

## Policing the Police

I used to have hard-boiled fantasies about tracking down criminals. But here my mission was to nab the truth.

By [Francine J. Sanders](#)

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This time I was leaving for good. No more classifying people by race and gender. No more watching people smile as they told me lies. No more being the bad guy. I'd rehearsed my B-movie exit speech at least a dozen times in the past eight years, but this time I planned to let my boss hear it. I began packing up the evidence of my life in this foreign land, hoping I had something to show for the journey.

In the inventory were a half-dozen audiocassettes labeled "911 calls," the first from 1987. I usually made copies of police dispatch tapes in one of two situations: when an officer shot a citizen and in domestic violence cases involving an officer. "Hurry, please! He's gonna kill me!" I couldn't remember how many times I'd heard that line. Maybe the cop was the husband, maybe he was the boyfriend. Whatever the scenario, the next day when I interviewed her nothing had happened, though she couldn't explain the broken rib or the gash on the side of her head.

I also had manuals. Standard Operational Procedures, Rules & Regulations, General Orders. I was surrounded by paper that reinforced the fantasy that the world could be figured out, that there were answers.

In the corner of my cubicle was the chair where a man sat when he told me he was sorry he hadn't beaten another man to death. Where an officer swore she had "no knowledge" of her partner's actions, even though she'd been standing two feet away.

On my desk was the IBM Selectric I used to type up more "motherfucker"s in a week than I'd heard in the whole year before coming to this place. It was the same typewriter that typed up the Q and A of the man who said four cops "beat the shit" out of him, though all he had to show for it was a scratch above his mouth.

A triage nurse at Mercy Hospital once told me, "Did you hear what happened to the guy who called some cop a motherfucker? He fell down a flight of stairs." I'd scribbled that in the margins of one of my telephone directories. On another page was a quote from a witness: "After the cop kicked him, the kid just curled up like a baby in the rain."

I'd logged hundreds of hours on the Wite-Out-splattered phone, asking people for things they didn't want to give me. "Hold on," said a desk sergeant, and I heard the phone slam on the desk. Sometimes I imagined officers on the other end flipping through a stack of invisible folders as they "searched" for my request. More than once I tried to conduct a telephone interview with a witness while family members in the background screamed, "Hang up on her! The bitch doesn't care!" Or "They're not going to do anything. They're all in it together."

A thin blue folder labeled "Under Investigation" was filled with hundreds of case numbers next to hundreds of names—a time line of the excesses of human behavior. There was the skinhead who appeared at my desk, eager to supply me with details about the two plainclothes cops who'd allegedly roughed him up. I tried to ignore his shiny swastika pin, tried to remain cool and objective. I was the only Jew in the office, aside from my boss.

In a lower desk drawer was a small cardboard box of business cards with a sample taped on top: Investigator Francine J. Sanders, Office of Professional Standards, Chicago Police Department. I broke the seal and checked the contents. The oily fragrance of print-shop ink was gone.

I remembered a summer day eight years earlier. Eugene Craig, my training partner, had just returned with me from a long afternoon hunting down witnesses. A package was waiting for him on his desk. "My guy can get you a helluva deal," he said as he checked out his crisp new business cards. He would no longer have to write his name and phone number on the generic OPS cards provided by the department. I'd filled in at least 20 that day, and his cards looked pretty good.

"I'll get some," I said. One of these days. Yet I hadn't ordered any until a few months before I started packing. I'd continued to fill out my name and number on hundreds of cards.

What had I been waiting for? From day one I'd loved the work. When I identified myself as "Investigator Sanders" it sounded good, it sounded right. Sure, the job could be depressing, but there were also plenty

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of highs.

Still, in my gut I knew OPS and the world of the police was a stopover, a place I would visit briefly on my way to somewhere else. It wasn't going to be a long-term commitment--not even a 500-card commitment. I think my decision not to place an order was less about not belonging than about the fear that a batch of preprinted business cards would somehow make it too easy to stay.

I also had five cartons marked "Wilson/Burge." I'd been the one assigned to this investigation, the one responsible for putting a "good cop," Jon Burge, out of work. At least that's what a lot of people said. Others said he got what he deserved. The former commander of the Area Two violent crimes unit had been accused of torturing Andrew Wilson, who was later convicted of killing two cops. As a result of the investigation Burge was fired, though he's never been prosecuted.

This was the case that put me in the news and cemented my status with many cops and coworkers as an outsider. The way I saw it--and still see it--I was doing my job. Yet as I packed up my desk I realized I was tired of thinking about the case. It was other events and other investigations--the smaller ones that never saw a headline--that replayed in my mind.

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I followed two uniformed strangers to a car in a fleet of parked squads. I knew that at least for tonight there was no turning back. And I hoped that despite his less than friendly demeanor, the man at the wheel, the one who owned me until 11 PM, didn't resent the outsider sitting behind him. I'd started as an OPS investigator the day before--April Fools' Day 1987.

We were only five minutes into the ride when the cop in the passenger seat fielded a radio call about a "man with a gun." He flicked on the siren and lights as I watched a sliver of sweat settle in a crease on his neck. The driver wheeled us around a corner. Colorful storefronts rushed past as we ripped down the boulevard. I don't know how fast we were going, but even I could see that the beat-up Chevy wasn't up to these moves. The siren screamed, then faded, then screamed again, each time grabbing me around the throat. Maybe there was still time to get out. But I didn't want out. I was already hooked.

I can't remember a time when I didn't want to be an investigator. Scotland Yard, the FBI, the mean streets of any dark city--these were the worlds I wanted to inhabit. When I was in grade school I did a book report on The FBI Story, and I did one on it the next year too. But it was television and film that really shaped my private-eye fantasies. It began with an addiction to Charlie Chan episodes but was soon replaced by the genre staples: The Thin Man's Nick and Nora, The Maltese Falcon's Sam Spade, The Big Sleep's Philip Marlowe. I was just a kid, but I saw myself as one of these tough-witted, justice-seeking, trench-coated heroes. When it came to detectives my dreams were always hard-boiled.

The siren continued to shriek. I wanted to say something, but nothing came out. When I glanced down I saw a smear of red where my fingernails were gouging my thigh. The officer calling the shots darted a look at me in the rearview. His eyes weren't hidden by shades, but they still didn't reveal anything. I stared back, hoping to offer nothing in return.

I'd always wanted to fly. I'd dreamed of soaring weightless, free, ungrounded, fast. Fast. This was pretty close, I thought. It was as if the dozens of cars we zigzagged around didn't exist. And I, lover of action movies, of drama, forgot for a moment that we were heading toward real danger. We pulled up at a generic-looking corner restaurant. The cops got out.

I waited. Here I was, seated in the rear of a Chicago Police Department squad car, a marked car, a cage car--the kind with the mesh screen that's supposed to separate the good guys from the bad guys. Only I was one of the good guys--though I would find out I was one of very few who thought so. I'd entered a world with dividing lines everywhere, a world of us and them. And as a member of OPS, I would always be on the wrong side.

OPS is an investigative unit within the Chicago Police Department. Its staff of 50 to 60 investigators reports to a chief administrator, who reports directly to the superintendent of police. The investigators aren't police officers. They're civilians. Their mission is to investigate allegations of misconduct involving excessive force, everything from handcuffs-too-tight beefs to police shootings; other types of misconduct are handled by the internal affairs division, whose investigators are all police.

I was one of 14 new recruits, and we were to go through an intensive training program that began with two ride-alongs. We had little in common. I'd been writing, working on film crews, and moonlighting at a Lincoln Park cafe. The other trainees included an ex-cop, a law student, an ex-parole officer, a graduate student in criminal justice, a former social worker, a computer programmer. I would later find out that the group also included a cop hater, a cop lover, a racist, and a friend.

For this first ride-along, on a balmy Thursday evening, I'd been assigned to two patrol officers from the Third District, an area that covers some gritty terrain on the city's south side. Thirty minutes earlier I'd reported to the watch commander, the top white shirt, who asked me to wait while he summoned his men. Two big cops, one white and one black, walked slowly in my direction. They were well-groomed, neat. Almost too neat, I thought. They reminded me of adolescent boys who'd been told to spruce up for a visit from an elderly aunt.

"OPS?" asked the bigger one. I'm almost six feet tall, but I remember having to look up at him.

The lieutenant nodded. "She's yours for the watch."

The cop stared down at me, then let out a small grunt. He motioned us toward the parking lot. His partner, who seemed to be taking his cues from this hulk, flashed a brief smile. It felt like an apology.

The last time I'd had an officer in my face I'd just turned 16. My parents were out of town and had given me car privileges. I was in Evanston, driving south on Sheridan in a heavy rain. When I saw the yellow light change to red I was afraid of skidding, so I continued through the intersection. I remember my panic as I watched the cop in my rearview mirror. I tried to explain that the pavement was slick. Sprays of rain flicked off his cap as he wrote me my first traffic ticket.

I don't remember how long I waited in the squad car. How long do "man with a gun" calls take? I wondered

what gunfire sounded like at close range. I'd heard shots before, but it had been a long time, and they'd been connected with events like New Year's celebrations and military tributes. Black faces paraded past the squad, not even glancing in. But I couldn't take my eyes off them or this place that was such a long way from my own neighborhood.

The two officers--"I'll call them Dombrowski and Martin"--got back into the squad without saying a word. When I asked what had happened, Martin, the rookie, said, "Nothing. Just a prank caller."

The evening yielded a smorgasbord of urban violence. Martin said the end of the week was always pretty lively, but the unseasonable heat gave things an extra push. We had a few domestics, a robbery at the 7-Eleven, a gang war, a home invasion, and even a couple of cat burglars. Many of the events of that night have since blurred together, but a few details stand out. An elderly woman had come home to discover she'd been robbed of her family treasures, and I can still picture her hunched, frail body as she paced from room to room, shaking her head and mumbling that nothing would ever be the same. Officer Dombrowski asked her the usual questions, but his gruffness had disappeared. He stood close to her, leaning into her as she whispered her answers. The softness of his voice, his whole approach, seemed to comfort her.

Dombrowski told me to wait in the squad while they handled some of the grislier assignments. But as the night went on they invited me to join them on all of their calls. Perhaps they'd begun to trust me. Perhaps they thought I was safer with them than on display in the back of their squad. Or maybe they wanted me to see.

Evening evaporated into night as we patrolled the streets, looking for something, hoping for nothing. A swarm of teenage boys clustered around the front entrance of a high school. Dombrowski warned them off with his bullhorn. We waited until a few slow-moving subjects took the hint. The evening peaked with a domestic. I followed the two officers up three flights of stairs in the direction of a woman's wailing. When we found her we learned she'd been knocked around by her live-in boyfriend. She continued to refer to him as her husband while blood dribbled into the space where there used to be a tooth.

I lost track of time, but it must have been around 8 PM when Dombrowski announced the need to eat. We settled on one of a handful of look-alike chicken joints sprinkled along 71st Street, and ordered a substantial amount of food and jumbo drinks to go. My last restaurant meal had been the asparagus-and-sun-dried-tomato souffle I'd eaten at the end of my shift at the cafe. Or was it a baby-artichoke tart? I stuffed a handful of greasy fries in my mouth as Dombrowski drove us away from the neon.

The darkness of Lake Michigan blurred against a muddy sky. We pulled up about 20 yards from the beach, in the middle of a park surrounding the South Shore Country Club. I'd heard about the club, a once lively haven for social activities, community meetings and entertainment. At this hour it was dark and empty. Martin radioed in that our unit was taking lunch. Lunch is that all-purpose police meal you eat even after the sun's gone down.

"You want good chicken ya gotta go to Harold's," said Dombrowski, ripping open another bag. As he spoke a piece of something flaked onto the side of his mouth. He started to swipe at it with the back of his hand, then went for the napkin. "Up on 64th. That's good chicken."

I smiled and wished we'd stopped earlier. Food seemed to take the edge off this bear of a man.

"Used to go there about two, three times a week. A lot of the guys like Greek. Ya like Greek food?"

"Love it," I said.

"You ever try that cheese that's on fire? It's real good."

"Saganaki," said Martin, choking down some food to get out the word. He turned and gave me a smile that read more like a wink.

"Right," said Dombrowski.

I listened while he talked about his golf game and how it used to be a whole lot better when he worked midnights. In some lines of work the graveyard shift is the one no one wants, the one reserved for deadbeats. In the land of the police, working midnights, the 11 PM to 7 AM watch, offers many cops the freedom and quiet that eludes them on days. Things loosen up a bit. You can get in and out of places. You can even get lost.

Dombrowski laid out his ideal day. Work midnights, get off at seven, nine holes at the club, pancakes with his buddies, and home to bed. It sounded like a good life when he talked about it.

He ended up sharing a lot with me, including the fact that he was a big Joseph Wambaugh fan: "Really liked that Onion Field story."

He also said he understood the need for OPS, though he, like most cops, didn't particularly like it when it got in his face. Working cops, he explained, are going to get their share of beefs.

I would learn that he was right. The officers in the trenches--the ones taking the calls and putting themselves out there--were bound to get hit with a complaint from time to time. And I eventually believed what a lot of cops felt: that it was the guys who stayed on the sidelines, the ones who didn't like to get their fingernails dirty, who often escaped a trip to OPS.

Both of their heads snapped up as a pair of shadows invaded the space ahead of the squad. It was a couple, lovers perhaps, walking along the deserted path.

"We don't see too many folks out here this late," Dombrowski said. His voice had a gentleness behind it. "Not anymore. Used to be lots of folks out here. Then things changed. Used to be one of the loveliest places in the city."

The rest of the watch was pretty quiet. As we parted ways in the parking lot of the district station, I hoped I'd never see these two officers again.

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I never wanted to be a cop, though I'd always been interested in that world. I discovered OPS in the late 70s, when I took a tour of CPD headquarters with a friend who was visiting from Denmark. The public-affairs guide pointed out the OPS office and said that OPS investigators played an important role in the system, that they helped police the police. He also mentioned that they were civilians. I pocketed this information, and several years later I applied.

One of the main reasons being a cop didn't interest me was that I had no desire to carry a weapon. I wasn't like my coworker who probably had lifetime subscriptions to Combat Handguns and American Handgunner. When we were assigned our first cubicles I arranged a few seashells on the corner of my desk and hung a framed photo of a dark blue sky speckled with birds. He decorated his wall with a full-color poster-size diagram of a semiautomatic.

After the ride-alongs we spent three weeks at the Chicago Police Department Training Academy. Learning to shoot was part of our training. When the firearms expert asked members of the group to grab a few blanks and load a gun, I tried to stuff a bullet in the barrel. I felt pretty stupid, considering how many times I'd seen this in the movies. A half hour later I found myself gripping a .38 Smith & Wesson, getting ready to fire at a paper target. After a couple of hours I discovered that I was a pretty good shot. I also discovered that it felt good to squeeze the trigger.

"So when you gonna apply for the police?" said a young police recruit one day in the cafeteria line. I would hear this line a lot. Like most cops I encountered, he assumed that OPS was a second choice and that one of these days I'd come over to the side of the real police.

It didn't take long to discover that OPS investigators occupied a strange no-man's-land. We were members of the Chicago Police Department. Our pay stubs said "police." We carried badges and police radios and drove unmarked squad cars. Technically we were civilians, but to most of the public we looked and smelled like cops.

Yet according to cops, we couldn't possibly understand what officers did in the real world, what they faced. We weren't equipped to judge. How dare we judge? We weren't them.

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"From now on, think of this baby as your bible," said Sam Morris, pulling a stack of pages from a large blue CPD binder. He said the words as if he really meant them. Morris was a large black man in his mid-30s, one of the OPS elite who'd been handpicked to train the new batch of recruits. He was also a member of the office's major-case unit, a special section that handled sensitive and complex cases--the ones likely to make the ten o'clock news.

Morris's training sessions had the spirit of a sermon. He worked himself into a sweat as he introduced us to the world of General Orders, the detailed directives that were supposed to guide department members in all situations. It came as no surprise to learn that he was the son of a minister.

"General Order 82-14," the directive Morris had called our bible, outlined department members' responsibilities when allegations of misconduct came to their attention. On page one was "Prompt, thorough investigations will be conducted into allegations of misconduct to establish facts which can absolve the innocent and identify the guilty."

I learned that the standard of proof in OPS cases was "a preponderance of the evidence." Morris clasped his hands as if he were about to pray, then tipped them slightly to one side. "When the weight of evidence is substantial enough to tip the scales," he said, "then your finding has to go in that direction."

There were four possible findings. Let's say a man alleged that an officer deliberately pushed him. "Not sustained," the most common finding, meant that there wasn't enough evidence to prove or disprove the allegation. Perhaps the witnesses--all equally credible--gave conflicting accounts. Perhaps there were no witnesses. A "sustained" finding meant that there was enough evidence to prove the allegation; the incident had occurred and the officer was guilty of misconduct. An "exonerated" finding meant that the officer's actions were justified. Yes, he'd pushed the man, but perhaps there was some kind of disturbance and he'd already given the man several verbal warnings to move. In the context of the total incident, the use of force was justified. The last possible finding, "unfounded," meant that the alleged action never happened. There was no push.

"Let the chips fall where they may," said Morris. As I listened to him on those clear spring afternoons I felt certain there would be an answer for everything in that large blue binder.

The next phase of our education was six weeks of field training. We'd filled in phony names on blank forms in a classroom and written summaries of mock investigations. Now it was time to do it for real. I lucked out--Morris was assigned to be my field trainer. His professionalism and passion had dazzled me at the academy. I also think I had the beginnings of a crush. The investigator assigned to be my training partner was 48-year-old Eugene Craig.

Craig (who provided valuable assistance on this article) was unlike anyone I'd ever known well. He was a veteran of the streets, having served as a parole officer for close to 20 years. He was black and came from the south side's Low End neighborhood; he knew the game and how it was played. I was a 32-year-old white broad from Wilmette; my background was on film sets and behind a typewriter. We were as different in experience as two people can be. We immediately hit it off.

The first weeks were like boot camp and a road movie rolled into one. We began with a week at the intake desk, the first stop for complaints. We learned that citizens can register a complaint by letter, by phone, or by coming into the office. I discovered that the intake staff--the ones who did this every day--had to be made of pretty tough stuff. By the time investigators were assigned a case, complainants had had a chance to cool down. Here emotions were ready to explode.

We learned that dates were to be written 25 April 87 and time was military. Everyone in this world was designated by race and gender; I marked up my reports and filled out my requests with m/h (male Hispanic), f/w (female white), m/b (male black). The classifications were endless. Police head-quarters, which was known as "the Building," soon became comfortable terrain. I started to learn the names of staff as I spent my days requesting arrest reports, criminal histories, and all the other documents needed to do

my job.

We quickly learned that it was impossible to predict a case's outcome. Complaints that looked fairly straightforward often surprised us with their complexity. Cases with "serious" written all over them frequently hit dead ends early on. They were all about a struggle for power and control.

Those first months on the job I usually woke up before my alarm went off--the way you do when you're a kid or on vacation or in love. On the bus on the way to work I would jump up from my seat three stops too early.

At the time OPS occupied the first floor of 1024 S. Wabash. Before that the unit had been inside police headquarters, then located at 11th and State. In 1986 OPS moved out of headquarters into its own space. Citizens' groups, the media, and human rights activists had questioned OPS's commitment to impartial and unbiased investigations, and the location of OPS offices inside the heart of copland had only reinforced their skepticism. The physical separation offered a tangible step toward building public trust in the system. The new office was only a block away, just around the corner, but at least the citizen with a complaint to file could walk in a different door than the cop on his way to work.

Yet the layout of the new office space still forced the worlds of police and civilian to collide. I was assigned a cubicle, one of the corner spaces, and like all other investigative personnel had only the privacy provided by a six-foot partition. You could hear everything, and you could see a lot too. Just a couple of days into field training I watched and heard a young complainant tell his story to one of the investigators across from me. As he gave his account--which was riddled with allegations of being "stomped on," "cussed at," and punched by the officer who'd arrested him--a beefy plainclothes cop sat in the adjacent cubicle, responding to almost identical allegations, though on an unrelated case.

"They're comin' in like hotcakes," said an investigator as he grabbed a fresh stack of manila case files. He was one of a handful of old-regime investigators who worked hard and cared but had never distinguished themselves. These first weeks of field training were our first real look at the office landscape and the people who inhabited it. Wads of discarded notes surrounded one woman's desk like a paper moat. Another woman would say, "Here, honey, have a seat," as she and her accused officers settled in for a statement. Yet another woman always seemed to be adjusting some man's tie or whispering on the phone in the syrupy voice of a cool-jazz deejay. And then there was the guy whose white shirts were spaghetti stained first thing in the morning. They all appeared colorful and harmless enough during those early encounters. I barely noticed Morris's Mona Lisa smile when I told him how nice everybody seemed.

Summers were always tough, but that summer the caseloads were unusually high. Each complaint against a department member is assigned a "complaint register," or CR, number. That summer, from what I recall, it wasn't uncommon to register more than 250 CR numbers a month. Even with a pool of about 50 investigators, that was a lot of new complaints needing "prompt, thorough investigations."

One investigator whose caseload had climbed to more than 50 had been reprimanded. Stories swirled around the office: cases had been found stuffed in her lower desk drawers, her case logs were empty, she'd done no work on some for months. Most of her cases had been taken out of her hands and given to other investigators. We, the newly recruited, chirped that this was horrible, incomprehensible. We would never let this happen to us. Meanwhile, the investigator always looked as if she didn't have a care in the world.

I discovered in the years to come that a caseload in the double digits sent most investigators into a tailspin. I also saw how easy it was to let the numbers pile up. And I understood the administration's and the investigator's eternal dilemma: the battle between quantity and quality.

For some investigators, I learned, the pressure to manage their caseloads often meant cutting corners: dropping a business card in a mailbox and leaving without even ringing the complainant's doorbell, or phonying up a canvass report. It was standard procedure to conduct a canvass on all investigations where there was the potential to uncover witnesses. That meant knocking on doors, ringing bells, talking to store merchants, gas station attendants. Sometimes it meant walking up eight flights in a public-housing stairwell or visiting an officer's neighbors on a block where half the residents were also cops. But a few investigators would simply visit the Haines directory of city residents arranged by address and "create" a canvass: Sitting in the office, drinking a cup of coffee, they would flip through the directory and type up names of people who "weren't home."

Sometimes the sidestepping was more subtle. Investigators would return to a location to look for witnesses at 10 AM even though the incident occurred at 10 PM. It could be insidious as well--a simple failure to ask the next question in an interview, because it could lead to 20 others and perhaps even a witness or two, which would mean another couple of calls and even more time. And there was the perversion of all perversions--to hear the name of a witness or other vital information and not write it down. Sadly, some investigators--fortunately not many--had traded in the OPS investigative manual for a manual Craig dubbed "How to Kill an Investigation."

But during those first months I was too busy to notice. I didn't even pay much attention when I discovered that someone had taken a bite out of my Granny Smith. The offender had returned the apple to my lunch bag in the employee refrigerator. Why not just eat the whole thing? I didn't get it, but I didn't dwell on it. Morris had handed Craig and me our first cases.

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One of our early stops was the records room in the basement of the Building. This dark, damp space, which I affectionately called "the Cave," housed an array of police documents, including radio dispatch cards, documents made out by police dispatchers when they assign a police car to a location. For my first case I needed to know which police unit had been assigned to the complainant's call. The easiest way to get this information was to contact the district. I'd called the day before and was told that this information wouldn't be available for at least a week. I didn't want to wait that long.

So I went to the Cave, which was guarded by an old man with a bad leg and his Igor-like assistant. I came to enjoy my occasional outings to the claustrophobic room. Digging through rubber-banded stacks of cards was time-consuming and often fruitless, but I fed on the suspense of not knowing whether I would find something. In some cases a dispatch card could yield vital information that couldn't be obtained by other means. I didn't even mind the assistant's frequent glances as I handled his paper, or his constant

means. I didn't even mind the assistant's frequent grances as I handled his paper, or his constant reminders: "Make sure they're put back in order. And don't mix up the batches." This was his kingdom and he was its keeper—at least during second watch. As I flipped through the cards I would often think: It's not the Library of Congress scene from *All the President's Men*, but it's close.

A few years down the road I investigated a case where some teenagers claimed that a team of plainclothes cops had stopped them in their car, asked them to get out, and then roughed them up. They weren't arrested, and as far as I could see no report had been made. The complainants had no names or vehicle numbers for the police. It was a long shot, but I decided to check for a dispatch card, hoping that perhaps the officers had run a vehicle check. After a lengthy dig I found the card: it confirmed that several officers had stopped the teens' car and run a check of the license. And it was at the exact date, time, and location the complainants had alleged. That didn't prove there'd been physical abuse, but it sure gave the teens credibility when the officers sat across from me and denied having had any contact with them.

Another discovery was the Communication Operations Section. The COS, then head-quartered at 11th and State, kept tapes of all police radio communications, as well as citizen 911 calls. Listening to COS tapes was a vital step in many investigations, especially in shootings and domestic incidents. For my first training case, I wanted to hear all the communications related to the complainant's call to the police.

The complainant, a citizen I'll call James Monroe, alleged that an off-duty officer I'll call Tyrone Davis had pointed a gun at him on the street outside his residence. Monroe said he'd yelled at Davis that he was driving too fast, and that when Davis stopped, the two men argued and Davis pulled out his gun. Monroe then called the police to report the incident. A short time later Davis, now on duty, returned to the scene with his partner, whom I'll call Janet Lyons. My preliminary investigation revealed that none of the necessary police reports had been made by either officer. There was also evidence that a police sergeant had been called to the scene, but hadn't gone there or made out a report. Why had Davis returned to the scene? Why hadn't any of the officers filed a report?

The dispatch tapes provided some answers. Shortly after Officers Davis and Lyons responded to Monroe's call, Lyons radioed COS and requested a supervisor, because "it involves my partner." While she was still on the air a sergeant told her he was tied up at the station and advised her to make out an aggravated-assault case report. None was made. I couldn't wait to get back to the office and play the tape for Morris.

A few weeks later I completed the investigation and had my first sustained case. All three officers would face disciplinary action, and the findings were largely the result of the evidence in the radio communications I'd listened to at COS.

After that initial visit I felt at home in the small COS monitoring room. It was crammed full of reels of tape, all marked with a zone, machine, position, and date. Perhaps I liked being able to actually put my hands on this stuff. As I learned in the years ahead, much of my job involved the effort to create something solid, something black and white out of gray, intangible fog. There were complainants and witnesses whose words on Monday became other words by Friday. Witnesses who couldn't be found or who were too afraid to share their stories. Incidents that took place in dark alleys with no witnesses and no physical signs of abuse. The tapes were tangible. No one could deny what was on them. Zone 6, machine 2, position 15, 25 April 87.

It wasn't that I was new to the land of ambiguity or even uncomfortable in it. I was aware that truth isn't easy to track down. There's always another side. There's always more to the story. When my schoolmates prayed for tests that required blanks to be filled in with "true" or "false," I wished for essay exams with big chunks of white space. I wanted to contemplate, ponder, explore.

And I'd watched my father as he made excuses for others, always pushing to find that other side. If a man was obnoxious to him he would mutter "jerk" under his breath. A few minutes later he'd tell me the guy probably had a fight with his wife that morning. There was always another way to look at it.

Secretly, however, a part of me had longed for clear-cut answers. No what ifs, no maybes. I wanted my father to say, "That guy was an asshole." Simple and direct.

As I look back on my trips to COS, I realize that my attraction was even more complex. I understood the voyeur in all of us. It's satisfying to watch, to listen. As an investigator, I was supposed to look at crime-lab photos of other people's darkest acts, to listen to witnesses talk about their moments of weakness, rage, and humiliation, and to hear police officers reveal their own moments. The act of investigation wasn't like voyeurism. It was voyeurism.

And the voyeur in me got her deepest fix in the privacy of the COS tape room listening to people's desperate cries, their pleas in the night, their fears. To be near this, but then to be able to hit "stop," shut the file, and walk out the door. This was as close to the edge as I could go without falling off.

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Field training was filled with firsts. Craig and I embraced these days, especially the work that took us outside the office. Some investigators, I was told, hated being on the street. Craig hated being inside. Whenever he had to do office work he looked like someone had stuffed him in a suit two sizes too small. For me, fieldwork was an adventure. Who will I find on the other side of this door? What will they tell me? Once inside, I liked getting a glimpse of other people's worlds. The photos of grandchildren that crowded the mantelpiece, the food cooking on the kitchen stove, the letters waiting to be mailed.

Later I realized that being on the street also meant risk. And it meant riding around in dirty squad cars that often reeked of someone else's fast-food lunch from the day before.

On these first cases Morris did the initial interviews. As I watched him I took notes, reliving my days as a journalism student and the dozens of interviews I'd done with the locals of Urbana-Champaign.

In some ways the qualities needed to conduct good interviews were the same: You needed to be a good listener, and you needed to make people feel comfortable. But there were also some important differences. As a journalism student I usually felt in control. I had choices. I could decide on the subject of a story and, usually, the setting for the interview. Sure, there were surprises. But for the most part the interviewees were cooperative, and I knew what to expect. Things were different in the world of OPS, where you never knew what awaited you. If you arranged an interview in advance you might have some

idea. But many complainants and witnesses didn't have a phone, so your first contact was often on their front doorstep.

There was also the question of style. I learned quickly that for these interviews gimmicks didn't work. Charm and hype might get you in the door, but they didn't get you past the barriers inside. I couldn't be like Craig, who spoke a language I still don't fully understand. I couldn't be like the Bridgeport-bred investigators who'd swagger up to a couple of guys at 15th and Springfield and say, "Hey, bro." The only thing that worked for me was to be who I was: a white woman who loved the city but was a lot more familiar with the streets of the North Shore.

Craig and I watched closely as Morris delivered his questions, one after another, using just the right tone, just the right rhythm. He was the Charlie Parker of investigative technique, always exploring, improvising. He knew just the right way to ease into a hard line of questioning and to make people feel like everything they said was important. He could talk to just about anybody and make that person feel like he grew up down the block. He'd become my hero.

Fieldwork with Morris and Craig usually meant a stop at the H & A soul-food restaurant at 63rd and Vernon. Morris was a big man--especially in those days--and H & A was the kind of place that could do right by him. The three of us found some heaven there--Morris in the ham hocks, Craig in the smothered steak, and I in the greens.

Cops ate there too, especially since their badges got them a hefty discount. Fifteen years later, as a college film-studies instructor, I often show clips from Sidney Lumet's *Serpico*, based on the story of a New York City cop who refused to give up his integrity for an easier ride. My favorite clip is a revealing scene in which the rookie cop, played by Al Pacino, insists on ordering roast beef, even though his senior partner strongly encourages him to get chicken, the food du jour for cops with a badge to flash. *Serpico* lets it be known that he'd rather pay a few bucks and get what he wants.

In eight-plus years with the department I didn't run into many Frank *Serpico*s. But I came to understand why some cops made adjustments to the rules. When it seems like everything's working against them, when the world keeps taking and not giving, it must be pretty easy to justify a few freebies here and there. It evens things up. For some cops, it's not just OK--the world owes them.

And I should know. I didn't put up much of a fight when a coworker, on the job for many years, suggested flashing our badges to get into a movie theater. I was a trainee at the time, and we were off duty. I don't remember thinking someone owed me, but I do remember thinking it was a nice treat and I deserved it. I'd like to believe it was my weakness for movies that compromised me.

The biggest chunk of fieldwork involved prospecting for witnesses. Our early canvasses took us to every pocket of the city--from Beverly to West Rogers Park, from the seedy to the sublime. We walked up stairwells in Robert Taylor and rode up elevators in lakefront high-rises. We stood in bug-laced hallways and interviewed people through the crack of a front door. We sat on pristine plastic-covered couches with dishes of dainty mints on the end table. We visited laundromats, pool halls, parking lots, taverns, condos, coach houses, motels, hotels, schools, jails, and every other place that had a bell to ring or a door to knock on. Every stop was different, and every stop was the same. It was a drama junkie's dream, and I gorged on the details.

Canvasses also provided a crash course in the quirkiness of human nature. On one of my early cases I canvassed the Paxton, a transient hotel on LaSalle. I didn't find any witnesses, so I left my business card at the front desk and asked the clerk to call me if he heard anything. As I was leaving, a booming voice called out, "Hey, lady!" I turned and saw an elderly woman charge into the lobby, waving her arm. "I saw it," she said, though she couldn't have known what I was there to investigate. "I saw everything."

On another routine canvass I spent about 20 minutes taking notes of a woman's eyewitness account. Then I asked, "So where were you standing when you saw Mr. Jackson get slapped by the officer?"

After a long pause she said, "What do you mean?"

"How far away were you when you saw the officer slap your friend?"

A few questions later I learned that she'd been visiting her cousin in Milwaukee when her friend across the hall had been involved in the alleged incident. She'd heard about it when she got home the following day.

It wasn't malice. People love stories, and she'd heard her friend's story so many times that when she told it to me it sounded as if she'd been there. After a few of these episodes I wised up.

These early experiences served as sobering reminders: investigators have power. Not just the power to render findings in a case, but something more insidious, more dangerous--power that can change the course of events. Just as I learned that it would be easy to turn an overzealous or lonely individual into an eyewitness, I learned that it would be easy to make a real eyewitness disappear.

□

"Damn, girl. Damn, those are some big legs."

The object of Craig's enthusiasm was a short black woman walking on the opposite side of the street. He meant it as a compliment. Morris, who was driving, glanced over to check her out. He laughed, one of those brother-to-brother things, then remembered that his other investigative trainee happened to be a woman.

It was early June, one of our last weeks of training, and we'd just finished up a string of personal visits. We were on Madison, about 4000 or 5000 West, and as we headed east Morris commented on the success of the Koreans and Jews in the neighborhoods we were passing by. I braced myself for the usual remarks, but they never came. Morris was angry, he said, angry about his own people not building up their businesses. He, the son of a black Methodist minister, and I, the descendant of Russian Jews, would discuss this more than once in the years ahead.

Later that night Craig and I had our first fight. We both remember it, though differently. He recalls that it started the day before, when I allegedly told him to shut up while we were monitoring tapes at COS. He hated the task and the room and the cold-fish cop who was always slumped in the seat outside. Maybe I

told him to keep quiet. What I do remember is that as we headed back to the office I recognized a man walking down the street. He was the night-shift desk clerk in my apartment building, and we often talked when I came home late. Craig laughed and called him a "fag." I replied, my voice packed with venom, "That's sick."

For the first time since our trio had formed, the silence was long and tense. My gut told me I didn't fit in this world and never could. Even the few people I felt a connection with didn't really understand me. And I didn't really understand them.

About a mile before we reached the office Morris drove us down a small dead-end street and parked. "There's a lot of pressure here," he said. "It's easy to say things." He told us about his early days on the job and tensions with his own partner.

As he talked, I glanced into the rearview mirror. Craig had a small smile on his face. He knew what I'd suspected: Morris's story was pure fiction. We were back on track.

The next day Morris sent Craig and me into the field on our own for the first time. As we drove around, we talked about how similar we were--both Scorpios, both sensitive. And we discussed how smart Morris was. We never had another confrontation, and we never had better days than those last ones under Morris's wing.

□

I think things started to fall apart the day Julie Byrne called Morris and me into her office. Byrne was the major-case supervisor, Morris's boss, and one of the most powerful people in the office. She was born to do this work. What she lacked in formal education she made up for in instinct and raw smarts. She was definitely someone you wanted rooting for you.

It was late summer, and I'd been out of training only a couple of months. I was a member of a team and "in rotation"--getting cases like everyone else in the office. The old-timers had been waiting for us recruits to take over some of the cases that were still swelling the intake logs even with the peak season nearly over.

"Close the door," Byrne said. She then informed me that I was being temporarily assigned to the major-case unit. I would be working on a big investigation with Morris and several other members of the office elite. "You'll be out of rotation for a while," she said. Then she showed Morris and me the case file, already thick with a stack of police reports.

The alleged incident had taken place at a bar I'd never heard of. Byrne said it was a popular hangout for locals and cops. According to the preliminary reports, members of the district tactical team, who were off duty at the time, had arrested five bar patrons after watching them conduct narcotics transactions. The five patrons claimed that the arresting officers had punched and kicked them while they were lying handcuffed on the ground. Other civilians, including the bar's owner and a barmaid, reported that they'd been illegally strip-searched by two other officers.

One of the key reasons the case came to the major-case unit was that some of the cops had made allegations against other cops. The tactical officers claimed that other off-duty officers had refused to help them make the arrests. One of those officers claimed that one of the tactical officers had pointed a gun at him. In the end, there was a stack of allegations against off-duty, on-duty, uniformed, and plainclothes officers.

As Morris and I walked out of the office he stared at me. "Do you know what this means?" he said, gushing with pride. "Do you?" He said some investigators who were pushing 15 years had never been given this kind of opportunity. He called it a career maker. He was right, though it set me on a course neither of us could have predicted.

The case introduced me to the dark side of that part of the city. My first glimpse had come a month earlier, when the four accused tactical officers visited my cubicle in connection with another case. Several Hispanic teenagers had accused the officers of beating them up in the district station after they were arrested. One teenager told me that one of the officers, whom I'll call Malvado, had picked up a metal floor ashtray, held it next to the kid's head, and said, "Hey, let's see what you sound like as a musical instrument." Then he and his partners smacked the ashtray against each of the kids' heads.

None of the youths reported injuries--they said the officers had hit them but "not that hard." And because the alleged incident had occurred behind closed doors, there were no independent witnesses. The police officers denied all allegations.

I still remember Malvado's Q and A. He swaggered up to my desk and before sitting down carefully repositioned the chair. When I showed him the list of allegations he gave them an indifferent glance. This was a man who liked control. He was the first officer who made me uncomfortable.

Like most complaints investigated by OPS, there was insufficient evidence to prove or disprove the allegations, so the result was a finding of not sustained. It didn't matter that my gut knew different. No offense to the kids, but I could tell they weren't creative enough to make up Malvado's lines.

As we worked the bar case, I interviewed a parade of citizens in my corner cubicle. I took dozens of Q and As from civilian and police witnesses. I spent long days in the field, visiting the bar, conducting interviews, tracking down reports. I also spent many hours in the internal affairs division, which housed photograph albums showing every member of the Chicago Police Department except undercover cops. I took witnesses there to try to make an identification and soon discovered that IAD photos weren't always up-to-date. It's tough to positively identify a balding cop with a clean-shaven face if his photo shows him with long hair and a mustache. The inadequacy of the system hurt victims and probably a few cops too. (I've heard it's changed a lot since I left.)

Morris and I were inseparable over the next couple of weeks. When we weren't doing fieldwork we were collaborating on strategy or critiquing each other's statements. We were both tough critics, especially of ourselves. "I should have asked another question," I would say, looking over one of my Q and As. Morris, looking at one of his own, would say, "I didn't follow up here."

We also shared our highs. We talked about those first moments in an interview when a complainant

collapses in the chair at your desk and the words spill out of his mouth: At last, someone's going to listen to me. We both understood the exhilaration of asking the perfect follow-up question--and the sweetness of the moment just before you ask it. Anyone can prepare a list of questions, Morris would say, but it takes talent to create on the spot.

As the investigation came to a close, we took final statements from the accused officers. And I had my reunion with Malvado, who proved a formidable adversary. This time he had an attorney with him, which wasn't unusual for an accused officer. The presence of lawyers cut both ways. Sometimes they made an investigator's life easier by helping an inarticulate officer tell a coherent story. But sometimes they zapped the spontaneity from an officer's responses, killing the rawness that could reveal the truth.

In Malvado's case an attorney seemed redundant. All of his answers--even the ones that were delivered without coaching--were precise, controlled, deliberate. I don't recall the exact words he used, but I do remember that his response to a standard question that usually yielded a one-word answer--On the date of the alleged incident, were you in uniform or civilian dress?--took up a paragraph.

In early 1988 the lead OPS investigator on the case turned in his closing report. It listed 272 pieces of evidence and named 15 complainants, 22 witnesses, and 18 accused officers. Five officers, all off duty at the time, were found guilty of misconduct. Four of the officers--Malvado and his partners--received sustained findings for excessive-force violations.

As a result of our investigation the four would no longer put on jeans when they dressed for work. They were off tactical duty and back on the beat.

I thought of Malvado and his crew recently when I watched F.W. Murnau's silent masterpiece *The Last Laugh*, in which the stately hotel doorman dissolves into a hunchback after he's demoted to lavatory attendant. When I saw Malvado a few months after the investigation he was wearing a uniform and had lost every hint of cowboy swagger. Even though I felt he deserved what he got, I almost felt sorry for him.

The case altered my life too. There was a cold snap in the office. I still felt a bond with many of the investigators I'd trained with, but the attitude of others on the staff seemed to have changed. People who'd always been talky suddenly got busy when I approached. Others seemed to strain to be friendly.

Morris later told me that many investigators, especially the ones who always complained that they weren't getting juicy cases (and often made these remarks while lounging with a *Sun-Times*), saw me as one of the chosen and resented me. They said I had an in with David Fogel, the chief administrator, who was an academic, a white boss in an office of mostly minorities, and the only other Jew.

It was bad enough that I was white, but I was also North Shore white. New Trier white. Temple Sholom white. It hurt that people were looking for a reason not to believe that I was chosen because someone thought I was good.

In the weeks and years ahead I would see more symptoms of this resentment, some of it directed at me, some at others in the office. It was a disease that transformed basically decent human beings into smaller, meaner versions of themselves. And it made me remember Morris's ambiguous little smile when I was still in training and said how nice everyone seemed.

There was no letup when a new chief took over in 1990. She was a tough black attorney who valued many of the same chosen as her predecessor, picking people because they could get the job done.

On particularly bad days I would think back to why I'd wanted this job--the private-eye fantasies, the need to escape the pressures of freelancing, the intense attraction to the underbelly of life and the shady corners of the human psyche. But I'd also wanted the challenge of trying to do what was right and fair. During my job interview Fogel and his two top administrators had put me through one of the most thought-provoking examinations I'd ever faced, hurling one hypothetical after another at me: How would I approach this situation? What was my attitude toward the police? What were my beliefs about right and wrong and the truth? Their questions took me back to Sunday school and our weekly ethics assignments.

I'd been excited at the prospect of working with like-minded individuals with a common purpose: being fair, making impartial judgments, analyzing evidence, looking at all sides of a situation. Hell, I'd often been criticized for being overly analytical and overly fair. I'd looked forward to being around others who had the same flaws. But as the years passed that sounded more and more like a scene from an old, grainy movie.

Behavior I once took in stride became less tolerable. The sport of taking a statement from an aggressive officer no longer excited me. A lawyer peeling an orange at my desk while his cop client answered my questions no longer seemed an amusing intimidation tactic. I found myself growing less patient with everyone. Witnesses and complainants who had no clue how to tell a story and often had to guess at their friends' last names. Middle-class businessmen who fussed because an officer allegedly nudged them or told them to shut up. Didn't they know I had a drawer full of real complaints? I began to feel that I wouldn't want me on the other side of the desk if this were my complaint.

Then there were the cops who saw me as the enemy because I'd racked up a fair number of sustained cases. One of them, a plainclothes officer who wore mirrored sunglasses during his Q and A, called me a "headhunter"--he said he'd heard my desk drawer was filled with the heads of cops.

It was annoying when officers like him blamed me for the results of their actions. I wanted to tell them: You did this, not me. The truth was, I preferred a finding of exonerated to sustained. It was always a lot more satisfying to prove that there was a good cop out there than that there was one who'd gone astray.

And then there were some of my coworkers. I kept asking myself, Who are these people who moan about being overworked but find the time to peel the sausage off someone else's leftover pizza in the refrigerator? Who are these people who crowd their cubicles with the word of God on plastic plaques yet shun other staff?

The days of standing up to get off the bus three stops early, daydreaming about a new day's adventures, were gone. Now I fantasized about not getting off and riding to the end of the line, wherever it was.

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In the cabinet above my desk was the last thing I had to pack, a plain white envelope addressed to "Ms. Sanders." It was from a man I'll call Parker, and the return address was the state prison in Centralia. The writing was round and smooth, each letter formed with spacious loops and curvy wisps. Old school. The correspondence was from early 1995, just after my eighth anniversary on the job.

My first and only meeting with Parker had taken place a couple of weeks earlier in a small, windowless room at Cook County Jail, his residence at the time.

I hated visiting people in jail. I remember a kid in the Audy Home, the hollowness of his eyes, the absence of emotion. His fight was gone, and there was nothing in its place. Any visit to the Joliet Correctional Center was also depressing. One day as my coworker and I waited in the reception area with dozens of other people, I decided that the employees behind the desk would have to walk backward if they wanted to move any slower.

Most of my visits inside were to the Cook County Jail, at 26th and California. There I met an arsonist who alleged that the bomb- and-arson investigators had beaten a confession out of him by bashing his head with a telephone book. "Got a match?" he asked as we finished up the interview. The joke sank in about an hour later.

These visits left me feeling a little embarrassed. I'm still not sure why. Perhaps because I saw myself with my crisp, clean outfit and schedule to keep, and saw the person I was interviewing with his shackles and all the time in the world.

When I visited Parker at the jail he was about 45, though he looked a lot older. I don't recall much else about his looks except that he was tall and black. But I remember his story as if I'd heard it yesterday. One morning in late January he left the homeless shelter, as he did most mornings. It was unusually cold, so he went into a nearby basement to get warm.

He told me that while he was in the basement a black man I'll call Johnson came in and identified himself as the owner of the building. Parker explained that he was just trying to keep warm, then tried to leave. The two men struggled, and their fight ended up on the driveway outside.

Parker claimed that then another man, dressed in casual clothes but carrying handcuffs and a gun, helped Johnson force him to the ground. The man, who he later learned was a police officer I'll call Taft, handcuffed him and said, "We're going to kill you, motherfucker." The officer then kicked him. Johnson, who'd picked up a shovel, "held it like a baseball bat" and began hitting Parker on the arms and legs.

At one point the officer intervened, and Johnson stopped hitting him. But the beating soon resumed and didn't stop until Johnson's shovel broke.

A few minutes later the police arrived, took Parker to the station, and charged him with residential burglary. He told me he was also taken to the hospital and treated for injuries.

So far Parker's allegations weren't much different from those of most excessive-force cases. The next steps of the investigation also turned up fairly routine findings. The canvass yielded only one witness, a neighbor across the street. She said she saw Parker swing at and struggle with her neighbor and his friend as they escorted him down the driveway and pushed him onto the ground. She then saw her neighbor hit and kick Parker, but didn't see her neighbor's friend strike him. Yet she also said she hadn't seen everything because she'd run inside to call 911.

The medical evidence was also inconclusive. The hospital report noted several lacerations and "muscle trauma to ribs with no fracture."

I'd spoken to Johnson on the phone before our meeting, so I had some idea of what he would say. It was customary to conduct a brief telephone interview with witnesses--you never knew if you'd catch up with them again. Johnson had told me that his friend, Officer Taft, stopped him from hurting Parker and that Parker should thank Taft for saving his life.

Johnson was just a few years older than Parker, and when he stepped into my cubicle I remember thinking he was smaller than I'd imagined. He told me that he'd been making his morning rounds when he noticed a wheelbarrow track leading from his basement. He assumed someone had gone in and "taken some stuff out." When he went inside to investigate he saw Parker duck behind a door. Johnson picked up a pipe and told him to come out. Parker told him, "I'm a homeless person. I needed a place to keep warm." Johnson then kicked him in the groin and started beating him with the pipe.

Parker ended up on the floor, and Johnson continued beating him with the pipe, then began "stomping" on him. At one point Parker grabbed the pipe and said, "You're going to have to kill me to get me out of here." Johnson said he told him, "No problem. That's my intention. I'm going to do just that." Then he stomped on Parker's groin and stomach. Parker let go of the pipe, and Johnson picked up a shovel and started hitting him: "My intention was to break his legs and break his ribs."

He also told me that Officer Taft came in, pulled him off Parker, and said, "Don't kill him." Johnson said he did stop for a while because he was winded. "When I got my breath back," he said, "I started hitting him again." He said Taft intervened a second time.

Johnson said nothing had happened outside. He'd asked the neighbor to call the police, and a short time later they came and took Parker into custody. Johnson said he then discovered that Parker had taken more from the basement than he'd realized: "I thought to myself, I should have killed him before the police arrived."

During my follow-up questions Johnson told me that Parker had gathered up a lot of his copper pipes and bent them. "He had some things in his hands," he said. "I don't know what it was." He also explained that he'd been "vicious" because Parker was bigger than he was. "I didn't know if he had a weapon or not. And my intention was to beat him into submission."

He kept saying he still wished he'd killed Parker. "I would do whatever I have to to defend my property, and for Mr. Parker's information, I will be staying in the building, and any day is a good day to die."

I felt sick. I'd seen evil before, but this was too close. It was sitting a foot away from me. It was breathing

the same air. What truly frightened me, horrified me, was that he felt no need to hide his actions. I wanted to walk out and not come back. Maybe Parker wasn't a model citizen. Maybe I could understand why Johnson might have been afraid of him, even why he'd been outraged. But that didn't change what I felt.

Officer Taft's statement was consistent with Johnson's. He denied all allegations that he'd participated in the beating.

It was never easy to recommend a not sustained finding. It meant lack of resolution, lack of clarity, and, for someone, lack of justice. As the complainant on the case, Parker would receive a letter explaining that there was insufficient evidence to prove or disprove his allegations. As the accused officer, Taft would receive a similar document. As the investigator, I would once more type "not sustained" on my investigator's closing report.

The letter from Parker, who'd been convicted on charges related to the case, had been sent before the department's letter went out. His letter read, "Ms. Sanders: This is a followup to let you know if any word comes about concerning C.R. I'm here in Centralia. Please forward everything to me here. I should be here for awhile so I will be looking to hear from your office in the future. Thank you for trying to get to the bottom of this matter regardless of the outcome. I will take up a trade while I'm here and try to regain control of my life once again. Thank you."

Sitting in his cell in Centralia, Parker still believed in the future, still had hope. And he forgave.

I read the letter again, then packed up the last carton and left.

□

It's been just over seven years since I gave that exit speech and walked out the doors of OPS. These days I settle for fictional private eyes, and my exploration of the underbelly of life happens mainly on the pages of screenplays. I still slip on occasion and identify people as "female black" or "male white." But my interrogations are mostly limited to asking students why they haven't turned in their term papers.

I miss a lot of things about my job as an OPS investigator. But I never regret leaving.

Craig left the job three years before I did. He said it was time to move on. A few weeks later, Morris died of complications following cancer. One of the last things he told me was that it hurt to feel small and fragile in the world.

The OPS unit moved to a new space on 35th Street. Police headquarters moved too. I still save news clippings on police brutality. I keep them in a folder, not far from the file with Parker's letter.

Art accompanying story in printed newspaper (not available in this archive): illustration/Lloyd Miller.

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