

Reporter gains insight on duty with police officer

By Susanne Steffens
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It's Saturday, just about 7 p.m. For most people, it's just another evening full of fun and parties. For me, it's going to be an exceptional evening because I'm spending the evening on duty with a Eugene police officer.

With my notebook and pencil, my purpose is to reflect an evening's events from the eyes of the police onto the *Emerald* page.

Going through my mind before stepping into the police car are major events like murder and rape, but, of course, Eugene is no Los Angeles. The primary problems for the Eugene police are criminal trespassing and noise disturbances, and Officer Terry Fitzpatrick tells me in the

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car that gang members hang out together in Eugene is also becoming a serious problem both for the police and the public.

Fitzpatrick, 43, is going to be my "teacher" this evening, and while he is talking on the police radio, my eyes wander around the car to the equipment buttons for the sirens and lights. A shotgun is placed in a holder almost in front of me, and behind me is the window that separates those who've been arrested from the officer.

Our first stop is West University Park, which has become one of the worst places around the

campus area for crime. Drug users visit the park constantly, and a number of people violate the park hours by hanging out there during the night.

Right now, there are two transients who are using the park, sitting by one of the tables, and we walk up to them for a little chat. Fitzpatrick says the two are well known among the campus police because they have open containers of alcohol on a regular basis. Fairly intoxicated, they are not causing any trouble and the park is still open, so we say goodbye and go back to the car.

It's soon 8 p.m., and by driving around the campus area, I'm beginning to learn one of the most important duties of police officers — observation. Fitzpatrick says police officers can

easily see beer bottles being hidden and people running away from locations. With the evening already in dark light, I squint my eyes, trying to see anything suspicious.

It is Fitzpatrick who sees something first, on East 13th Avenue outside of the Bijou Theater. A transient named Jeffrey is sitting on the steps to the entrance, so intoxicated that he can hardly move. Fitzpatrick tells me Jeffrey has lost a lot of weight lately from consuming mainly alcohol.

Fitzpatrick tries to make Jeffrey leave the premises, but Jeffrey does not cooperate and is therefore arrested for criminal trespassing. With help from a nearby officer, he is handcuffed and put into the car.

With a strong smell of alcohol in the car, we drive Jeffrey to the Lane County Jail. He is slurring his words, trying to invite me out for a date. (Luckily, I already have plans for Sunday evening.)

At the jail, the gates are opened and Jeffrey is brought into the arms of the security personnel, who will take care of him until the next day. Care means giving him a shower, breakfast and clean clothes. For most of the transients, this is their opportunity to get a medical checkup, a good meal and a bed to sleep on. The only thing they will miss is the alcohol bottle.

After the arrest, Fitzpatrick has to write out a report of what happened, which includes general information about the suspect and an observation report about the incident.

Back in the University district, we stop in a parking lot near East 13th Avenue and Alder Street, and Fitzpatrick sees two minors who are sitting in front of a car with open containers. After trying to break off the evening, they are both given citations, and from my seat in the car I can see the despair in their eyes when they are told the court date and bail.

The night is getting older, but it's still fairly quiet. On the radio we are informed about a customer at the Best Western Motel who is having diabetic problems, but when we arrive, the paramedics are already in the process of helping. After a few minutes, the situation is under control, and we are on our way to a noise disturbance from a party. However, the party has quieted down by the time we arrive, so my hope of visiting the party is gone.

Fitzpatrick tells me that the boundaries that he usually goes by on his route are High Street to Walnut Street and 24th Avenue to Broadway Street. Passing by Rennie's, Guido's, Taylor's, Safeway and High Street Cafe, it seems like most people are staying inside this evening, maybe because of the loss in the football game.

Driving through the whole

route, we meet Robert, the transient we had talked to earlier at West University Park, on East 13th Avenue. Walking down the street with a glass of beer, Robert has already been given a number of warrants and been arrested 20 to 30 times, says Fitzpatrick. Tonight Robert is about to be arrested once more for having an open container, an arrest he is strongly against.

As Robert shouts that he is not breaking the law, Fitzpatrick gets help from a nearby officer and they put him in the police car. We are on the way to the jail again as Robert calls Fitzpatrick everything in the book, and I start to wonder how much patience these officers have. Being called an "idiot" and a "bloody fool" without responding would have been impossible for me, but for Fitzpatrick it is just another part of his work.

During the rest of the evening I have the opportunity to visit a number of parties, where \$350 citations are given for noise disturbances. Most of the people having the parties try to avoid being cited by giving explanations that could have won them an Oscar, but for the police, the complaining neighbors are the ones who should be the winners.

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So, did I have the chance to ride with loud sirens and blue and red flashing lights during the evening? Yes. At 1:30 a.m. we were on the way for a cup of coffee, but we had to change plans after the radio informed us of a fight on East 13th Avenue and Alder Street outside of the 7-Eleven. Suddenly, I realize how the surrounding traffic responds to our fast speed, and I wish I could put the same lights on my car.

In less than a minute we arrive on the premises, but the fight is over, and the suspects have already gone. Looking around for the fighters brings us nothing, so we take a break at Franklin Boulevard, where we consume cookies and coffee.

The shift is almost over for Fitzpatrick, but before that time we get a call about counterfeit money that had been found at Lawrence Hall, a complaint about noise and criminal trespassing, and notice of possession of open containers. Visiting the different sites brings the evening to an end, but when Fitzpatrick brings me home, a fire alarm is ringing in the neighborhood.

For him the evening was not yet over, as he explains, "this job brings a lot of overtime."

Going to bed, I could still hear the fire alarm ringing, and looking out from my window I see the firefighters and police officers on the premises talking to some people. With a new insight about the Eugene police officers and how they work, I fall asleep safe and sound, knowing that the officers are out there to help, and not the opposite.

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