

Tracey's Ride Along

*with Officer Gary Anderson of the Minneapolis Park Police
Tuesday, June 27, 2000*



In June of 2000 my husband, Paul, was talking with Sergeant Joe Friday of the Minneapolis Park Police. Paul asked him if the Park Police had a "ride-along program."

He said "Yes."

Paul asked, "Would it be possible for my wife to go on a ride-along?"

Sergeant Friday told Paul to have me phone him and he would arrange it.

A few days later I phoned Sergeant Friday.

He told me the ride-alongs were four hours long and could be during the day or at night. He thought that during the day would be better. He asked me for some dates that would work for me. He asked me why I wanted to do this. I do not recall exactly what I said, except I know it sounded lame.

I said something about always being interested in police work. I thought it was curtains for me. But he said "OK."

And he said he would set something up and call me back within a week.

I spent the week reading about ride-alongs on the internet.

Some police departments had restrictions or had preferred candidates. Some limited ride-alongs to once a year. Some twice a year per person. Some restricted or gave preference to teens still in high school who were interested in going into law enforcement. Some preferred people who were enrolled in law enforcement classes, or people who were community leaders, or people who were block club leaders, or people who were city council members, or government workers, or people who were currently police officers but from another city. I was beginning to feel apprehensive.

And I read that most police departments did background checks of people who wanted to go on a ride-along.

So then I had to wonder if the Park Police would do a background check on me. And just what might show up in a background check? Then some had dress codes and release forms to sign. And rules, like obeying the officer a person is riding with and doing nothing to get in the way of the officer doing his or her job. And that the officer could end the ride-along at any time. And what might happen if the officer arrested somebody? And what about the possibility of witnessing something I would later have to testify in court about? And what might happen in the event of a shooting or a pursuit during a ride-along?

Sergeant Friday called on June 14th and left a voicemail telling me four or five dates that I could go on a ride-along. He suggested June 27 because on the other dates he gave me I would have to ride in the back seat, whereas on June 27 I could ride in the front seat where he thought I would be much more comfortable. It would be in the evening from 5:15 to 9:15. He asked that I call and let him know which date worked best for me.

I called Sergeant Friday the next day and said the June 27 date would be fine. He said I should get to the station early, about 5:00 p.m. He said the station was on 38th and Bryant Avenue South and wanted to know if I knew how to get there. I did. I grew up about eight blocks from the station and during winters went sled sliding with friends next to the station where the Park Superintendent's house is located.

He said wearing jeans and a t-shirt would be fine to wear as long as they looked neat, and to also bring along a light jacket because the officers like

to keep their squad cars cold with the air conditioner. The vests they must wear make them feel too hot within the squad car.

I said, “Are you sure this is okay? For me to do this? I know I am not an important person.”

He said, “Tracey, you can do it. Any ‘Joe Citizen’ can go on a ride-along. The officer you will be riding with is Gary Anderson. I don’t know if I shall be here or not. You can ask for me, but if I’m not here when you arrive just ask for Gary Anderson.”

Now I was in for it. A date was set and I had two weeks to think about it. Two weeks of both anticipation and agony. I agonized because I am an extremely shy person and wondered how I was going to manage four hours in a car with somebody, especially somebody I had never met.

And how was this person going to deal with someone like me. I often times made people feel uncomfortable because of my quiet nature. And I knew I wanted to ask questions but wondered if I would really ask any.

Talking was not my forte. There had been countless times throughout my life when I had an upcoming social occasion and told myself I was really going to make an effort to talk and as usual ended up not talking much.

And what if this officer asked me, as we were driving along, why I wanted to go on a ride-along? And there was no way I was going to let out that my hobby was reading who-dunits.

But I really wanted to do this. I had wanted to go on a ride-along since I was ten years old. That was when a relative of mine went on a couple of ride-alongs with a Minneapolis police officer who was a friend of a neighbor of my family in south Minneapolis.

That neighbor was also a Minneapolis police officer. I wanted to go along on one with him but was told I couldn’t. I never inquired about it again until Sergeant Friday came along and I thought since Paul knew him, he could ask him about it. I liked the idea of going on a ride-along with the Minneapolis Park Police because I had grown up in Minneapolis and spent lots of time at Minneapolis parks, primarily in the south/southwest area of Minneapolis. But I knew absolutely nothing about the Park Police. I didn’t even know they existed until Paul met Sergeant Friday around 1990.

On June 27, Paul drove me over to the Minneapolis Park Police station on 38th and Bryant.

It had taken me quite a while to decide what to wear. Although Paul suggested I wear blue pants and a blue shirt so as to color coordinate with the officer, I said, “No, I don’t think so.”

Instead, I wore tan Dockers and a red shirt.

I had never been in a police station before. We arrived at 5:00 p.m. and after ringing a buzzer we were let in and we asked if Sergeant Friday was there. He was there and came out to the lobby where we were waiting and I was introduced.

Paul had met Sergeant Friday about ten years previously, around 1990, when he was helping Sergeant Friday write his career resume.

And Paul, knowing how I was interested in police work, Paul told me at that time about how this police officer had been in to see him that day.

Paul said the guy worked for the Minneapolis Park Police, was an intense workaholic, and was as good looking as Robert Redford.

So ten years later Paul introduced me to Sergeant Friday on June 27, 2000. And I had to agree, yes, he was as good looking as Redford.

While we sat in the lobby with Sergeant Friday and he asked me what I did. I told him I worked for the Star Tribune in the advertising department.

However, Paul then had to tell Sergeant Friday a little story; a story about when Paul worked for the Star Tribune during the late 70s and early 80s, and how sometimes Paul and other employees from the Star Tribune would go play pool at a bar called Richards, located near the Star Tribune and the Courthouse.

Paul said that a lot of police officers would go to Richards to play pool. And while playing pool those officers would flat out tell Paul and other Star Tribune employees they did not like Star Tribune people. And how one of the police officers would raise his pool stick at Paul and say, “You’re damn lucky I left my pistol in my car.”

I thought to myself, “Gee, thanks Paul.”

Sergeant Friday told me the area that we would be in tonight would begin from downtown and would include all of north Minneapolis. He told me to ask lots of questions. He said the ride-along should end around 9:15 unless we were on a call that went past that time, or if Officer Anderson had to arrest somebody and take them to jail.

Sergeant Friday said that officers sometimes spent a lot of time waiting to book somebody into jail. He said some officers were known to order pizza from their cars while waiting in line at the jail.

Paul piped up and said, “I don’t know if I should say this, Tracey may not want me to, but her favorite TV show is COPS.”

I was horrified. Of course I did not want him to say that.

How embarrassing. I did watch COPS sometimes but it was NOT my favorite show. It sounded like I was a groupie and was glued to the TV watching COPS every night. Which was NOT true. I told Sergeant Friday COPS was not my favorite show. But too late, the damage had been done.

Sergeant Friday said, “You know, they tape that show. And then it’s edited.”

Then he leaned forward and said, “You should know that the officer you are riding with tonight was hand-picked by me. Hand-picked. And just recently he helped save the life of another officer by giving the other officer CPR. It was on the news.”

When he said that, I recalled reading a story in the newspaper, I think a couple weeks earlier, about Minneapolis police officers pursuing a suspect along the Mississippi River and then one officer experiencing chest pains and receiving CPR from another officer. But I did not ask Sergeant Friday if that was the incident he was referring to.

Paul then felt compelled to tell another story, this one involving his dad chopping up a park bench in a Minneapolis park years and years ago when his dad was a teenager, and then how after using the park bench wood for firewood to cook hot dogs and roast marshmallows, Paul’s father was arrested and spent a night in jail.

Sergeant Friday said he would look that up on the police computer and send Paul a bill.

Sergeant Friday leaned forward again and said, “I want you to understand that I personally hand-picked the person you are going with on this ride-along tonight.”

Sergeant Friday asked Paul if anything was being done about investigating Paul’s brother Rick’s disappearance, or his dad’s unsolved homicide case. He said he thought that with more investigation, some questions could be answered. He told Paul to call him in a couple weeks to set up a time to meet for breakfast and talk about it. I asked if I could come along.

Paul said, “Yes, Tracey should come along. She is very interested in what happened to my dad how and how my brother vanished and is always asking questions about them and saying I should do something to resolve their unsolved mysteries. Plus, you know, all she reads are mysteries.”

Sergeant Friday said that it would be fine if I came along to breakfast. Then he leaned forward again and said, “I want you to know a lot of thought went into picking the officer you will be riding with tonight Tracey. I chose him after a lot of careful consideration.”

I then noticed a lot of officers walking by and Sergeant Friday looked over at someone and shouted, “Gary!”

Sergeant Friday introduced Paul and me to him.

Sergeant Friday said to Officer Anderson, “Tracey only has one question for you. She wants to know if you’ve been on COPS.”

As I stood there aghast Officer Anderson said, “No.”

I blurted out, “That’s not true! I did not ask that!”

Paul wanted to know what would happen at the end of the ride-along and where he should pick me up or if I would be dropped off somewhere.

Officer Anderson said we should be somewhere in the north metro at around 9:15 and we would call Paul from the squad car and decide on a place that wasn’t too far from our house in Columbia Heights.

Sergeant Friday said to Officer Anderson, “Tracey’s going to be writing a story about this for the newspaper. She works for the Star Tribune.”

As Officer Anderson stood there not commenting on that, I again blurted out, “That’s not true!”

We started to leave the station and I shook Sergeant Friday’s hand again and said, “Thank you” and as I was following Officer Anderson down a hallway, leaving Paul and Sergeant Friday behind in the lobby, I heard Paul say to Sergeant Friday, “She is so excited. She was hoping she could just get a ride around the block.”

Before we left the station, Officer Anderson stopped at a little room and got a shotgun. And as we went outside to where the squad cars were parked I asked Officer Anderson, “Do you do many ride-alongs?”

Officer Anderson replied, “Hardly ever.”

Oh Lord. It occurred to me that this Sergeant Friday was going to owe Officer Anderson big time for this one.

As we were getting in Officer Anderson’s squad car, somebody ran their squad car siren and Officer Anderson made a comment like, “Oh, that’s just somebody fooling around.” And then he said something to another officer about backup.

Officer Anderson said they were short some people that night. As we got in the car he cleaned some things up, commenting that some officers leave the cars a mess, but it didn’t look that messy to me.

The squad car was a brand new Ford Crown Victoria. I was partial to Crown Vics because my dad owned a 1989 black Crown Vic in pristine condition and I loved driving it. But I decided against mentioning to Officer Anderson that I had experience driving Crown Vics.

Officer Anderson mounted the shotgun between the driver’s seat and the passenger seat. He showed me the computer and pointed out other things in the car to me. He told me that if we got into a dangerous situation I should get down on the floor in front of my seat, under the dashboard.

Out loud I said, “Okay.”

To myself, I thought, “There’s no way I can get all 5 feet and 10 inches of me down there.”

Later, at home, after my ride-along was over, Paul told me how he tried to follow us, but after we sped away Paul lost us after about two blocks.

Officer Anderson handed me a form on a clipboard to fill out. I think it had lines for my name and address and that kind of general information. And a question regarding the reason I was on a ride-along. It was that tricky question again. And I do not remember what I wrote. But luckily I was in a moving car and I was nervous. So nobody would probably be able to read my writing anyway.

I remember our first two stops, but cannot remember which was first and which was second. For one stop, Officer Anderson got a call about something happening at Currie Park. I think it had something to do with some people in the swimming pool who were arguing with each other and it looked like it could escalate beyond that. I think some people were upset because a guy was letting his dog swim in the pool.

I do not remember where we were when Officer Anderson received this call, but he did a U-turn in the middle of the block and then drove fast to the location of the call. He drove on streets I was not familiar with, turning down a dirt road next to a freeway. He called it a shortcut. We arrived at Currie Park and two park patrol agents came over to the car.

Apparently the situation had been resolved and the people who were involved in it had left.

Officer Anderson introduced me to the two park patrol agents. One of them told Officer Anderson that she had heard that the police officer he had given CPR to was now doing well and what good news that was.

We left that area and headed back toward downtown Minneapolis.

We drove by an office building on 3rd Avenue and 11th Street. It used to be Minneapolis Vocational High School. I told Officer Anderson that the building used to be my high school, and I graduated from there in 1976 and that 1976 was the last year it functioned as a high school.

He said he went to school there after he was in high school, when the school was called MAVTI (Minneapolis Area Vocational Technical Institute) and took printing classes. He also told me he had a twin brother.

I remembered later that I went there after high school, also, for about a year and a half which would have been 1976-77-78.

We drove over to Loring Park and Officer Anderson turned the car and drove up and over the curb onto the pathway in the park. I was both surprised and impressed. He did such a good job driving over the curb and it occurred to me that how else are they going to patrol parks? I had imagined just staying on roads only.

The grass was quite trampled and Officer Anderson said that a festival had recently been held there. It may have been the GLBT/Gay Pride Festival. He explained how there was always extra work for them during that festival and other festivals in other parks.

Officer Anderson drove the car over to three men sitting on a park bench who were obviously inebriated. He told me to stay in the car. To me, this situation was scary.

As Officer Anderson got out of the car, I looked at the three men and they did not look happy to see him.

And there were three of them and only one Officer Anderson. I wondered how he could approach these people not knowing if they had any weapons, or if any or all of them would decide to put up a fight or become antagonistic, or if they had friends around, or other people who would come over to give Officer Anderson problems.

I thought, "How could he ever predict what someone who is drunk is going to do?" And actually, "How could he ever know what anybody he approaches is going to do?" It seemed to me this call would not be any less dangerous than any other call.

Officer Anderson stood behind them and it appeared he was doing a search of them at the same time he was talking to them. After a few minutes all three of the men got up and started walking out of the park.

I was very relieved when Officer Anderson got back into the squad car.

He had said something into his radio, although I am not sure that is what it is called, and he asked me if I heard it "come over" and I said, "Yes."

I asked Officer Anderson what would happen if the drunks did not leave the park. I think he said that these situations are handled on a case-by-case basis. That sometimes they are taken to a detox facility. I think he said there are three detox centers that they could be taken to, but am not sure. And I do not remember if he said there are times they are taken to jail.

We then continued to drive through Loring Park.

Officer Anderson left the path and drove up an incline on the grass and stopped to talk to a man from the car.

The man was sitting by himself and Officer Anderson said "Hi" to him and said he had not seen him in a while and asked the man where he had been. I cannot remember what the man said.

Officer Anderson asked the man where his dog was.

When we drove away, Officer Anderson told me the guy usually had a dog with him and I think he said the guy had been in some kind of trouble before in the park. But I cannot remember if it had to do with drugs, or alcohol, or what exactly.

Officer Anderson pulled out some pictures of people who the police were looking out for. He said they were all wanted for felonies. He said if we saw any of them just walking through the park that they would be arrested.

Then Officer Anderson said he was going to drive over to where a group of people were getting up from a park bench. He said he noticed that when they saw him, they all got up from the bench they had been sitting on and began walking the other way.

He pulled up alongside of them and asked them how they were doing and he asked one woman what her name was again. I again, cannot remember everything he asked them but after a minute or two, they walked on and we drove on.

As we drove through what I thought of as “near-north Minneapolis,” Officer Anderson commented how the area had improved in recent years and a lot of newer affordable housing had been built.

We stopped at Harrison Park. He got out of the squad car and went inside the park building there. I waited in the squad car while he was inside.

Then there was a call from a park agent about a pile of clothes left next to the Mississippi River on the West River Parkway. So we headed over there and as Officer Anderson turned on to the Parkway from the NE 8th Avenue Bridge, he said, “Look familiar?”

It was the Heritage Building, the Star Tribune’s printing plant.

We drove to where the park agents were waiting for us. I think it was the area beneath the 3rd Avenue Bridge. The park agents were the same two agents who were at Currie Park.

Officer Anderson said I could get out of the car on this one. Someone had left a pile of clothes neatly folded on the ground near the fence at the top of the river bank. If I remember right, the concern was that someone may have jumped into the river. It was determined that was not the case and we got back in the car and drove back down the parkway going back the way we had come.

We started driving back toward north Minneapolis. I really did not know where we were most of the time. I had grown up in south Minneapolis, where my family had bought a house in 1965 when I was seven years old.

Earlier, in 1962 when I was four, we had moved from Hibbing to north Minneapolis. We lived in a duplex at 2815 Aldrich Avenue North. I went to kindergarten and part of first grade at Bremer Elementary on Lowry and Emerson Avenues and I remembered going with my brother to Farview Park, on Lyndale Avenue North, a block from our house on Aldrich Avenue North. So that six-block or seven-block area was the extent of my geographic knowledge of north Minneapolis.

Officer Anderson asked, "How do you know Sergeant Friday?"

I said, "I don't know him. Tonight was the first time I met him."

Officer Anderson said, "He's really good at interviewing. Kids will tell him anything. He's really good at getting kids to confess. I've taken some classes from him. He just got married. They didn't make a big deal of it. The reception was at his house. Nice house. They really worked hard on the vows."

Then he said, "If you want to go on another ride-along some time, just give me a call. Or give Friday a call. He'll set it up. I'm training through the middle of July, but after that would be okay."

"Okay," I said.

I was so happy Officer Anderson invited me to go on another ride-along with him sometime. That just made me feel so much better. Surely, he would not have said that if he didn't mean it. Which meant to me that maybe I wasn't making him feel uncomfortable.

After my initial nervousness, I had been feeling better and more comfortable, even though I knew I was being my usual self and not asking as many questions as I should have been and wanted to.

Officer Anderson seemed to have a lot of patience and had been asking me questions and voluntarily explaining procedures to me and what some of his other duties were as a Park Police officer.

I was learning a lot. He was very kind and I had thought if he was in any agony internally, that he wasn't showing that to me externally. But still, I had been wondering what must have been going through his mind about him and me having to do this ride-along.

And Officer Anderson inviting me to go on another ride-along wasn't going to make me suddenly open up and start talking his ear off, but it sure made me feel better about him having been the one picked by Sergeant Friday to do this ride-along with me.

I have a tendency to spend too much time over-analyzing things sometimes, and now, after spending several minutes analyzing Officer Anderson's offer of another ride-along, I had to snap out of it and refocus on where we were.

We were at the intersection of Broadway and another street but I don't remember which one, when Officer Anderson said, "I think we'll respond to this one. We're close by." It was something to do with a city officer involved in an incident possibly involving gunfire. Then he said, "Oh, don't need to." Apparently the situation was under control.

Officer Anderson said, "That would have been a lights and siren call."

We were now at the intersection of Broadway and James Avenue. Officer Anderson said something about that intersection being the most dangerous or the most crime-ridden in the city.

Then he said, "Here, we'll drive up there."

A City of Minneapolis police car passed and Officer Anderson waved.

He explained how the city police officers and the park police officers back each other up and explained some more about how the computer in his squad car lists all the calls.

He told me how, as a police officer, it is best not to take what happens on his job home with him, and that he tries not to do that.

I asked Officer Anderson how long he had been a police officer and I think he said he became a police officer in 1988, when he was 31.

I am pretty sure that's what he said. So that meant he was about my age, which is 42.

We drove by North Commons Park but did not stop. There was a group of people standing next to a car parked on the street next to North Commons Park. He typed in the license plate number and pointed out some of the information that came up on his screen, and said if the car was stolen it would show up on the screen. He said the car was not stolen but that if it was, it would be a felony stop with guns drawn. He said he would call for backup first before making the stop.

Either at North Commons Park or possibly another park that we drove by, there was a group of kids playing a game on one of the fields. There was another group of kids standing nearby.

Officer Anderson started listing off the names of some of the gangs in Minneapolis and said they are in every park. He said (I think, my memory is fuzzy) that if there is trouble with a gang of kids that the police will go after the one(s) that runs because there is always a good chance that one, or more, have the gun(s).

I cannot remember the order of the next two stops.

One was at Webber Park. This looked like a large park and Officer Anderson pulled up and stopped next to the park building.

Before we could get out of the car, some kids ran up and asked if he had any cards.

He reached over into the glove compartment and gave each kid a Minnesota Vikings Cris Carter card. One kid took the card and looked at it and then asked Officer Anderson if he had any Minnesota Vikings Randy Moss cards.

That got the other kids excited but Officer Anderson said he did not have any Randy Moss cards, so the kids had to settle for Cris Carter.

As we walked into the park building, Officer Anderson saw that one kid had dropped his Cris Carter card on the ground.

Officer Anderson told the kid, "Hey, I'm not going to give you any cards if you're just going to throw them on the ground."

The kid picked up his card.

I think this may have been the park that had an indoor gymnasium where a lot of kids were playing basketball, but am not sure. But we went in the gymnasium and Officer Anderson checked to make sure everything was okay in there. Then we talked to two women who worked at the park. They may be Park Directors, but I am not sure. They were real friendly, and Officer Anderson introduced me to them. They called him "Andy."

We went into a room that may have been a kitchen. It had a refrigerator. We had some popcorn and chocolate milk. The people using the park could get snacks there and one of the women who worked at the park handed me a box of popcorn to hand to a kid who was standing in the doorway and wanted some.

We stayed there for a few more minutes, one of the women was telling Officer Anderson about a trip to London she was planning.

As we left Webber Park I said, "Geez, I feel kind of sorry for Cris Carter."

Officer Anderson laughed and said, "Why? 'Cuz those kids dissed him?"

And I said, "Yeah."

We drove to Anwatin Middle School. Officer Anderson said he always checked behind the school because people would go behind there to either use or sell drugs. There was nobody behind the school.

Officer Anderson drove to an area of the school's parking lot and said, "This will be a good place to show you the lights and sirens."

I had been wondering if he was going to demonstrate the lights and sirens for me and I was wondering if he had not done that by the time we came to the end of my time with him, if I should ask him to or not. I probably would have, but was grateful that he took the opportunity to do that when the time was right, saving me having to ask.

Officer Anderson went through them all, showing me how they worked and turning them on and off. I could see the lights reflecting outside the squad car. He then showed me something he did on the steering wheel that changed the way the siren sounded. And he demonstrated the device inside the car where he could talk to someone outside the squad car. I do not remember what it is called but I thought of it being like a loudspeaker.

We drove back around to the front of the school and there was someone outside of the school building and I think he was carrying something to the trash bin. He looked like maybe he was an engineer at the school and he walked toward us with an inquiring look.

Officer Anderson drove over to him and stopped. The man was standing on my side of the car.

Officer Anderson rolled down my window and said to the man, "You probably heard the sirens. Everything's okay. I was just showing her all the lights and sirens."

I fidgeted, looked straight ahead, looked at my hands, looked down at the floor. I looked everywhere except at Officer Anderson and the man standing outside my window.

I was still fidgeting as we proceeded out of the parking lot. Except instead of driving out over a driveway, or at least not a very good driveway, Officer Anderson drove over the curb to get to the street, while having to squeeze his way through a very tight fit between two parked cars. By now I was thoroughly impressed with his driving skills.

Officer Anderson pointed out a building across the street from the school and said something about how something in his car used to cause an alarm to go off in a business office that was inside the building.

I think after leaving Anwatin Middle School we were driving for a few blocks on a parkway, in what looked to be a real nice neighborhood with big, nice-looking houses. It may have been on Memorial Drive, or Victory Drive. Officer Anderson pointed out a house that a friend of his lived in. It looked like nobody was home.

We stopped at a park but I cannot remember the name of it. It may have been part of Theodore Wirth Park, or near there.

Officer Anderson drove up a driveway to a parking area and since there were no cars or people there, he decided to close the gate to the park, even though it was a little before closing time. He mentioned an area of the park that he advised me not to go into. He said that even police officers did not like to go there.

It was about 9:00 p.m. when we arrived at Theodore Wirth Park. We parked and went inside a building that may have been a golf club building. We had a chance to use the restrooms and get something to eat. Officer Anderson had some pretzels and a pop and asked me if I wanted anything. I decided to have a Sprite which he bought for me. He talked for a few minutes with some people there and then it was time to go. I was not done with my Sprite yet but he said I could bring it with me.

I believe it was still at Theodore Wirth Park or near there that Officer Anderson pointed out what he thought was the best view in the city. We were on top of a very high hill with what I thought was a fantastic view of downtown Minneapolis. I told Officer Anderson that I had spent most of my life in south Minneapolis and was not familiar at all with northeast or north Minneapolis. Officer Anderson said he grew up in northeast Minneapolis. He said he went to Edison High School.

Officer Anderson had told me earlier that he could not go too far into the suburb of Columbia Heights. We thought that the Columbia Golf Course in northeast Minneapolis, on Central Avenue, would be a good place for Paul to pick me up. Officer Anderson handed me a phone to call Paul.

I was really inept. He had to turn it on for me and show me how to use it.

I told Paul we would meet him at the Columbia Golf Course.

Paul asked, "Where are you now?"

I said, "I have no idea."

That caused Officer Anderson to laugh and it occurred to me Paul's voice sounded loud and because of that Officer Anderson could perhaps hear what Paul was saying. I didn't want Paul to say or ask me anything embarrassing like he did at the station, so I told him I would tell him all about it later, and hung up.

On the way to the Columbia Golf Course, Officer Anderson said, "I think this is the best job in the world." He said if he was not with the Park Police he would probably be with the Minneapolis or St. Paul police. He again said if I wanted to go on another ride-along to give Joe a call.

Paul was waiting at the Columbia Golf Course when we got there.

He walked over to us and looked inside the squad car.

Paul asked Officer Anderson about the computer in his squad car and I asked Officer Anderson if he could type in our license plate number to look us up.

Officer Anderson shined the spot light on the outside of his car on our license plate, typed our plate number into his computer, and our information popped up on the screen.

Paul asked if any warrants out for him would show up on the screen.

Paul was shocked to see his weight was listed as only 205 pounds. I laughed until I realized the same information about my weight would be listed and hoped Officer Anderson would not notice it.

Paul asked Officer Anderson if he was wearing a vest and was glad to hear Officer Anderson say yes, he was wearing a vest.

Paul told Officer Anderson that his dad had been killed by two kids holding up a grocery store and that they had shot his dad with .22 pistols.

Paul asked what a person should do when they are stopped in their car by the police. He wanted to know if a person should reach into their back pocket to have their wallet ready. Officer Anderson said it was best for a person to just leave their hands on the steering wheel of the car.

I was wishing the ride-along wasn't over and I could continue on with Officer Anderson until the end of his shift. But, I got ready to get out of the car, and shook Officer Anderson's hand and said, "Thank you."

Officer Anderson told me I was always welcome to go on another ride-along with him.

A few days later, I sent Thank You Cards to both Sergeant Friday and Officer Anderson. I was still thinking about it and how I should have written it all down then, while I still remembered everything.

I learned so much about what the Park Police do as opposed to the Minneapolis City Police. Prior to my ride-along, some people had suggested the primary function of the Park Police was to “shoo-along” drunks out of parks. Or retrieve beer cans that kids or adults had littered during family outings or company picnics.

And I had read that some people thought the primary function of the Park Police was to cruise around the parkways from park to park, handing out tickets for expired license tabs parked in the lots or on the parkways.

But now I know better. From just four hours, and I now know there is much more to know besides what I did learn.

I also learned what a special kind of person it takes to be a police officer and how much their safety matters. And how much the people living in Minneapolis should appreciate police officers going to work every day “to protect and to serve” them. I kept wondering how Officer Anderson could ever know what was going to happen each night. And I now respect how it’s such a huge risk for them to do that day and night, regardless of all the professional training that they receive.

I did still feel a tad sorry for Officer Anderson having to do the ride-along with me, even though he invited me to go on another one sometime. I was concerned about doing nothing but wasting his time. But he was such a kind man and seemed to have a lot of patience and was informative and never talked down to me or made me feel like a total dork. I really do not know exactly why Sergeant Friday “hand-picked” Officer Anderson for my ride-along, but I am glad he did.

I will always remember it as one of the most memorable experiences of my life. A positive one.

Thanks again to Sergeant Friday and Officer Anderson,

Tracey Johnson

