegetables out of the rail cars and that kind of thing.

KC: Were there officers assigned to the Flats?

WJ: To the Flats, yes, that was 318. It was kind of an interesting neighborhood in a lot of ways. Those people were very poor, most of them. I remember coming home and telling my wife, you know, some of these people live in just terrible conditions, but they pay as much rent as we do. And, so slum landlords go way back, apparently. We didn't pay very much in those days, I think we paid forty dollars a month for our apartment and it was like a two room apartment and a shared bath in somebody's duplex. It wasn't anything real deluxe. But those looked pretty tacky. These old houses had literally sunk right into the mother earth. The doors didn't open good half the time and I don't think you could lock them very good, it was pretty bad. But it was pretty well crime free during the week, we didn't have much activity then.

But payday night, Friday night, Saturday night, we had a tavern called the Bucket of Blood, we had some pretty good fights in there and it was pretty wild sometimes. The neighborhood itself had a mix of people in it, later on it became kind of predominantly Mexican and then after that Latinos of different kinds. At the time that I was down there, we had Lebanese

people and we had quite a few Jewish people mixed in, really that's not a nationality, I think most of them were from Russia, a few Blacks, a few Indians.

KC: Italians?

WJ: I don't think there was any Italians to speak of on the Flats. They were down on the Levee and they were lower Payne Avenue.

KC: So how did you go about policing the Flats with the various ethnicities?

WJ: Well, you started out with one or two people that seemed to trust you. We'd go by, for instance, the day was nice the Lebanese people were probably out with a grill. Which nobody else grilled in those days, but they were out making this flat bread that they make and barbequing a little piece of lamb. We'd stop and they'd invite us up, we'd come up and have a little lamb with them and bread.

We had more time, you've got to have more time to get with the people, you can't establish anything driving by holding a steering wheel and looking straight ahead, or even just stopping and asking somebody how is everything, everybody says fine or don't say anything to you. You have to have time to develop a little friendship between them and when you get to know one or two, then you start to know their children maybe. Then you don't have to run to the station with everything, you can say, "Hey Joe," or whoever he is, "I saw your boy, Dave, down here, I don't know, he's hanging with some pretty rough characters, you maybe better keep a closer eye on him." And, all of a sudden you were one less person on that street gang. I don't know what went on and we didn't want to

ask. [Chuckles] But I think that's the core to it, you've got to establish some kind of friendship.

Now, some of the things were harder to make any in-roads in, the merchants. Of course, we tried to go into almost every merchant once during your tour. Not to pester, the trick was don't stay in there and be something that spoils his business, but stop in and let the neighborhood know you're friends with him. You can stop in several merchants every day even if you're a patrol car, walk in and say, *How is things going? You got any problems? da da dadada Anybody pestering you?* And, first they won't say much of anything. Pretty soon, about the second or third time you stop and do that, they've got something to say – "better watch this guy," "that so and so," "he's been hanging around, I don't like the way he acts at all." Oh. So you got a little tip there, so you know a little bit about him before he committed crimes, many times, you knew where he lived, you knew things, so that helped considerably. And, I've always been proud, it seems to me in Saint Paul, when a crime happens, not every time, but if this person is a local, we got him picked up within forty-eight hours. They don't all do that [in other cities.]

KC: And, that is because?

WJ: I think it's because officers have taken the time to learn something about the people. You know, even if they're bad, the more you can learn. Well, of course, that's what your job is, is to learn more about them, but good or bad, you'll be able to differentiate a little bit between them and their characteristics. People who commit sex crimes have a little different

mentality from those who are going to go out and rob you or assault you. You know, some of that's very apparent at a younger age.

KC: When you were working in the Flats and you were building these relationships, if there was a crime, would you then go back and visit people and just get the tip quietly?

WJ: Yes, but usually so that they didn't get in the middle, and that's sometimes hard to do. We used to keep a little notebook. That was our old fashioned way of keeping information. It never went down, but the notebook was always there and it was kind of the standard question from the detectives if they had a major crime, a felony or anything happened, "We're looking for a guy who is so big and does this kind of thing, maybe hangs out . . ." You'd usually take out your notebook and you'd say, "Well, I got a guy like, so and so, maybe try this guy, see what he's got to say."

The other side of that is the public wasn't so sensitive, they weren't out to oppose you at every turn. The law said that as a police officer, I could stop anybody on the street and question them, but before you did that a lot of times you had some information about them. The number one best insight for a cop is, if I stop and ask you a question and you reply in a lie, I got something to dig on right away. If you tell me the truth, even if it involves you a little bit, I can then make a judgment call, are you involved in a crime or are you just know of it, or what's the story here. But if you lied to me, that triggers my wants to get you if you're wrong. [Chuckles]

KC: You came on, I don't remember what month, you came on in '49.

WJ: July of 1949.

KC: Okay, so this was right after Allan Lee was killed.

WJ: No, just before, he was killed in August or September.

KC: September 10<sup>th</sup>. What was it like in the Department when an officer was killed in '49?

WJ: Well, I can remember that pretty clear, it happened on my shift. We had eighteen cars on the street, supposedly. But we never put out about four or five of them, so we can bring that number down to about a dozen cars on the street on a typical shift. So, this thing started out as a liquor store stick-up and one of our, what we called emergency cars, just looked like a bakery truck, delivery truck, that had an ambulance stretcher in it and a little better first aid kit than most of the rest of us had, which wasn't much. Dick Rowan<sup>4</sup>, who later became chief, and I think Ted Fahey<sup>5</sup>, were on, it was called 326 in those days, 325, 326 and 328, we never had a 27 out, were the emergency cars. They had freedom to roam, because they served as ambulances and they also served as backup to the other cars.

The districts were named from 301 up to 318, and like I say, we didn't put some of them out ever. Usually, like 318, had all the west side, they had the whole thing. 301 was seldom out, which was the far end of West Seventh Street, 301 usually had the whole thing, all the way from one end

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<sup>4</sup> Richard H. Rowan (1922-2005) was appointed patrolman October 13, 1947; promoted detective June 20, 1965; deputy chief April 17, 1964; chief June 30, 1970; and retired December 31, 1979.

<sup>5</sup> Theodore C. Fahey was appointed patrolman October 13, 1947; promoted to sergeant September 16, 1955; lieutenant December 18, 1965; captain December 9, 1972; and retired April 20, 1981.

to the other. At any rate, the stick-up occurred and Oliver Crutcher, [the stick-up man], come running out of that and . . .

KC: Where was the stick-up, was it downtown?

WJ: It was at Saint Albans and University. I can't remember exactly where they got shot at, but someplace around Dale Street, I think, they came up alongside of them with the intention of stopping him and he fired a shot or two, and I remember Dick Rowan said he thought it was a bee going by, it was just went in one window and out the other one and no body got touched in the squad. At any rate, Crutcher ended up in an apartment house on Rondo. And it was a nice warm night, I remember that, and I'm two months on the job, if that, and my sergeant came by. He says, "Don't let anybody out that doorway." And, so they had him, I figured that they had him pinned in this apartment house and, of course, he wasn't coming out, he was hanging tight.

So, I'm down behind the fender of my squad car, I got my gun pointed at the door, green as grass, and I remember people. There was no television, but the 10:00 news came on [the radio], and I remember the news in the background telling the breaking news in Saint Paul, they had a robbery and shots fired and the police have this man cornered. And, I'm like this with my service revolver over the fender of the car [hands demonstrate pointing a gun] and I thought to myself, what a crazy job this is, I don't know if this is for me or not.

The next thing that happened is nobody was supposed to leave the building, we thought it was all secured, pretty soon a big Black man came out of the building and I went and I tried to stop him and control him. He wouldn't do what I wanted him to do and I didn't know if it was the stick-up man or not. I didn't have a club, all I had was a 2-cell flashlight and I hit this man hard as I could with that. And he went down to his knees and he came back up again roaring fighting. And I hit him again and he went down again, we did this about three times. Finally, I got some help in there and they grabbed him, and this guy I find out later was a beef lugger for one of the packing plants, he was a big strong man, much stronger than I was. At any rate it, turned out it was not Crutcher, it was somebody else and I never heard anything more about what became of him. I suppose he thought I was terrible because I think he was just leaving the building, but he wouldn't do what I said, so he got whacked.

Then we sent several officers in, that was Griffin<sup>6</sup> and Mercado, John Mercado<sup>7</sup>, who was an ex-marine who had a lot of combat time in the Pacific. And officer Boots Michel<sup>8</sup>, who was a motorcycle officer and was in on a lot of the heavy action all the time, they put gas masks on and we threw tear gas in the apartment, then they went in and he was hiding

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<sup>6</sup> James Stafford Griffin (July 6, 1917 – November 23, 2002) was appointed reserve patrolman August 6, 1941; patrolman full-time August 1942; the first Black male to be promoted to sergeant September 16, 1955; and captain March 2, 1970; and deputy chief October 6, 1972; and retired August 31, 1983.

<sup>7</sup> Jesus John Mercado was appointed patrolman July 6, 1948; promoted sergeant June 26, 1957; lieutenant July 19, 1971; and retired August 24, 1983.

<sup>8</sup> Vernon P. Michel was appointed patrolman March 1, 1937; promoted to detective March 1, 1962; appointed license inspector June 2, 1964; and retired January 19, 1978.

under the bed and there were shots exchanged and he got killed there. That's the story of Crutcher, as best I know it. And, Allan Lee<sup>9</sup> was in the process of going up onto a porch to check, was it his mothers? Maybe, a relative's home, I believe, or an address they thought this Crutcher was at and got shot in the process. I think that's right, if my memory hasn't gone foggy on me.

KC: An officer was killed that day. What did that do to the Department, how did that feel? [Emotional pause] You're two months on the job and you see the vulnerability of the job.

WJ: Well, I think I was too young and too dumb to really know that that put me in great jeopardy. That's kind of a foolish thing to say, put yourself in that spot. But I really don't think it had the impact. It's almost like saying to yourself, somebody made a mistake and they had to pay for it. That's almost the kind of attitude that I think I carried into combat when I went into regular combat, too, that I'm going to follow my training to the "T" and I'm going to try to do what they tell me to do, to survive this stuff. And maybe I will, and the Good Lord watch over me, I've always been a Christian, considered myself one, anyway, I don't know if the Lord does, but some things you've got to do on faith. And, I think the police job is one of them.

33:30

KC: Say more about that, I like that.

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<sup>9</sup> Allan G. Lee was appointed patrolman March 1, 1937; fatally injured by gunfire while pursuing a robbery suspect on September 10, 1949.

WJ: Well. [Pause] If you worry about every little situation where you're in danger, it's not the job for you. If you do things you're supposed to do. We had this big funeral [for Sergeant Vick<sup>10</sup> when he was killed in May 2005]. We didn't have a big funeral after Allan Lee, I don't remember a funeral at all for him, some others might. But I remember visitation and a wake. But it was big by those standards, but nothing like we do now days.

I learned a few things out of it, I learned you've got to depend on yourself and no one else, first of all. I worked alone 60% at least, most of the time, maybe more than that, of my career, and you get some hard fast rules. Sam Hardy says, look you go on trial, I never shot anybody, but I pulled my weapon quite a few times. I didn't point it at people necessarily. I kept it behind my leg. Sometimes it was a club that I had there, sometimes it was my gun. If I found that whoever I was dealing with was completely innocent of whatever I thought happened, usually I said something like this, "We just had a stick-up in the neighborhood or we were just chasing a person we believe to be a felon, you matched the overall description of him, so I stopped you, I'm sorry if I frightened you, but that's why I drew my weapon. I didn't draw it to intimidate you." [Pause]

I remember another incident as a commanding officer or supervising officer. One point I went out to pick up a policeman and we were into wearing vests, bulletproof vests then, so called, except it seems like the

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<sup>10</sup> Gerald Dennis Vick appointed police officer September 18, 1989, promoted to sergeant July 31, 1999; fatally injured by gunfire May 6, 2005. Receive the Metal of Valor 1991 and 1997.

other guy always shoots you through the armhole or shoots you underneath the edge of it or gets you someplace there. We practice and practice and practice, and our bullets seem to go astray and if it's a bad guy, he never took a day of practice other than shooting tin cans or something and he nails you every time.

I remember they said, well this guy is crazy, I'm not going to identify this officer, he ended up getting fired off the Department, but at any rate, bring him into me, the chief was saying. So I thought, well, I'm going to take and put on the bulletproof vest today, I didn't wear it most of the time because it was uncomfortable, once in awhile if I really thought it was bad, I'd slip it from the locker and put it on.

KC: About what year was this?

WJ: This has to be in the mid 1970s somewhere. At any rate, I thought, well, the Good Lord protected me every other time, he's going to protect me this time, too. Which may be foolish, but on the other hand you either go at one extreme or the other and so I went and got him. I brought him in and I told him, "Jim, you've got to go to the chief's office, come on in." I said, "I want your gun." When I said it I was ready to play Quick Draw McGraw and get rid of him if I had to.

There's a factor in military combat and in police work, that you better have this commitment, I'm not going to fool with you, if you don't do something, I'm going to shoot you and I'm not shooting you in the hand, I'm going to shoot you to kill you. You've got to have that set into your

mind, because if you start trying to play around, I'm going to shoot you in the leg, I'm going to shoot you in the hand, the opportunity isn't going to be there. It's only there in the movies, Buck Jones, Tom Mix, whoever the current, Gene Autry could fire and achieve something with that. You better make sure you're ready to go on that prospect. Then a little faith goes a long way from then on. The Lord helps those who help themselves, too, you've got to remember that.

KC: You had been in the military, so in the military you had been trained that you have to be prepared to kill someone.

WJ: Yes.

KC: Did that serve you well when you went into the police department?

WJ: Yes, I think a number of things served me well. I was in the Naval Air for about six months and then World War II came to an end, they didn't need anymore pilots, so then I went out. But, of course, I was very eligible for the draft and they offered me a spot in the Navy, I could have transferred to Norman, Oklahoma and been a tail gunner, but I didn't want to be a tail gunner, so I took the discharge instead. Then I enlisted in the Army in the fall. Then I did a tour of duty in Japan in the occupation. That was an infantry outfit, so it was infantry training over and over again. When I came home from there, I was joining the police department. I was on the Department about a year. Well, October of 1950 I got recalled as an infantryman to Korea. I put thirteen months of combat in over there and then came back to the Department again. I hadn't been on the Department all that long before I got that combat experience, too.

That I think served myself and the Department well, because I kind of made it a point when I got involved in training later, to teach the difference between cover and concealment. You can hide behind a bush, but it doesn't do nothing to stop gunfire, but you can hide behind a curb and cover half of your body very well, or you can hide behind a fire hydrant, or a fender of a car, [and it will stop a bullet]. That's the difference, whether you're hiding or whether you're really protected.

KC: How were you trained to be willing to kill? I mean, I respect the fact that police officers have to be willing to do that to keep themselves safe.

[Pause]

How were you taught to be willing to draw the gun and to pull the trigger? Were you aware of any type of teachings? That has to be taught.

WJ: Well, it became more sophisticated in the latter years, where we got this *shoot, don't shoot* kind of program and we'd have a chance to practice it with wax bullets and that was kind of the refinement of early years.

But when I got recalled to Korea, they were looking for riflemen. And, it so happened I did my stretch in the 27<sup>th</sup> Infantry in Japan and that was straight infantry training and they needed riflemen. So when I got recalled, I remember, the first day you go to an interview and amongst other things they ask you what your job is. I said, "Well, I'm a policeman." They said, "Well, what do you do?" I said, "Well, I try to keep the peace in an area. Enforce the laws, try to help people, direct traffic and investigate accidents and all these kind of things. Isn't there an MP spot open?" "No, we don't need any MPs." So, the next thing is we

got sent over there to Korea – well, before we did we went to Fort Louis first. I had ten days to get to Fort Louis, got to Fort Louis and we were there a week only.

We got our uniforms issued and our rifle issued and we spent the rest of the week on the rifle range. And, I can remember this old sergeant telling us, “You got to get him, ‘cause he’s gonna get you, if you ain’t gonna get him.” And, he drilled it into us, and he taught us over and over again. We fired a lot, we fired all week long, over and over and over again in combat villages. And, he said, “Always shoot low, it doesn’t do any good to shoot over their heads. If you shoot low and you hit something in front of them and it chips dust into their face, they’re going to get down and can’t get you.” And, of course, my prime example on that to everybody else is, the Finnish people in the Winter War with Russia, they didn’t last very long, but they made the Russians think twice because they shot onto the ice of the lake and skipped the bullets up into them and got a greater range than they would if they’d tried to shoot straight. At any rate, we were taught to shoot low.

That stayed with me, in fact, it made me be a poor shot, for many, many years on the Department. I wasn’t as proficient as I should have been, because I was shooting up into the person, I was aiming basically from here on down [hand gestures from waist to floor]. And, they always asked you to shoot two or three times, and I hear the comment all the

time, how come this officer shot him double time or three bullets, that's terrible, but one might not do it. In fact, one often doesn't do it.

And that was the reason for changing over to a Glock automatic, because a revolver's very limited on your fire power, you're assuming you're going to get them to stop with one or two shots.

KC: And, if someone's coming at you with a knife, [I was taught the officer must shoot multiple rounds because the assailant's movements won't usually stop] with one shot. You have to protect yourself.

WJ: I remember, I got a domestic call, I think it was on Carroll, I was alone. I went up in there and somebody said, well she's in the bedroom. Locked in the bedroom and I think she was high on something or drunk. She says, "You're not going to take and arrest me, because I'm officer so and so's sister." I said, "Well, I don't know about that," I said, "You can't be running around with a knife." She had a big butcher knife in her hand, she says, "I'll stab you." I said, "No, you're not going to stab me." She was on one side of the bed and I'm on the other, she started walking around the bed and I eared it back and I said, "I don't care if you're somebody's sister or not, at this moment you're a person with a knife threatening me." I said, you take another step and don't drop the knife, I'm going to shoot you." And, she dropped the knife. So, I put the [gun in my] holster and took her downtown. But that's the kind of stuff you're in. I would have shot her. I worked alone a lot, I tried not to be bravado or brave, super brave about this stuff, but try to have faith.

Later on I was on this traffic car and I roamed half of the City just looking for traffic violations or I was also support, any part one felony, I'd run in on. I went home to eat lunch, the kids weren't there, so I took my gun belt off, threw it on the chair. And had my sandwich and my coffee and talked to my wife for a little while. Pretty soon a radio call came out and it was somebody wanted by the FBI and they were supposed to be in Saint Paul, so I said, well I got to go and I ran out of the house and jumped in the car. I went about two or three major streets from my house, I got up to Minnehaha and Johnson Parkway and there goes the car that they were looking for right across in front of me. So I pulled through the intersection, put this car into the curb within half a block. Jumped out of the car and started coming up, reached back to clear my gun, which was my habit, and I didn't have the gun belt on. I had two choices, I could turn tail and run and get the shotgun in the car or I could fake it. So, I turned it over in my mind real quick and I decided well, this is one of those times I think you fake it, if you can. I always stood just back of the window, so they couldn't get a good chance at me when I came up to ask for their ID. I went up and asked for their ID, well, it turned out it was the right car, but the wrong person, it was a brother-in-law of the guy, he wasn't wanted for anything. And, so, I got by another one on faith.

KC: In those early years, what were some of the ways that the Department was, that have changed? What would be some historical stories that describe the Department then?

WJ: Our Department's got a good thing and a bad thing built into it, depends on your viewpoint probably. All along our Department has basically

operated that when you bring a prisoner into the station, it started out you had to bring them to Captain Steiner<sup>11</sup>. Captain Steiner presided over the City as the acting chief or whatever you want to call it. You tell the story and he decided what to charge him with and send him upstairs [to a holding cell.]. At first I thought it was a real good idea, because obviously it kept you from making any mistakes. That is the positive side of it. Then as I was on a little longer, I started to see a few times when things would happen, we'd have a good clear arrest and you'd bring it down and, well, this is *So and So*, I remember a couple times, this is *Dr. So and So*.

I remember getting a guy off, University Avenue used to have great big cement things on what they used to call safety islands, and this guy hit the safety island, smashed his car up. I brought him in. Well, Captain Billy [Steiner] looked at him and he said, well, this is *So and So*, take him over to his office, he's got to pick up something. He goes over to his office and low and behold, I'm kind of in the outer waiting room watching him, he's in a desk drawer and drinks about half of a bottle of liquor and I take him back to the station again. And, I think, what's this? So, then the Captain says, well, you leave him here, I'll take care of him. He never got charged.

Traffic kind of molded me in a lot of ways, because I got to be so I didn't really like that system, I felt I was smart enough to know what they

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<sup>11</sup>William D. Steiner was appointed patrolman January 3, 1921; promoted to sergeant May 9, 1929; lieutenant September 1, 1931; captain January 1, 1942; acting assistant chief January 3, 1961; and retired February 10, 1964.

should be charged with. I remember a couple of times bypassing the Captain, taking somebody straight up. Captain Steiner used to be across the room, so he'd say, "What do you got there Jyrkas?" "Oh, I got this or that." So, you can see how that can work both ways, that can be a positive thing or restrictive.

When I got to be Station Commander, I kind of changed my ways a little bit and I tried to be a teacher to the younger officers, so they'd bring something in, "What do you got?" "Oh, I got so and so." I didn't criticize their work, I opened up the law book and showed them where the charge was that they could apply to it and then you'd look through the elements of that crime, can you prove each and every one of those elements and you should write something about each one. If you can't then you should either charge them with something else or release them. But I never sent anybody out to go get liquor or to do these things. It was kind of a part of the culture. We did all kinds of things for the Captain in those days, he got his eggs and he got his bread from Taystee Bakery, which was right behind us, and we always went to get it for him, he never went and got it himself. So, when I became a supervising officer, I tried not to do those things to the best of my ability.

51.:49

KC: Were times changing?

WJ: Oh, sure.

KC: Was that part of the old culture?

WJ: Part of the old culture, you bet.

KC: Is the Saint Paul Police Department an ethical department?

WJ: Well, I remember roll calls where cries were the Irish or the Dutch, they don't amount to much. Because we were principally Irish or we were German and there was a few others mixed in there. I felt like I was all alone in this world when I went down there, really, I didn't know any of these other guys. They really were all strangers to me, but you sort through them. You find out who you want to be buddy-buddy with and who you don't. And the strange thing about that part of the culture was they'd say, "Oh, Officer A is such a great person." And, you had a chance to work with Officer A on the car or on assignment. Officer A didn't amount to much. Or Officer A maybe was just goofing off, or maybe he was too interested in just going and getting a drink, which there were a lot of free ones when I came on. Whereas, Officer B, sometimes they said, "Don't pick him." Well, Officer B could be a pretty good officer, in fact, some of these guys who were B, I remember them all through their careers. I remember trying to write them up for some routine things that go on day-to-day, which are more duty oriented. And those guys worked the last day they worked on the job just as hard as they did on the first day, because they thought that was what you were supposed to do. But they didn't have this glowing personality that some Officer A's had. So, that's the way I saw the culture.

KC: You came on in 1949, there were at that time I think four Black officers, and there were only four until about 1975. What experiences did you have with the [diversity changing in the department]?

WJ: Well, in '75 or there about, I was serving on quite a few oral boards, not only in Saint Paul, but in other places, too, other towns, counties around the City. I believe I was a sergeant or I might have been a lieutenant, I think I was sergeant. And, I remember I was on the oral board examining the officers. One of the things about it that impressed me about the Black candidates is— I was pretty hard nosed about it. And I would give them some pretty tough scenarios to figure out. And, of course, no matter what they said they were wrong. If you do this you're wrong, if you do A you're wrong, and if you do B you're wrong, and I got you either way. I got you in a situation where you have to come up with another part to the answer, because I'm not going to let you win the questioning. The idea was how well do they think on their feet.

And, I have to say that the Black officers that came on, some of them really sweat through this oral and I wasn't nice to them. But they impressed me—to the man. I thought they all had a genuine drive to make the community better. And, that was their motivation, they sometimes had the right answers, sometimes the wrong answers, on these questions we through and pop at them. But they always seemed to have that drive in the back that, I want a better job.

The simple truth is, you go to work as a policeman or a fireman, whatever it is, you aren't out to be a hero right away, the first thing is you want a good job, all right. And, then the next thing is what are you going to do with this after you get it. Well, they came up with some pretty good

answers and I thought. Well, it seems to me they're coming back with the answers I like, better answers than I had when I came on. If I would have had those same questions, I don't know if I'd a got good answers.

KC: What was the mood in the Department in 1972 when Griffin sued the City for his appointment as Deputy Chief. He had scored number one in the test. Historically they had never not appointed the person that scored the highest and, yet, [Chief] Rowan appointed McCut thus Griffin sued the City.



James Griffin  
1983

WJ: Well, the civil service is supposed to be an earned thing. You apply for a job, you take a test and based on your marks you get it. Now, where they built into this top three stuff just don't fit my ideas at all. Been there, done that, been sitting there and not appointed because you're the next one on the list. That happened to me when I was supposed to become a detective and I didn't, because it didn't bother me. Looking back later on, I put about 95% of my time in, in uniform and glad of it. But that doesn't change the idea that, okay, you work hard, you study hard, you do everything they want you to do and your first on the list, you should get the job, period.

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<sup>12</sup>William Wallace McCutcheon was appointed patrolman January 4, 1954; promoted to sergeant August 22, 1960; lieutenant December 12, 1965; captain June 20, 1969; deputy chief February 4, 1972; chief April 1, 1980; and retired July 15, 1992..

And, I believe I was in that position on a detective's examination and I think I was in that position on assistant chief, and I think I could have done a good job as assistant chief of patrol. Because the men respected me. And they'd do what I wanted them to do, to a high degree. That's kind of what it takes to make the patrol function.

I think at the time that Griffin took [the test] and had this law suit, I think there was a split in the Department. I think the majority were with him, but I think there was also a pretty strong element that didn't want him to make it. And, I think that was just our evolvement from being primarily all White to being a more diversified department. I don't think it had nothing to do with credentials. And, I think, Jim [Griffin], when he became captain, I think he floundered a little bit, just my own personal opinion, for a year or so. Because a lot of people from his race were coming in and thinking they were going to get a free ride because he was in the chair. And I think a few times he succumbed a little bit to the pressure.

But Jim Griffin is a friend, or was, and a very respected. I respect him, and all the things he had to go through to get where he was. I believe that after the first year or so of being able to call the shots, he did very well in the job. And, again, got the respect pretty much of all his co-workers, but he had to struggle a little bit. When you're the top man in the heap, you've got the power, you know.

KC: You were also on the job in 1975, when the first female went through the same training as the men and came on. Were you in traffic at that time?

WJ: I believe I was, I'd been in and out of traffic a number of times. Was that Debbie Montgomery's<sup>13</sup> class?

KC: That was Debbie Montgomery, Debbie worked midnights on Rice Street. What was the attitude on the Department for a woman coming in?

WJ: Well, we already had a couple women police officers, but they were working out of the detective division and originally they were [called] matrons, then it evolved to Dorothy Freischel<sup>14</sup> and Carolen Bailey<sup>15</sup> and Micki Flores<sup>16</sup>, these came along as sergeants, so they had college educations. I think they had been teachers, or maybe one was a social worker, I can't remember exactly their background. They were pretty smart woman and they handled basically juvenile and sex cases. Of course, the men were pretty glad to get rid of those kind of interviews. They were happy to have them, as long as they did just that, more or less. That's the attitude I sensed anyway, although, I found them all to be

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<sup>13</sup>Deborah Louise Montgomery was the first female to complete the same academy as male recruits and appointed police officer September 8, 1975; the first Black woman promoted to sergeant November 8, 1987; lieutenant May 29, 1998; commander January 1, 2000; senior commander February 8, 2003; retired July 31, 2003; assistant commissioner the Minnesota Department of Public Safety 1991-1998; the first Black woman elected to the Saint Paul City Council in 2004.

<sup>14</sup> Dorothymae Freischel was appointed October 1, 1954; promoted to sergeant December 25, 1971; and retired October 19, 1979.

<sup>15</sup>Carolyn Fay Bailey was appointed policewoman July 17, 1961; promoted to Sergeant December 225, 1971; resigned December 3, 1963. Returned to the department September 16, 1964, and retired January 31, 1991.

<sup>16</sup> Graciela "Micki" Flores was appointed policewoman July 13, 1953; promoted to sergeant December 25, 1971; retired July 30, 1976.

pretty good people to work with and deal with. Carolyn Bailey was an exception, she went on the street.



Grace; a "Micki" Flores and  
Carolyn Bailey

When Debbie came on, there was some reluctance, I think, on the men to accept women out there [on the streets], and they pretty much had to prove themselves. You've got to cut the mark. I can remember a staff meeting, maybe a little bit further down the road, because we had more women on at this point. McCutcheon was chief and he wanted to know what our thoughts were how we're going to use these gals on the street. And, I remember I always kind of took the hammer position at staff meetings. I didn't say much of anything at the beginning, but then near the end of the meeting they'd say, "All right Jyrkas, what have you got to say?" I'd lay it on them. Seemed to me it was more effective use of the time. On this particular meeting I told them that if you really want to get a fair test on it. I think you should give me all the women and I'll put them in a squad and we'll give them assignments as they come. We'll let them work their own area, their own calls, and then we'll look at them at the end of a period of time and see if the girls' squad did as well as the men's squad. Well, I got kind of drummed out of the corps almost with that

thought, that wasn't a good thought at the time. But I had quite a few gals working for me.

I'll give you a prime example of two of them. At this point, the budget had suffered, I was out on the street, I was commanding half the City and we worked out of the junkyard, which is a terrible name, but that's what we called it. It was a building that sat adjacent to this insurance operation that took the wrecks in and sold them for parts out again, some of the cars were usable, some of them weren't. [This was the A-2 Team at 1280 Jackson Street.] At any rate, we were renting from them, so that we called ourselves the Junkyard Dogs, we operated out of this building. We had half the City, we had all the west side, downtown, and the east side, and the loop, and out as far as Western Avenue to the west, that was my district.

I had two gals that really illustrate this pretty well. I had one who was kind of a big bodied woman, I guess, is the best way to describe her, and we'd have roll call and we'll say, John Doe is wanted for assault, he has a brother or mother or somebody living at such and such an address on Case Street, see if you can pick him up, there's a warrant for his arrest. Never failed, this one gal would go straight out there, all by herself, and instead of waiting for backup or calling for backup, which many of them did, but this one didn't, she'd tangle with the guy. She'd find him, he'd be there, and the next thing that would happen is he'd probably say, *no blankety, blank woman is gonna take me in*, and he'd find out that this little

gal was tougher than she looked. I'd have a complaint because she had literally beat the snot out of him.

And, I had to warn her repeatedly about being too rough with the prisoners. I finally told her, "Listen, I love that you go out there and check on it, but call for some help, when you find them there, call for some help and we can take this the way we should." We had other girls who would call all the time, you know, we'd be on this corner or we'd be on that corner, I don't know if you know who I'm talking about or not, but the guys would kid about that, that she always was looking for backup.

KC: Who was the woman who had the tenacity to go out and tackle it?

WJ: Do you really want to know?

KC: Well, I'd love to know.

WJ: Lorrie Dorrance<sup>17</sup>. She was a first class officer in that regard. A little bit [quick to] force the issue too many times, but I image after I left and she stayed on, I image that she got more refined at how to do this.



Lorrie Dorrance  
1984

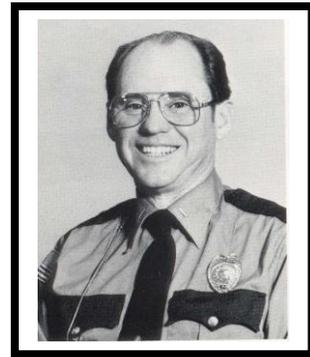
KC: Well, and if she was one of the early officers, probably there was a need to prove that a woman could do it.

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<sup>17</sup> Lorrie Beth Dorrance was appointed police officer July 11, 1977; master patrol officer September 15, 2001; and retired June 21, 2004.

WJ: Prove herself, could be. Then we had another officer, very slight in size and I kind of worried about her. I never knew her to call for help if she didn't need it and most of the time she brought the people in without the need to call for anything. And, I remember in the academy I watched her pretty close because the thing that I really emphasized when I was

Training Director is that I wanted the officer candidates to control the scene. Larry McDonald<sup>18</sup>, who was one of my assistants, and I and Paul Paulos<sup>19</sup>--the whole staff, we went out of our way to kill each officer candidate. We kind of



Larry McDonald  
1984



Paul R. Paulos  
1984

made it a point that we'd catch them at some point where they didn't control the scene and either lost the evidence or got killed themselves in the process. Because that's the secret of good police work, is control that every inch of the way. But that doesn't mean you've got to throw the guy on the ground or up against the car all the time. Some of this control

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<sup>18</sup> Laurence Francis McDonald was appointed patrolman July 11, 1955; promoted to sergeant February 26, 1966; lieutenant January 14, 1971; captain July 5, 1989; lieutenant January 12, 1991; captain August 31, 1991; and retired March 31, 1995. Awarded the Medal of Merit Class B on August 26, 1993.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Richard Paulos was appointed patrolman January 4, 1954; promoted to sergeant December 12, 1966; and retired September 4, 1990.

problem, now days you see everybody, man, women and children, they all come handcuffed to the station, because then we got control on them. That kind of evolved.

I didn't have a pair of handcuffs the first six, seven years I worked on the job. But I did have come-a-long, which is a little different. They called them iron claws and you could put it on a person's wrist and you now had power like you never had before. I could drop that person to their knees and [make them] submit. We used to tuck it under our arm, with that on their wrist, and they'd come walk with us very nice and polite. But you had to hold them while you go to a call box if you were on a beat. Put your key in there open it up, call the station, hope the operator would answer right away, send me the wagon, now I got to make them be nice for ten minutes before the wagon got there.

KC: Were both hands handcuffed or just one?

WJ: No, just one.

KC: Just one, and you held the other end of the come-a-long?

WJ: Yes.

KC: So this other woman?

WJ: This other woman had a really good record of being able to do everything and do it well, and she's a senior commander today, I think.

KC: Who is that?

WJ: Nancy DiPerna<sup>20</sup>.

KC: She is an Assistant Chief.

WJ: Assistant chief. Very good, very good person and tiny as they come. It certainly isn't the "might" that makes her a success, but good smarts.



Nancy DiPerna  
1984

KC: When women started coming on, did it change the culture on the Department?

WJ: Oh, I think it made some things more difficult. Naturally, we have a zillion stories and we tend to talk rougher than we really are. And, there's two things you could do, you could modify everything all the time to not offend the women or you could just let it flow. I think we did a little of each. I think we pulled in our horns just a little bit and some of the rougher stuff didn't get talked about quite the same way. I think to a high degree we kept our culture going.

There's two police cultures in my book. There's the first one that's out on the street and how we react to people, we should be the same every time we got a brand new contact. And, there is another culture and that's the combat stories and the boloney and maybe even a choir practice, going to have drinks or something, which sometimes leads the wrong way to wrong stuff.

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<sup>20</sup> Nancy Elizabeth DiPerna was appointed police officer October 31, 1980; promoted to sergeant March 9, 1986; lieutenant May 1, 1990; commander October 4, 1997; senior commander January 1, 2000; assistant chief June 26, 2004.

I used to tell people who started in the police department, "Don't get suckered in too much by all these combat stories, because there's a tendency of all of us to embroider them a little bit and to make it sound like it's easier than it is. Follow your training, stay with it, be sincere in what you do and enforce the law and keep the community safe and serve the town and you'll get along just fine if you do that. But be there and answer the calls when we call you." I have no excuse for the person that couldn't keep contact with us.

KC: What was a situation, a difficult situation that you handled that you were proud of?

WJ: During the big flood, they had us work alone and in our own cars. We had no radios, we didn't have radios or anything, we were just out there.

KC: About what year was this?

WJ: Had to be 1956, maybe, somewhere in there, '55, '56. It flooded the whole Flats over there on the west side, that was all under water, all the way up to the hill, all the way down Lilydale, everything on Wabasha, Robert Street, all the way to the airport, and the airport, were all flooded, the whole thing. When the water started to go down, I remember they put us out there. I sat out there, we were supposed to be watching for looters, much like, I think, I kind of relate it to the New Orleans police officers [after Hurricane Katrina in 2005] now trying to get in there and watch the stuff. We had to take your own lunch because you couldn't go anyplace and eat, there wasn't anyplace to go. No radio, like I say, so no communications with headquarters at all. We had a daily sheet that had wanteds and stolen cars and things on it.

I had picked up a sheet before I went down, I was down on State Street and Filmore sitting in the car, and I had befriended a little dog, little Terrier, and he was sharing my lunch with me. So, I'm sitting there eating a sandwich and all of a sudden I see a guy going into one of the houses, nobody was supposed to be in there at all. I got out and I yelled at him and he disappeared in there and he didn't answer. So, I went in there and, of course, there was no electricity on and the waters had receded and we got this yuck left in there. I got into the kitchen and I come face-to-face with this guy. And I'm kind of thinking to myself, I don't know if this is the best scenario, this guy isn't doing what I want. We got into a wrestling match and the stuff was like, well there are all kinds of colloquialisms for it, but it was very greasy kind of mud and dirty. But it was only about an inch or two thick, but on the linoleum kitchen floor it was really slick, there is no ice to compare with it. We got into this wrestling match, I got a pretty good hold on him, when I was a young man I had good strong hands, and I managed to get him in submission and brought him out of there.

I got thinking about it in later years and wondered, *hey that wasn't a great scene at all, get in there with somebody, he didn't belong there, he was a looter, to get in there and have somebody and you're all alone and you're down there and you're miles from any help, literally, and nobody is going to check on you because you've got no way to call in.* It was just do your thing. So, that was one day that kind of brought me up scared.

Then, the next day I'm down there, I got my slip and this car goes by, now the water has receded a little more, some of the streets are open. Car goes by, it's a stolen car. A Northwest Airlines guard had come up and was sitting with me, I said, "You want to go with me? That's a stolen car, I've got to go after it?" "Oh, no, I gotta stay here." He jumped out. So, I went up and when we got to Robert and Kellogg the light was red and this car stopped. I pulled my car up behind, jumped out the door and I drew my weapon on the three people in the car. I told them they were under arrest, they had to sit there. Now, I'm sitting there, I got three adults in the car, I don't know what to do with them, I haven't got any radio.

KC: How come you didn't have?

WJ: We didn't have radios. No, no radios. There was a call box on the corner, but I can't get to them because that's the opposite side of the intersection. Robert and Kellogg is a pretty good size intersection. So, I'm standing there holding my gun on them and a couple of them are kind of nervous. I'm telling them, "You better sit still. Don't move around, I want to see your hands all the time." I'm sitting there and I'm wondering what to do? I had left my car door open, so a couple of cars go by me. Finally, somebody pulled up and said, "Officer, do you need some assistance?" "You bet." It was a South Saint Paul cab and he called it into the station and about three, four minutes I had several cars down there and we got these guys in tow. I'd done that a number of times, similar things, all alone and out of the clear blue some help appears. Yes, it got a little hairy for awhile.

- I've had several stickup men the same way, who were armed and who were out to do no good, and I don't know where the help comes from. Well, I do know where it comes from. [That's why I have faith in my God.]
- KC: Yes, we always know where the help comes from. What year did you get radios in cars?
- WJ: Well, we had radios in cars, but I didn't have a police car, I had my own car. They just put us out in different places. You take care of this area here and stay there, do your full eight hours there.
- KC: So you had the radios in your squads, but you didn't have the radios on you, like the officers now days.
- WJ: Yes. Even when we first started having portable ones, we didn't have ones that you could just punch up here and get the word through. We had them so you could stick them in your pocket or clip them to your belt. That's how the cord and the other microphone came into existence, that they didn't quite answer the patrolman's needs really. Patrol officer, I guess I should say, bring it up to modern times. They refined all of this equipment to a high degree.
- KC: It sounds like you were most of the time alone. Were there times when you had a partner and were working with a partner?
- WJ: Yes.
- KC: Any stories you remember about working with a partner?

WJ: Well, worked a car called 302 for awhile and George Dearborn<sup>21</sup> was my partner most of the time, steady partner. We worked real well together. One that I remember that's real quick is, there was a robbery at a grocery store and these people had struck a number of times. They called them the paper bag bandits, and George and I used a little different technique than a lot of them. Everybody has a tendency to want to rush into the crime scene.

Something you learn when you've been on the street for a long time, is that position is just as good as going in there. Time and space, if you can visualize it, you have a robbery and you have a street that exits from there and in all likelihood if he didn't go that way, he went your way. If you were there and the car that's somewhat close to the right time and place and you stop that one, many times you will score an arrest. You were at the right place at the right time.

This was one of those kinds of scenarios. We said, you know, he just about had time enough to get here, and a car went across Snelling Avenue from Selby, the robbery was down Western, I think. So, we fell in behind this car and the next thing that happened is something came out the window and I told George, "He's throwing something out the window." George, said, "Probably his gun." And, I said, "No, it looks like money." So, we caught up to him and stopped him and I don't remember all the

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<sup>21</sup> George L. Dearborn was appointed patrolman July 6, 1948; and retired February 1, 1974.

details of the arrest. But we recovered the gun and a couple of paper sacks, grocery bags, full of money, and there was a lot of it on the street, but it wasn't real windy, so we went back and picked up a good share of it. I don't know if we got it all or not. Brought him down to the station. We even got a day off for that one.

A good partner is worth his weight in gold, but you have to be in-tune with him all the time. What's a good partner do that the other one doesn't do? A good partner watches all the time, he doesn't get busy with a report or newspaper or something of that nature. I worked with a man named Jack Morley<sup>22</sup>, who was mostly a traffic officer, but very sharp on lots of other things, too. He had a real feel for people. I remember getting out and stopping a car that came in from Wisconsin and just when I got him off to the side of the road and I'm talking to him. Pretty soon Jack's up and grabs the guy, patting him down real quick, comes up with a revolver in his back pocket. Well, you know, now days everybody seems to have a gun, it wasn't all that common in those days, but there was a few out there, and this guy was packing iron. I don't know what he would do with it, he didn't threaten me with it or anything. I had the upper hand at that moment, but I didn't know what he had in his back pocket at that point, at all, but my partner did.

KC: How did he know?

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<sup>22</sup> John P. Morley was appointed reserve patrolman November 1, 1949; and retired November 1, 1975.

WJ: He just saw the right shape. You get used to certain things, wallets look a certain way, handkerchief, keys, and you can't put a gun, it's a little big, he just had it in his pocket. Whether he intended to use it or not, I don't know but that's the way it is. You're never sure of some of this stuff.

So, I was mighty happy to have a good partner. George Dearborn and I worked real good together, we'd stop guys on the midnight shift. You kind of are taught that you aren't supposed to be drawing the weapon all the time, but you've got to have it to protect yourself. So, we looked like lazy cops, we had the newspaper on our lap. We stopped somebody, "Where are you going? What are you doing?" Frequently, we had the gun underneath the newspaper. It didn't frighten anybody, but it served to take care of any bad situation and take care of it right away. Sometimes if we wanted to impress this person at the end, if we thought he really wasn't a good person, we'd just take the newspaper off and re-holster the gun. Just to let him see that we were ready to go.

We had the big heavy wool coats with the high collars, mutton lamb collars, very good in cold weather, had big deep pockets, one pocket was lined with leather so you could put a gun in it. Many officers, instead of relying on the revolver that was on your belt, had small handguns and they'd slip them into this pocket and you'd have it right there. So, you'd go talk to people, you'd have the gun in your hand at that the time you were talking to them. That always made you feel just a little safer, I don't know if it made you any safer or not, but it felt better.

KC: Back to the qualities of a partner working relationship.

WJ: Observe and watch your back. Be ready to join you in a fight. Got my

first lesson from an old detective, Austin

McNeely<sup>23</sup>, who was later a captain, and I were

assigned the Saint Peter Street beat. A lot of

nightclubs in those days and a lot of action there

on the weekend. So, we're down

there and a fight ensued and I was on one side of

the street and Austin was on the other. And I start

going across the street to hurry—[help Austin].

And this old guy taps me on the shoulder and he says, "I'm one of yours,"

he says, "You don't need to worry about Austin, he's a big boy, he can

take care of himself, so far, you're job is to watch his back. You can go

over there, but don't get involved in the fight. Stay on the outside, if he

needs help, that's the time to step in."

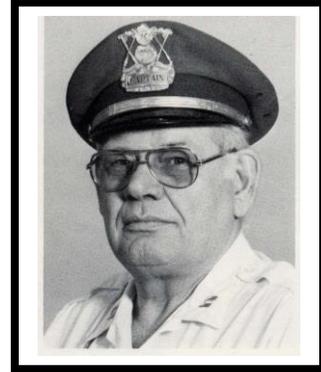
Okay, so you kind of put that down in your database, that's something to

watch for. Besides, I think it always works a little smoother with a group,

if one person is in charge and does most of the talking. That way there

isn't two different kinds of statements coming out, or commands coming

out to the public, they got one thing only.



Austin F. McNeely

1984

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<sup>23</sup> Austin F. McNeely was appointed patrolman July 6, 1948; promoted to detective October 1, 1954; captain January 12, 1970; and retired August 1, 1988.

KC: How do two partners who are working well together, does one always talk and one always holding back, or do you trade, how do you know how to be that partner [in charge]?

WJ: Well, when you start out, part of the culture was in some police departments and some squads, you weren't allowed to drive, you were just the recorder, you write the reports and you answer the radio and you write down the times and things. Little by little you got to be more accepted. Generally, the best partners, you drove half the time so you were exposed to accidents half the time. The other guy drove half the time. Sometimes one man was a better driver than the others, so that would change off. Sometimes one guy is a bigger BSer, in plain language, than the other guy, so he handles people and situations better. But there always seemed to be one person who had that capability of getting a little more respect from the people.

Probably the worst scenario was to work with somebody who antagonized the people you were with and then expected you to back them up. That's a bad partner. There was a fellow who was a boxer that was on for a long time and I remember working with him. It kind of went like this, he'd say, "Now, Will, now." And, "No, no, don't do anything Joe." And, pretty soon the person would be really out of line, I'd say, "Yeah, okay, Joe." He'd step in, bam, [slaps hands] somebody would get smacked and usually go down. That was a good partner, only in the sense that he had the ability to fight good, but wasn't much of a partner

otherwise. [Chuckles] A good partner is very observant and sees things and doesn't give you a lot of false alarms or anything.

You drive down and patrol these parts of town, the good partner senses when things really have to be looked into. When you get to be good partners you almost think alike. You get this common group of knowledge and techniques down pat, so if you go in and grab someone, I'm right there ready to watch your back, put that person under control, take them to the car or whatever.

If you hold off too long sometimes in these things—I worked alone a lot and one of the things they taught you and one of the things that became paramount is, if you're going to do something, if you really saw a clear violation, go after it right away, get up there, get control of the situation as fast as you can get it. It took all the wind out of most peoples' sails.

You're right, I did this, I'm sorry. Or they wanted to do war, okay, you did war, but it seemed like there was less resistance if you got up there quick versus you kind of come up slow. You know, we teach them sometimes to come up kind of slow, observe everybody in there. But then you give them a lot of time to think, too. And, we human beings think at about the same rate, I think, sometimes, so, better we got the advantage than they do.

KC: With partners, would you socialize with them, would you get to know their families?

WJ: Well, you spend eight hours with them and sometimes they were spending longer than that, depends on what shift structure they were working on. We had some that went 4/40s, so, we'd only work four days, four ten hour days, which I never liked. But the eight hours, if you spent eight hours in a car with a partner, you're spending more time with them than you are with your family and you better be compatible. So, it's good to be compatible, but after awhile you've talked about every subject there is, so it has to be one of those things where you can enjoy sometimes just a little peace and quiet.

One of the things that used to create friction sometimes was one of our good officers was a real freeze baby, he had to have it about 75°, 80° in the car in the wintertime, which was hard to come by in those days, because the heater didn't work that good you'd get it real warm. Whereas I was more kind of an outdoor – I'd wear long underwear and I didn't care if I was in the car or out of the car. I was just as comfortable either place, so I would want the car cooler. So, you get little conflicts like that. Some are talkers, some aren't and you get used to that. But as long as they got that common thread that they want to do something to see if they can find an open door at night or a broken window or find the person who's starting a playground assault or whatever it is. At least you can rely on them to spot it then you don't have to worry about it.

We used to have streetcar tracks all over and in the early days on the midnight shift one technique that many officers used is to put one wheel

between the streetcar tracks then you wouldn't hit a parked car. You would drive down the line with a spotlight checking everything and sometimes you're eyes would close on you momentarily and you run over the streetcar track then you'd wake up. I shouldn't tell you that.

[Laughter]

133.33--Beginning of tape 2

KC: Tell be another story about traffic, because you said you spent a lot of time in traffic.

WJ: Well, I did everything in traffic you can do. During the course of my years, I investigated 500 death cases. I ended up running the Traffic Division, I kind of took over running it as a sergeant, I made the stripes as big as I could make them. Then I was a lieutenant and was in there, and then I was a captain. When I became captain, I really started to try to do the things I wanted to do right along. I had a very good bunch of officers working for me. It was kind of strange because I used to kid them at the staff meetings and that, *I'm like the Statue of Liberty, give me your weak, and all your people that are destitute and everything, and I'll put them to work.* And, I did. I made investigators out of them and gave them jobs that they could handle.

You get all kinds of information through traffic. Not only that, a good mechanic's got a big tool box, or a carpenter, and he don't use half of these tools half the time. Well, the law is a little bit that way, too, in community behavior. I knew that traffic code, which was inches thick, I knew it like the back of my hand. I knew every little in and out of it.

I knew the criminal code pretty well, too, but you don't deal with a criminal case every day, you do deal with traffic cases. And, when you investigate a serious hit and run traffic death, you put as much work and time into that as you do a homicide. Well, it is, it's the killing of another human being, no matter how you look at it. There was some really bad ones.

I remember a young lady who came roaring down Larpenneur Avenue around 90 miles an hour and hit this car and just smeared it all over the place. We did a lot of work trying to duplicate skid marks on it. I had a real tough lawyer, that's when we first started doing reconstruction really. This lawyer gave me kind of a bad time in the court room after we had charged her with criminal negligence. He says, "Well, how do you know that, let me see, now, you said that you got called out of your home to come down to this case and you said you used the windshield wipers 'cause it was dewy out and there was raindrops or dewdrops or something on your windshield. And, then now you're saying that the road was dry. How could the road be dry, how are you so sure that it wasn't wet out here and that would have accounted for the long skid marks?" I said, "Because counselor, I went out there and felt with my hand on the pavement and it was dry and gritty, and that's why I used the dry in the formula." And, that became a case that's in the Supreme Court Annals now. And we convicted that woman and sent her away. But the important thing about that case was that all the formula for doing

reconstruction, for the first time got recognized in Minnesota. We had been chastised before because we weren't sure of some of these conditions. I always look back at that one with some pride.

A lot of terrible, terrible accidents, and they go on, but one of the things I'm very proud of is that at the beginning of my time in the traffic division, we typically had fifty deaths a year, in Saint Paul. When I left there we were down to twenty-four. I always figured it was kind of my report card, we did 10,000 to 12,000 cases a year. I looked at each and every one of them. When you start counting it up, that's a lot of accidents. But it did give me the advantage over some others, in that, if I said this is what it was, pretty well the courts accepted it. I didn't have a hard time proving my cases as a rule. But I had to bring all of these elements in each time, if I couldn't, I couldn't prove the case. And, the other side of traffic is, it gets pretty personal sometimes. Sometimes you're dealing—a few occasions, with other officers and they've got skid marks and you have to say they were speeding or whatever it was, and sometimes it's friends. Traffic is awful inclusive, it's got the whole world, and you do one of two things. You either fluctuate for friends or you take the line and you go down it, straight forward and honest. That don't mean you have to throw everybody in jail.

I know one pedestrian was killed and with the same skid mark evidence, and it was a Black man that was driving that day, that's not important except that some people think you zero in on these people. I got this

pedestrian dead and this man was really worried, the driver of the car, he was probably fifty years old and I'm sure he had had scenarios where he ended up on the wrong side of the thinking. We did all the information and got all the measurements and I could just tell that he thought he was really in the soup. We got all done and I proved he was going the speed he said he was going. I told him, "Well, you can go home, do you want me to have somebody with you? Can you drive yet?" Because his car was still drivable, he had just popped this pedestrian and knocked him down. They hit their head when they went down, and that was the end of the scene. He was awful relieved, I remember. It was a slow accident, I think the car, if I remember right, was going like 20 or 22 miles an hour, or something like that. So it happened. But we've seen some terrible ones.

I remember one, well, one kid using marijuana from Cretin. I can't think of the street right now. It comes off by Highland Park High School.

KC: Edgcombe?

WJ: Edgcombe, yes, it probably was Edgcombe. I think that's where it was, he hit a big tree there and he hit the tree so hard it broke the car in two and that one was a pretty bad accident. And, of course, it was all probably because marijuana, the one thing marijuana does to you, if you use a little or a lot, your space and time don't fit anymore and that's what you need to drive successfully.

Then I remember one--the vision of it I will never forget. That was on Highway 61, just south of Burns. A car went off the road and it hit trees on

the embankment as it was going down and there was three kids in the front seat, teenagers, and they went through the windshield and their roof collapsed when they hit the tree and they were like toothpaste half out of a tube, so all three bodies were stuck out and caught by their legs and they were all dead, of course, all mangled up. Some really, really terrible ones, but the most terrible are always the kid calls.

KC: Did you have to go notify families or did someone else?

WJ: Well, I did a few times. I remember going to notify one person that their son was killed in an accident on Mississippi River Drive. That's a hard place to speed, takes practice to speed there, I don't recommend it. He had hit a tree, the trees, they run up and get you all the time, you know, you've got to look out for them trees. [Chuckle] Anyhow, he hit a tree and he got killed and I really sweat going up to parents to notify them. I hated those calls with an absolute passion. Get up and ring the bell, it's the middle of the night, of course, you finally get somebody up and it's his mother and dad. And, I'll never forget his dad, his dad must have asked me, well, his mother was almost as bad, must have asked me – first it was anguish of the death for a minute or two. And then he said, "It was a brand new car, he wrecked a brand new car." He must have said that half a dozen times to me. Well, I kind of kept that in my craw for a long time, I wonder what kind of strange life that must have been to live with those people, they were more interested in a vehicle than they are in their son's death. Yes, there were a lot of strange ones and tough ones.

KC: When you made a death call, did they have chaplains that went with you?

WJ: Not at first, that's been added. That's a very good thing, I think. If we had a death notification of any kind, we'd always try to get a neighbor in there, we'd try to get a clergyman in there, a rabbi or whatever they had.

KC: So you would stay there until they had called someone?

WJ: Usually, yes. It's nice when you move up in the ranks, because you don't have to make those calls anymore, you can say, "Jones, you go out there and make the death notification." That's one of the advantages of rank.

KC: Any last stories that you want to share with me?

WJ: Well, you don't see everything all the time. And, I'll illustrate that real quick. When I worked a traffic car, which was an unmarked car, and my purpose was to be out there as a support vehicle and that, but I had a habit of I'd run the length of the streets, see if I could pick up a traffic violator. If I didn't, I'd pull off and I'd usually pull off like where there was a strip mall or a little bit of businesses, check the businesses, see if I could see any break-ins or anything. If I didn't, I'd pick a street that had a stop and go light come back on, somebody went through the red, I got an easy tag.

So, I did this one night and I ran out Hudson Road and got off at Sunray, we'd had a couple of postal burglaries and there was a post office there, so, I went around the back and checked, the doors looked good and fine. I thought to myself, well, a lot of times the postal burglars go through the roof, a flat roof building. And, I looked at the pole, and I think it was my laziness that prevented me from crawling up there, but I thought, it's a

little tough, I don't see any real sign, there's no vehicles back here, I think everything's okay – so, I turned away.

About two weeks later we caught these people, and I remember one of the detectives coming up to me and saying, "Was that you that was behind Sunray such and such a time?" I said, "Well, it could be," I said, "that's kind of my pattern, I do that all the time." And, he said, "What kind of car did you have?" I told him, "Well, I had the blue Ford." And, he said, "Yeah, I think that was you." He said, "I want to tell you, you had a close squeak, you didn't even know it." He said, "There was a man with a rifle and a scope up on water tower," and, he said, "They burgled the place that night and if you'd have climbed up on the roof, I think you'd have been shot." Never knew about it. I don't know if I was there or not, but that's what he said.

But, there's lots of good things. Before I sign off, I really would like to say, you know, the vast majority of the people are willing to help you if you give them a chance.

KC: And, I also hear, Captain Jrykas, that you're very aware that your God has been there with you and helped you and guided you all the way through and kept you safe. Thank you sir for serving our city.