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toward EQUALITY EXPLORING A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE Making a Difference Officer Works to Reap a Harvest of Hope in Watts

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Abstract (Abstract): Officer Wayne Guillary, in his pressed blues, nosed the black and white out of the Southeast Division parking lot onto the streets of [Watts]. Guillary has been staring at these streets and its people all his life. He grew up here, he and his two brothers, in a modest home on Mary Avenue near 103rd Street.

Guillary turns right off San Pedro onto 92nd Street. He and his partner cautiously check an apparently abandoned house frequented by crack addicts. The stench of urine and human feces meets them at the door. They find a man inside. His fingers are badly singed—a tell-tale sign of a crack addict who clutches the glass pipe even as it burns his skin. Guillary warns him that he is trespassing and promises to arrest him if he finds him in the house again.

Cruising down Figueroa, Guillary spots a suspected prostitute. He stops to chat and notices her left hand clenching something. Inside is crack. She squeals on a trick inside a hotel. Guillary and a backup unit barge in. The man is in bed watching adult movies. A smattering of cocaine is found in his possession. Both are arrested.

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Full text: Officer Wayne Guillary, in his pressed blues, nosed the black and white out of the Southeast Division parking lot onto the streets of Watts. Guillary has been staring at these streets and its people all his life. He grew up here, he and his two brothers, in a modest home on Mary Avenue near 103rd Street.

Guillary, 32, has been on the force for seven years and has risen to the rank of P-3, a supervisory position. He approaches his job with almost missionary zeal. He is trying desperately, he says, to return something to the neighborhood.

For Guillary, the realities of the street and the politics of the job present a troubling dichotomy. He works in a division where nearly all the residents are black, save a spattering of Latinos. Nearly all the officers are white. Guillary heads area A-3, a segment bounded by Central Avenue on the west, Wall Street on the East, Manchester Boulevard on the north and 103rd Street on the south. It includes middle-income areas and striving families as well as stretches of urban badlands, gangs, troublesome liquor stores. On the streets are baseheads and strawberries, the local nicknames for the men and women strung out on crack cocaine. Often, he ends up arresting people he grew up with.

Today is a slow day. He will meet with three block clubs to boost their spirits with an upbeat crime report, roust crack addicts from three vacant houses, arrest one woman for prostitution and possession of crack cocaine. Her trick, on probation, will also be charged with possession.

"Sometimes I believe there is no hope for black people. I was very optimistic when I started out. I didn't think it would be worse. It's changed in a way that I sometimes feel, 'Are we going to make it over that hill?' That mountain looks pretty high. It's a mountain of crime.

"Sometimes I wonder who cares.

"It's tough, but I can't quit. I look at my old grandfather who's 95 years old. James Fuzee. When he can sit back and tell me the hardships that he's seen black America go through, I know I can't quit. When he talks about the hardships and the strides that blacks have made over the years, it's much worse than what we're dealing with today. My grandfather said if our ancestors could go through all that hardship, if we can come over here and be

put through slavery for 250 years, we can come out of this condition we're in today.

"But it's hard. It's hard trying to be strong. There are times I look at kids and tears come to my eyes. I feel for them. I wish there was something that I could do. I'm doing something morally that I think is right by being in this uniform. I get down on their level and tell them they can make it. There may or may not be a lot of other black cops who do it, but it means something to me.

"I feel for these people. I really do. To have to wake up every morning, turn on your radio and here that in South-Central Los Angeles, 'Three gang shootings occurred. Three men are dead, separate locations.' You find out that the family is watching television or having a little birthday party, somebody drives up and shoots in the house and a little kid gets killed. It's sad.

"People are afraid to let their kids out. You won't see a lot of children walking up and down Wadsworth because we've got the gangs over here. We've got Avalon, 89th Street gang. We've got men who are just walking the street unemployed, and it's intimidating to the citizens. They see graffiti on the walls. They see gang members walking down the street with their pants hanging down, a rag hanging out their pocket, their sneakers untied, dark shades on. That's intimidating to them.

"I spoke to a young lady one time on the street, I said, 'People try to clean up your neighborhood, take pride in it. There's too much crime.' You know what that young lady told me. She said, 'We don't need the police around here. We are the crime.'

"I talk to my friends about it sometimes. They really don't understand the problems. They hear it on the news, and they say that's sad, but I'm right in it. They say, 'I don't know if it's that bad.' I say take a ride for yourself and see how many (prostitutes) you can pick up on Figueroa. If I could get a bus to follow me . . . I could fill it with girls that I pick up. I guarantee you."

Guillary turns right off San Pedro onto 92nd Street. He and his partner cautiously check an apparently abandoned house frequented by crack addicts. The stench of urine and human feces meets them at the door. They find a man inside. His fingers are badly singed—a tell-tale sign of a crack addict who clutches the glass pipe even as it burns his skin. Guillary warns him that he is trespassing and promises to arrest him if he finds him in the house again.

The unit heads through Nickerson Gardens. Heads turn. Stares. A young boy asks about baseball cards that police often hand out. No baseball cards today.

"There's discrimination within the department. There are a lot of blacks who say Southeast isn't fair, but there have been changes made. Guys look and say, 'Guillary, you're the only black senior lead in the division. You're in a predominantly black area. Why is that?' I can't answer it. Those decisions are beyond my control.

"They're making gradual changes. We'll never get rid of racism and discrimination to 100%. You have to deal with it every day. It's not a constant or where it's blatant. I've worked with a lot of good white partners in black neighborhoods. There are some good white officers in the division who care. We have several lieutenants who like to see the affirmative action plan applied. I think if you saw a lot of undercover black cops who are effective in those areas, you're going to see some officers taking interest in that.

"I started out in Hollywood Division as a probationary officer in 1981. I was the only black on morning watch. They had blacks in division, but on that watch I was the only one. It's kind of a funny feeling. You're sitting there with your counterparts, and they might crack and joke, and it might be a racial joke. And if you took offense, you might find yourself in a hard place. You've gotta have a pretty thick skin to be a police officer because there are a lot of jokes being thrown at you. Some are said with meanness, and others are said to crack a joke. If you don't have a thick skin, it can hurt you.

"It's a very touchy situation to talk about at times because you don't know who you may offend. Around here, they've had training days when no blacks are involved. It could have been an oversight or just something they just weren't aware of. But if you saw more blacks in narcotics, administrative vice, being detectives and working those areas, you would in fact see a possible change in the crime factor. They may have some effect in getting

to the heart of the problem. They can't rid the entire community of the problem, but I think to infiltrate some of those areas, you'll find that a black was able to get into those areas before a white guy. If some of the black guys went undercover, they look the part. They can talk the talk."

Cruising down Figueroa, Guillary spots a suspected prostitute. He stops to chat and notices her left hand clenching something. Inside is crack. She squeals on a trick inside a hotel. Guillary and a backup unit barge in. The man is in bed watching adult movies. A smattering of cocaine is found in his possession. Both are arrested.

"When I went for my interview to become P-3, they asked me why I wanted it and what I was trying to accomplish. I think my answer to them sums up my feelings about what I'm doing here. See, I'm like the farmer. Right now land is barren and the soil rocky, and everybody wants to abandon it. But I feel that if I'm persistent in staying here, I can get something done. I believe if I could rid the land of all the problems, then I feel that when the land become productive and fruitful, I would reap the harvest. I think that we could all reap the harvest."

Illustration

PHOTO: Officer Wayne Guillary talks to neighborhood watch group about recent problems in area.; PHOTO: LAPD Officer Wayne Guillary outside suspected crack house. / Los Angeles Times

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