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## PARTNERS IN PERIL

*A story in four parts*

*Two young men, Michael Ceriale and Joe Ferenzi, met in police academy, became friends and partners, then saw their lives change forever one fateful night on patrol in the 2nd District--the Deuce.*

*This is their story, reconstructed from interviews and records.*

Part 1

## ‘WELCOME TO THE DEUCE’

**T**hey crouched among gnarled trees in the dark, their eyes trained on the entrance of 4101 S. Federal St., a tattered high-rise in the Robert Taylor Homes.

The expressway moaned with traffic.

Not so long ago, Chicago Police Officers Joe Ferenzi and Mike Ceriale sat in assigned seats together at the Police Academy. Now they hid among litter, dead leaves and discarded tires, trying to observe a drug operation run by the Gangster Disciples street gang.

Ferenzi and Ceriale were rookies doing the dicey work of plainclothes cops, making a foray into drug surveillance with little training to guide them. At the academy they had learned how to handcuff suspects and how to use commas when writing reports, they had sweated together through pushups in the summer heat, and they had been fitted one autumn afternoon for bulletproof vests.

"One of you will be involved in a shooting," an instructor had told them. "Keep in mind it's not if, it's when."

But nobody had taught them how to hide on Chicago's most dangerous streets. Less than a year after graduating from the academy--a place so structured that cadets are supposed to stay to the right in the hallways--Ferenzi and Ceriale were on their own for a night, working the midnight shift, free to roam and improvise with virtually no supervision.

Hours after their shift had started, they headed for one of the city's more violent addresses, hoping to make their night with an impressive arrest. But nothing in their training had prepared them for what was to come.

"On them popsicles!" one of the young men standing near the breezeway of 4101 was overheard shouting, meaning: Get the guns, intruders have been spotted.

"I think they made us," Ceriale said calmly.

"What do you mean?" Ferenzi said.

"The guy in the orange jersey. He's pointing this way."

Ferenzi looked.

"The guy in the No. 5 jersey?"

"Yeah."

There was a flash and a hiss.

Ferenzi thought of fireworks.

**C**ops choose partners like themselves. It's an informal process that often begins with the simple request to ride in the same car. Generally the department allows officers to select their own partners with little consideration to balancing youth and experience or strengths and weaknesses. Non-smokers usually ride with those who won't make the car reek of cigarettes. A vegetarian works with somebody whose idea of a great meal isn't a hot dog at Peppe's.

Sometimes the bond goes way back. When they were 5 years old, Chicago Police Officers John Dougherty and John Knight stood shoulder-to-shoulder for a kindergarten photo. Raised half a block from each other and educated at the same grade school, dirtied by the same baseball fields and stained by the same sandlots, blessed at the same church and hopeless over the same girls, the two grew up to ride together in the same police car.

So close were Dougherty and Knight that they scheduled the same days off and took vacations together so they wouldn't have to work with anybody else. Dougherty's six-year partnership with Knight ended when Dougherty was promoted to gang specialist. A few weeks later, on Jan. 9, 1999, Knight was killed in a shootout as he was trying to question a man during a traffic stop.

Ferenzi and Ceriale grew up strangers, but they hailed from parallel worlds. Both were die-hard Sox fans. Both fished the waters of the same small town in Wisconsin. Both were 26.

Rookie partners grow closer as they learn together on the job. They usually must staff the least-wanted shifts--the ones abdicated by veteran cops who use seniority to work day shifts in less risky neighborhoods.

It is a blessing and a curse that Chicago's toughest streets and

most treacherous shifts belong to its greenest police officers. Many cops fresh out of academy are careful and deliberate. Others, out of eagerness, tenacity and idealism, are inclined to take risks, to throw their lives on the line for a good traffic stop or drug arrest.

Before becoming police officers, neither Ferenzi nor Ceriale had been familiar with violence--except what they saw on television. Neither was of the old breed of cop who had seen combat on a battlefield before confronting gunfire on the streets. Both had grown up relatively sheltered, born into a generation with no wars to fight and raised in close-knit, white-ethnic families bound up in the seemingly old-fashioned values of faith and commitment, diligence and holiday celebrations.

Ceriale, whose parents were divorced before he started school, lived with his father on the Northwest Side for four years while attending Gordon Tech, a Catholic high school. The boy played football, basketball and baseball. He wrestled. He grew into a big, strapping kid, bigger than either of his parents.

He attended Harper College, in suburban Palatine, in the fall of 1990. He took some criminology courses but did not get a degree. He worked as a car salesman and drove a Budweiser beer truck.

In 1993 Ceriale took the test to become a Chicago police officer. While he waited for his name to come up on the waiting list for a police job, he tended bar at Marge's Pub, an Old Town neighborhood tavern.

When his name came up in the spring of 1997, he quit bartending. His mother didn't relish the thought of her only child being a cop. But it was all Ceriale ever really wanted to do, his father said.

Ferenzi grew up in suburban Melrose Park, where he would live with his parents and sister until becoming a police officer. Police work ran in his family. Two uncles were in the department when he was growing up. One of them--veteran Calumet Area

Detective John McCann--had a grandfather he never met; Chicago Police Officer William McCann had been killed in 1930 responding to a burglary.

By the time Ferenzi graduated from Holy Cross High School, his boyhood dream of becoming a cop had faded. He enrolled at the University of Illinois at Chicago, where he began working toward a degree in marketing. He thought he would develop advertising campaigns for a living but then settled into a job as a financial planner.

But when Ferenzi heard some friends talking about taking the Police Department test, his interest was rekindled. He decided to sign up too.

About 25,000 men and women took the three-hour exam in 1993. Ferenzi was one of about 8,000 who made the grade, and his name was put on a list of "well-qualified" candidates to be contacted at random as jobs opened up.

Ferenzi liked the idea of getting away from a desk. He wanted action, unpredictability. He also liked the thought of helping people, protecting others as he would his own family, getting violent criminals off the streets.

It would mean a slight pay cut from his job at Prudential Financial Planning Services, down to \$33,522 a year. But when the call came he jumped at the opportunity. He hadn't found work developing ad campaigns. And he didn't like financial planning as much as he had expected; it was all too low-key. Ferenzi figured he had to give police work a try.

**I**n May 5, 1997, Ferenzi walked to the end of a long hallway in the Police Academy and sat down in Room 205. It was a quiet place with brown carpet and white walls. Ferenzi, short and boyish, sat behind Ceriale, peering around the tall, broad-shouldered man 7 inches taller than he. With his blue eyes, square jaw and Hollywood smile, Ceriale looked as though he had been sent

to the academy by Central Casting.

On the front wall of the room was a blackboard. On the back, a plaque memorializing Chicago Police Officer Daniel Doffyn, a rookie killed in the line of duty in 1995. Most classrooms at the academy have at least one plaque honoring a decorated officer-- or one who was killed in the line of duty.

Police academy is a six-month boot camp carried out in the shadow of the city skyline on the Near West Side. Instructors don't necessarily have formal teaching experience, though many do.

The khaki-clad cadets crammed into wraparound desks sat ramrod-straight. In "Patrol Procedures" they learned the 10 deadly errors of police work, chief among them, poor search, or worse yet, no search. There's even a term for valuing nerve over self-preservation: tombstone courage.

Ferenzi and Ceriale each filled a notebook with practice reports they had been required to write. A green sheet listed commonly misspelled words--from "abate" to "zigzag." They received 10 hours of instruction in crisis intervention, seven in crimes against persons, four in crimes against property, four in police morality, three in crimes in progress, and two in fingerprinting.

They learned a little about making a drug bust, how one suspect usually holds the dope while another holds the money.

And they received three hours on surveillance. That lesson is supposed to continue on the job or, for those who become narcotics officers, in follow-up classes taken after graduation. So brief was the introduction that Ferenzi later would think back to his academy days and be unable to recall that they had touched on the subject at all.

It was a crisp day in autumn when they were fitted for their bulletproof vests. Company representatives came bearing tape measures--as if, Ferenzi thought, they were outfitting the cadets

for tuxedos.

A man wrapped a tape measure around Ceriale's chest and stomach. He stretched a tape measure down Ceriale from shoulder to belt. Each time, the man blurted out the measurement to a woman with a notepad, who wrote the numbers down.

Ferenzi opted for an upgrade from the standard city-issued model--made by Second Chance Body Armor Inc. A protective vest is about the only piece of equipment a police officer doesn't have to buy for himself. Ferenzi decided to pay an extra \$500 from his own pocket for a thicker model with a special titanium "trauma plate" to better absorb the impact of a bullet.

Ceriale settled for the standard model.

**T**hey passed Friday nights after academy at Ira's, a dingy police bar in the 1100 block of West Madison Street.

Ira's is marked by an Old Style Beer sign out front, a 50-cents-a-game pool table lit by a Budweiser lamp and bumper stickers on the wall that read, "Proud to be a Union Sheet Metal Worker," and, "If You Love Your Freedom, Thank a Vet." A Confederate flag hangs inconspicuously on the wall near the back door. A life-size stuffed pig wears a Chicago Police cap and has a gun strapped to its right-front leg.

Though the bar doesn't serve breakfast, it opens at 7 a.m., in part to accommodate cops on every shift. Most of the patrons are white men, and they come in all ages, shapes, sizes and ranks, talking, laughing, cursing and draining beer after beer and leaving the empty bottles to stand in mute congregation on the heavy wooden tables.

At Ira's, Ferenzi and Ceriale considered their days in the academy as a first step to becoming the cops they wanted to be:

Tough but fair. Compassionate but never naive. They dreamed of good homicides--where the body still was warm and the trail still was hot and the killer might be just around the corner. Arrests like that get awards.

Sometimes, like when they were force-fed elementary grammar, they thought they were wasting their time at the academy. It was easier to pay attention when they were learning the difference between cocaine and heroin, between the drug dealers on the street and the money handlers nearby.

Graduation, at Navy Pier, came on a bright fall day in October 1997. Someone snapped a picture of them, both beaming, Ferenzi looking over Ceriale's shoulder.

Supt. Matt Rodriguez spoke, then the newly sworn officers pinned the badges onto each other's formal blue jackets. Ferenzi got Star No. 11967, Ceriale, No. 17429.

They were detailed to different areas of the city to serve out their obligatory probationary periods. Ceriale went to the 13th District, near where he grew up in Ukrainian Village, and was disappointed there wasn't more to do. Ferenzi went to the 9th, a diverse district that included Comiskey Park, and had as much as he could handle.

Six months later, Ferenzi and Ceriale learned that they had both been assigned to the 2nd District, also known as Wentworth but nicknamed the Deuce. They would be transferred there in April.

**E**very rookie had heard about the Deuce, a notorious tangle of housing projects, vacant lots and squat, faded businesses with bars on the doors. It has one of the highest crime rates in the city. Through April this year, Wentworth had 13 homicides, which was third among Chicago's 25 districts; 41 sexual assaults; and 363 robberies.

Ferenzi was nervous, but he was also excited. He wrote a memo



asking to work midnights so he and Ceriale could share the same shift--one that would put them under the command of Lt. Michael Byrne, a boss they had heard good things about in the academy.

They quickly made an impression on other officers in the Wentworth District. Lt. Virginia Drozd, a watch commander, noticed how quiet and polite Ceriale was. He always sat or stood near the wall farthest from the door in roll call--near the back corner of the big, stark-white room. He was laid-back and easygoing, with the people skills of a seasoned bartender.

By contrast Ferenzi was intense and fidgety and sometimes seemed lost inside himself. He rocked in his chair. He swung his feet.

Though Ceriale was a few months younger than Ferenzi, most thought he was older. But it was obvious they had one important trait in common: Both were eager and craved all the perverse action the Wentworth District had to offer.

Officer Gerrardo Teneyuque, who had been in the department a year and a half, met Ferenzi in roll call on the rookie's first day in the district: April 30, 1998. They rode together that night.

Two hours and six minutes into the shift, Ferenzi got a taste of Wentworth on his inaugural visit to the red brick, 16-story high-rise at 4101 S. Federal St.

Responding in uniform to a domestic disturbance at about 1:30 a.m., Ferenzi and Teneyuque climbed the steps to the sixth floor, where they could hear people screaming in an apartment. Ferenzi, inside a housing project for the first time, stood speechless. Cockroaches skittered across the walls.

A woman accused a man of beating her. She signed a complaint and he was charged with battery. Down at the car, Ferenzi opened the back door for Teneyuque so he could usher the suspect into the back seat. Suddenly there were two quick pops

and the cacophony of shattering glass as the rear window of the squad car blew apart.

"They're shooting at us," Teneyuque shouted.

Ferenzi felt his heart lurch.

He yanked open the front door and dived for cover, landing inside on his stomach, his 5-foot-7-inch frame stretched full-length across the front seat.

For a second the waffled bottoms of Ferenzi's shiny new police boots waded at the building. Then he unlocked the driver's door, shoved it open and squirmed, tumbling out the far side of the car.

Nobody had been hit.

Ferenzi's heart raced. He looked at his watch. Two hours into his first shift. Maybe I could transfer, he thought.

"Welcome to the Deuce," Drozd greeted Ferenzi when he returned to the station house.

"Look at you," Ferenzi recalled Ceriale telling him. "You can't stay out of trouble, can you?"

Despite the risks, the rookies began to embrace their assignment to the Deuce. What better place to gain experience fast?

During Ferenzi's third day on the job, he was assigned to work with Ceriale, their first shift working together. He and his partner rolled to a stop at a red light, Ferenzi behind the wheel. It was early on a Sunday, about 6 a.m. New light bathed the projects.

Facing south, a single car in front of them, Ferenzi and Ceriale heard the squeal of brakes and looked across the intersection. A car headed north had skidded to a stop at the red light.

When the light changed and Ferenzi drove past the car, he shouted out. The driver was sitting in the passenger seat--so he could drive with the Club still attached to the steering wheel of the stolen car.

Ferenzi leaned into a U-turn. The driver of the stolen car stepped on the gas, smashed into a building, then got out and ran.

Ceriale bolted after him.

Ferenzi picked up the radio.

And froze.

How could he call for help? The dispatcher would ask for their location. Ferenzi, in his third day patrolling the Wentworth District, didn't have a clue where he was. Desperately he craned his neck in search of a street sign.

There! Rhodes Avenue.

By the time help arrived none was needed, Ceriale had chased the suspect through a motel lobby, plucked him off a fence and put him in handcuffs. Breathing hard but smiling, he sauntered toward Ferenzi, car thief in tow.

**R**iding together two or three shifts a week, the rookies began making a name for themselves. Returning to 4101 S. Federal helped. Ferenzi and Ceriale knew that all manner of arrests were there for the making, many with surprising ease, and Ferenzi revisited the high-rise dozens of times by his own estimate, mostly for radio calls by the dispatcher, but sometimes on his own.

At 4101 an enterprising rookie could write his own ticket. There was crime enough to go around, for the Chicago Housing Authority cops, the city's public housing unit, and rank-and-file

police. An activity sheet filled with arrests meant promotions-- conviction rates didn't matter. Ambitious from the start, Ferenzi and Ceriale were following the unwritten code of the department: They were getting noticed by the bosses, they were working the most demanding shifts and they were racking up arrests. Maybe someday those arrests would add up to something. They had their sights set on detective. To Ferenzi, that was what being a police officer was all about. No more responding to the same domestic call day after day. You're solving a puzzle. You're finally putting criminals away.

After a brief stint working days with a different partner, Ceriale switched back to midnights. It's a shift dominated by rookies. Of the more than 60 cops now working midnights in the Wentworth District, only six have more than 10 years of experience. Twenty have more than five years. The rest--more than half--have fewer than two.

Ferenzi and Ceriale grabbed at the chance to work in plain clothes, driving around in what is called a CD, or civilian dress car. In a CD car, you have to respond to felonies in progress--shootings, robberies, rapes. But you don't have to chase burglar alarms or worry about lots of routine paperwork. It's good experience, a great way to make arrests and sample the life of a tactical or narcotics officer. You set your own pace, follow your own instincts.

In Wentworth you had to have a year of experience to work a CD car. But the year included six months in the academy and six months probation. By Aug. 13, 1998, Ferenzi had done CD duty about ten times, three or four of them with Ceriale. That night Ferenzi had ducked into Byrne's office, asking the lieutenant for a CD car on the following night.

Byrne had the schedule in front of him. He liked Ferenzi and Ceriale--the "Dago car," he called them--liked their ambition and ability, which in his view made up for their lack of experience and training. Sending them into the South Side in an unmarked car would be reward for good work.

Byrne said if a car was available that would be fine.

"You guys gonna get some arrests?" Byrne asked.

Ferenzi grinned. Driving an unmarked Ford with your partner 10 months out of the academy: What could beat that?

At 3 a.m. Ferenzi returned to the station house to see if the schedule had been posted. It was pressed under clear plastic on the counter.

293/CD

M. Ceriale

J. Ferenzi

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## PARTNERS IN PERIL

### Part 2

# ‘MAN, WE ARE THE REAL POLICE’

**J**oe Ferenzi pulled a black T-shirt on over his protective vest and cinched his wide, black police belt tight around his waist. He pulled his gun out of his backpack and put it in the holster. It was a 9 mm Sig Sauer P228--black and silver with a 13-shot magazine--never fired on the job. He had chosen it while at the academy because it felt good in his hand.

Ferenzi checked out a radio from a storage room near the front desk. He grabbed a laptop computer. He got the keys to the unmarked car he and his rookie partner, Michael Ceriale, would

be driving.

Then he saw Ceriale.

The big cop grinned ear to ear. His hair still was wet. His face was freshly shaved. Under his gray T-shirt, Ceriale wore a St. Christopher medal on a thin gold chain.

"Man, I overslept," Ceriale said.

"That's OK. It's only the weekend," Ferenzi replied facetiously. "We shouldn't be busy."

They hit the road about midnight, Ferenzi at the wheel of their Ford Crown Victoria, which had been designated a CD, or civilian dress car. Tonight they would be free to roam the streets of the troubled Wentworth District.

Working in plain clothes, Ferenzi and Ceriale--along with every other young patrol cop eager to make arrests, get experience and win a promotion--would be doing the work of seasoned officers. The police union suggests that a cop have at least five years of experience before joining a plainclothes tactical team. Ceriale and Ferenzi had been in the department 15 months, including six months as cadets.

Their boss, Lt. Michael Byrne, had every confidence in the two rookies. Neither Ferenzi nor Ceriale had worked in the Wentworth District more than four months. But the way Byrne saw it, the Deuce, as Wentworth was known, provided more experience in four months than many officers get in years on the job.

Ferenzi and Ceriale had asked to work midnights partly because of Byrne. Word had it he was a good boss, with an impressive resume.

Byrne took an interest in Ferenzi and Ceriale, giving them good assignments and engaging them in friendly banter that often

started with jabs about each other's ethnic heritage.

In contrast to the rookies, Byrne had been in the department for two decades, having worked in the narcotics, gangs and organized crime units.

He had transferred to the Wentworth District a little over a year ago.

Byrne's career had taken him through some of the city's toughest neighborhoods, where he was known as a street-smart cop, whose aggressive tactics were sometimes called into question.

Byrne shrugs off the handful of lawsuits filed against him.

"If you put yourself out there working fast areas and doing lots of police work, you're going to get complaints," he says.

Byrne thought Ferenzi and Ceriale had just the right mind-set. They wouldn't drive around chatting and killing time.

As they rode in the big silver Ford, Car 293, Ferenzi felt good.

"Man, we are the real police," he said.

They settled on a simple formula. If they scored a good arrest that night, maybe they could lock into a CD car whenever they wanted.

"Half that stuff's luck, though. You just gotta be in the right place at the right time," Ceriale said.

The car purred along State Street in the dark, rumbling over bumps and manholes. Up ahead were Miracle Food and Liquor and Harold's Chicken Shack No. 9. To the left, row after row of high-rises of the Robert Taylor Homes and Stateway Gardens glided past like tombstones.

The Crown Victoria was brand-new and smelled good. You could

push back the seat as far as you wanted because there was no cage between the front and the back. It was a clear summer sky, what you could see of it above the glow of the city.

"Maybe we'll get a homicide tonight," Ferenzi said.

The night unfolded slowly until the police radio crackled with news of a shooting near 43rd and State Streets.

Ferenzi mashed the accelerator with his size 9 boot and headed north. The orange globes of street lamps flew toward them.

A crowd had gathered by the time they reached the scene of the shooting yards away from an Amoco station. Paramedics had arrived ahead of Ferenzi and Ceriale.

The victim, a man in his 40s, hung half out of a Chevy, his legs inside, his head and shoulders and arms splayed onto the pavement. Paramedics lifted the man out of the brown four-door car. He had been shot at least three times. There was blood on the seat of his car, a bullet hole through the headrest. A bullet was lodged in his spine, but he was lucid. He told paramedics he couldn't move his legs. They put him in the ambulance.

Ferenzi was unmoved. Though he hadn't seen anyone dead of a gunshot wound until he started working as a police officer, by now he had seen more than a few, the first one, when he was a probationary police officer working in the 9th District. It had been autumn then. A man lay dead at the northwest corner of 51st and Wood Streets.

His training officer took Ferenzi for a look. There was a heavysset teenager sprawled on the sidewalk, eyes wide open, killed moments before in a gang-related drive-by shooting. There was a hole right in the center of his forehead but there wasn't much blood. The wound didn't even look real. Officers had left folded cards along the street like tiny, white tents to mark where bullet casings had fallen.



Ferenzi stared, speechless. But that had been months ago.

At the Amoco station, Ferenzi and Ceriale helped with crowd control, chatted with other officers on the scene and soon left. They headed back to the projects, still looking for the arrest that would make their night.

"You wanna stop at 4101?" Ferenzi asked.

The building at 4101 S. Federal St. is a high-rise in the CHA's Robert Taylor Homes whose violence the rookies knew well. Less than four months ago, Ferenzi had been shot at there by a sniper after responding to a domestic dispute. But its brazen drug trade made it an opportune place to pull down an arrest. About two months earlier, Ferenzi and Ceriale had arrested a 16-year-old just outside the building for possession of heroin.

Ferenzi punched the car north along State Street toward 4101.

Though some big-city police departments have rigid guidelines for officers working in plain clothes--they work in teams with a supervisor and stay in touch on the radio--Chicago's have a great deal of autonomy. Ferenzi and Ceriale did not use the radio to tell anyone where they were going. They arranged for no backup. In a CD car, they were not required to.

Ferenzi passed Root Street, then leaned into a U-turn so he could park along State Street facing south. He and Ceriale walked southwest away from Loeb Equipment Supply Co. and its boxy, brown facade, talking in hushed tones.

They turned west on Root and walked along the sidewalk past a dark playground. Then they trudged up a shallow incline into a tangled stand of trees and scrubby undergrowth and turned to the north.

It wasn't unusual for cops working the Robert Taylor Homes to use this as a stakeout. Some--including two officers from third watch with whom Ferenzi and Ceriale each had worked on

occasion--even used it during the day. With a little luck, a cop might observe a drug deal, sneak across Root Street, sidle along the high rise and surprise a suspected dealer. A Class X felony, just like that.

Crouching less than 10 feet apart in the dark, Ferenzi to Ceriale's left, the two cops peered across Root Street at 4101. They saw some young men near the breezeway. It was about 3:30 a.m. Saturday, Aug. 15, 1998.

**F**or Ferenzi the perils and possibilities of working in the Wentworth District always seemed to come back to this one building, a red Chicago Housing Authority high-rise with a graffiti-tagged breezeway. Sixteen stories high with 10 apartments on each floor, 4101 served as a drug market for the Gangster Disciples.

That night, like almost every night, the Disciples were hawking cocaine and heroin out of the building, according to prosecutors. And they armed themselves with guns, many supplied by Ezra Evans, a 27-year-old South Side man with a pockmarked face.

Evans was an unemployed high school graduate with a spotty work history and three children. He had a criminal record that included a theft conviction and was on probation for a year for taking \$895 out of the cash drawer at University National Bank while working as a teller.

Prosecutors say he had another problem: He owed the Gangster Disciples money for cocaine.

When gang members learned Evans had a Firearm Owner's Identification Card, they suggested he work off the debt by buying them guns. Evans complied, buying 13 guns between August 1997 and July 1998 and turning them over to a gang member called Kojak.

One of the guns, bought Dec. 28, 1997, at Chuck's Gun Shop in

Riverdale, was a Smith & Wesson, six-shot, .357 Magnum revolver with a four-inch barrel and a blue-steel finish, prosecutors say. In the industry the gun is known as a "man-stopper" because it can fire a longer-than-usual round with more power and range.

As Ferenzi and Ceriale crouched in the trees conducting surveillance of the building at 4101, prosecutors say, a suspected drug dealer named Rob Brandt stationed inside the building was finishing up his 2 a.m. to 4 a.m. shift.

Brandt would later tell police in a written statement that his job was to hide the drugs if intruders were spotted, and about 20 minutes before quitting time, lookouts for the Gangster Disciples noticed movement in the trees.

A member of the gang's "outside security" detail alerted gang members inside the building to grab their guns:

"On them popsicles!" he called out.

Two armed gang members--one with the .357 Magnum from Chuck's and the other with a 9 mm--emerged from the building's front door, according to Brandt's statement.

"I think they made us," Ceriale said as a gangly young man walked in their direction.

"What do you mean?"

"The guy in the orange jersey. He's pointing this way."

"The guy in the No. 5 jersey?"

"Yeah."

The two gunmen walked toward Ferenzi and Ceriale. The one with the .357 raised his gun.

Ferenzi saw a flash.

A bullet fired from a .357 can travel up to 1,350 feet per second--faster than the speed of sound. This one seared at least 50 feet in less than a heartbeat.

With a muffled thup, it tore into Ceriale.

The bullet had a copper jacket and a core of lead. It opened a half-inch hole in the lower left abdomen just below the protective vest, flattening as it burrowed down below the pubic bone toward the hip.

Part of the copper tip wore away to expose a bit of the lead core.

Ferenzi looked at Ceriale on the ground, figuring at first that his partner had hit the dirt because Ceriale thought the fireworks were gunshots. He remembered the following exchange:

"Call an ambulance, I'm shot," Ceriale said, curled up writhing.

"What?" Ferenzi said.

"Call an ambulance. They shot me," Ceriale repeated.

The blood rushed hot behind Ferenzi's face. He dropped to a crouch beside his partner and took his radio off his belt.

"293, emergency," he said, referring to their car number.

"I have a police officer shot at 4101 S. Federal St.," Ferenzi said, his voice uneven and squeaky. "We need an ambulance immediately."

Had something caught the light? Had one of them moved? Not that Ferenzi could remember. They hadn't learned much at the academy about surveillance, and Ferenzi and Ceriale hadn't had that much time on the streets to pick up the fine points.

The police dispatcher notified the fire dispatcher. The fire dispatcher turned to the computer to notify the firehouse at the corner of 40th Street and Dearborn Avenue.

Upstairs in the Engine 16 firehouse, 27-year-old paramedic Billy Sotos sat down on the edge of his bed.

Sotos was tired. It had been a busy night. He and his partner, Al Batiz, had just returned from a run to Cook County Hospital, where they had taken the shooting victim from the Amoco station. Sotos hadn't noticed Ferenzi and Ceriale working crowd control there earlier.

Sotos began to remove his shoes when the firehouse alarm rang. The radio blared: "Gunshot victim at 31 W. Root St."

He rose from the bed, forgetting his exhaustion.

Sotos pulled on his bulletproof vest and went downstairs and climbed into the ambulance alongside Batiz. The engine still was warm. He turned the ignition and began to drive.

Ceriale wondered what was taking the paramedics so long.

"Where the hell are they?" he grumbled as he lay on his back. "Are they taking the ----ing bus?"

The night had grown strangely quiet. The figures at the building had disappeared.

Ceriale was sweating and cursing now. He couldn't feel his leg.

Sirens wailed as police cars descended from every direction.

"You're a jinx," Ceriale told his partner.

Hearing police arrive, Ferenzi shone his flashlight so they could find their way.

Ceriale said he thought the wound was in his leg. Ferenzi studied his jeans in the dark and saw no blood. He breathed a sigh of relief. Maybe it's not too bad.

Then he saw the dark spot on Ceriale's T-shirt. With their palms Ferenzi and another officer pressed the shirt against the wound to stanch the flow of blood.

"I can't feel my leg," Ceriale said again.

Some of the arriving officers stood over him. One of them had planned to play basketball with him come Sunday. Ceriale's face was contorted in pain, but he was conscious. He told them about the shooting. Ferenzi retraced their final steps.

When Sotos and Batiz reached Ceriale, about 20 feet back from the sidewalk, the cops surrounding him backed away. One of them had taken Ceriale's gun--standard procedure when a cop goes down.

Only a week earlier Ceriale had told his father he never had been happier; he was doing what he loved. Now Sotos was shoving a heavy gauze dressing against his abdomen to stop the bleeding. The gauze soaked through red almost immediately. Cops were helping paramedics lift the 6-foot-2, 195-pound Ceriale onto a backboard.

Though Ceriale was alert he didn't say anything as the paramedics put him on the stretcher.

Sotos looked at the bloody wound just below Ceriale's vest and thought: That's a one-in-a-million shot.

"What's your name?" Sotos asked as he carried the foot of the stretcher.

"Mike Ceriale."

"When's your birthday?"

"January 21."

To gauge whether Ceriale was conscious and alert, Sotos continued asking questions. Ceriale looked tired. He told the paramedics everything hurt. His back. His stomach.

Lt. Virginia Drozd, the watch commander who had rushed to the scene, caught Ceriale's gaze as paramedics carried the stretcher past and smiled wanly.

"Hi," she said softly, waving.

Across town Lt. Byrne blinked awake in his bed. His blue eyes bore into the dark, wondering what had broken his slumber.

Byrne couldn't sleep. Restless, he walked to the car to check his pager. It was filled with "911" messages. He called the station and was told Ceriale had been shot. He was seriously wounded. Byrne threw on some clothes and raced to district headquarters.

At the scene of the shooting, Sotos, sweat shining on his forehead, looked down at Ceriale. "I'm going to start an IV on you, Michael," he said.

He grabbed Ceriale's left arm.

Ceriale grabbed Sotos' left arm.

"Don't let me go," the cop said, his face gray.

"You're not going anywhere," Sotos said.

Right before the ambulance left, Ferenzi climbed inside.

Ceriale turned his head and looked silently at his partner.

"You're gonna be all right," Ferenzi said.

Ferenzi got out and watched anxiously as the ambulance turned the corner and disappeared.

"Is Cook County a good place to take him?" Ferenzi asked Drozd nervously.

"It's a good place," she said. "They get a lot of gunshot wounds there."

*Chicago Tribune, Monday, August 16, 1999*

#### PARTNERS IN PERIL

#### Part 3

## 'YOU'VE FOUGHT LONG ENOUGH'

**P**aramedic Billy Sotos stepped on the gas, and Ambulance 35 surged north on State Street. In the back lay Chicago Police Officer Michael Ceriale, clinging to consciousness. Paramedics aren't supposed to break the speed limit, but it was almost 4 a.m., and Sotos had a police escort to the hospital. Ceriale had been shot in the abdomen while on surveillance of a 24-hour-a-day drug operation in the Robert Taylor Homes. He was losing a lot of blood. The IV was replenishing some of what had drained out of him onto the dead leaves and sticks at the hiding place he shared with his partner, Joe Ferenzi, across the street from 4101 S. Federal St. Three liters of a sodium chloride solution dripped into Ceriale during the seven-minute trip to the hospital. As he lay there with his blood-soaked T-shirts cut away, his face went from gray to pink.

He lost consciousness by the time the ambulance reached the emergency room entrance at Cook County Hospital.



The brooding main building of County is more than 80 years old, but it houses one of the city's six Level 1 trauma centers and is equipped to handle the most dire medical crises.

Looming pallid alongside the Eisenhower Expressway, the hospital is an icon of urban violence, familiar to many who never have stepped inside. Its ponderous facade is a common backdrop for television dramas, including "ER" -- a show loosely based on County's emergency room.

Behind the green doors of the trauma ward, doctors and nurses hustle to save everyone from gangsters to cops -- sometimes laboring simultaneously over those who have shot each other.

Off the job, they sometimes wear T-shirts emblazoned with a question they commonly hear from patients and their families: "Did you get the bullet out?"

Sotos and his partner, Al Batiz, had been to Cook County less than an hour before with a victim who had been shot in his car near an Amoco station on the South Side. That man had taken a bullet in the spine and couldn't move his legs, but he would survive. Now, a little after 4 a.m., they hauled in Ceriale.

Hospital orderlies wheeled the cop into a bright-white room with a solitary bed in the middle. The bullet was lodged in the soft tissue of the backside of the right hip. The hole it bore was half an inch in diameter. Doctors and nurses huddled over the bed trying to stop the bleeding. If they didn't succeed, he would slowly bleed to death.

At about 5 a.m. they wheeled Ceriale through a dim, stuffy hallway into an elevator and took him up to surgery.

Police, most of them from the 2nd District, known as the Deuce, poured into the hospital and were directed to a waiting room on the second floor.

A solemn ritual had begun.

When a cop is shot, a time-honored chain of events rapidly follows -- set in motion sometimes by the supervising sergeant, sometimes by an officer at the desk. Everyone must be notified. The watch commander. The street deputy. The area deputy. The district commander. Someone from the crime lab. The superintendent.

Some are called or paged. Some are radioed.

Rev. Thomas Nangle, the police chaplain, carries a pager whose number is known to only the FBI and the Chicago police. But it was the phone that woke Nangle in the hours before dawn on Saturday, Aug. 15, 1998.

Shortly after Ferenzi arrived at the hospital, he spotted Nangle. The chaplain was wearing his cassock and collar. The soft-spoken Nangle, 55, is usually the one assigned to tell cops their partner is dead. The sight of him made the blood pound in Ferenzi's head.

Nangle apologized for alarming Ferenzi. Ceriale was alive, he said.

In the waiting room, Ferenzi saw Police Supt. Terry Hillard, who got the call on his car phone as he was driving home from his parents' house.

It was the first shooting of a police officer on Hillard's watch as superintendent. Ferenzi, one of the most junior members of the department, never had met the 54-year-old chief, a tall, soft-spoken man with 30 years on the job. Hillard has worked in some of the city's toughest districts, including Wentworth, and served time as an undercover gang-crimes specialist. He was no stranger to violence, having taken a bullet himself while responding to a domestic disturbance in 1975.

He walked up to Ferenzi and introduced himself, offering words of comfort. But if there were some secret talisman stored by the

department's brass for moments such as this, it would not be revealed to Ferenzi that night.

"Are those boots heavy?" Hillard asked.

Ferenzi heard the question clearly, but it caught him off guard.

Are those boots heavy?

The question hung between them as Ferenzi forced himself to think.

Are those boots heavy?

Ferenzi looked down at his feet.

"Yes," he answered. "They are heavy."

Hillard nodded. The department was thinking of testing some lighter, athletic shoes for the officers, he said.

**A**t 7 a.m. Saturday, a small, bright-eyed nurse arrived at the hospital, punched the time clock and hurried into the trauma ward. Yolanda Valencia is a veteran trauma clinician and one of two nurses who would tend to Ceriale for a week. She was supposed to have the day off, but her boss had called and asked her to come in.

Valencia, who is married to a police officer, didn't hesitate.

Between 8 and 9 a.m., Ceriale came down from surgery and was put in Bed 3, in a bay big enough to accommodate all the equipment, doctors and nurses he would need.

A digital clock glowed red above his head.

Ceriale still was unconscious. A tube in his mouth ran down his trachea to his lungs so he could breathe. Multiple IVs pumped

blood and fluid into him.

The bullet remained in Ceriale's hip; doctors had decided it posed no further threat where it was and so they need not remove it.

Ferenzi left the hospital and went to the 2nd District station, to help with the investigation, which already was in high gear.

The shooting of a police officer provokes a ferocious response born of fraternity and anger. Cops wired on coffee and adrenaline paced the station house, while others swarmed the building at 4101 S. Federal in search of suspects and witnesses. At first, there wasn't much to go on besides Ferenzi and Ceriale's description of the gunman. Ceriale had whispered his account to patrol officers in his final moments of consciousness.

Less than a half hour after the shooting, police arrested a gangly 16-year-old named Jonathan Tolliver as he strolled past the scene of the crime. Tolliver, who wore an orange jersey and hat, matched the description of the shooter.

Investigators got another break when a man who acknowledged he had been working the drug market at 4101 passed along the street monikers of two others who allegedly had been there that morning: "Chi-Town" Alexander and "Big Rob." With dozens of police officers investigating the case, one suspect led them to the next, starting with George Alexander, 18, who allegedly volunteered a statement after he was driven by his mother to the Area 1 violent crimes office at Wentworth. His attorney would later claim that his client's statement was coerced.

Next police paid a visit to 17-year-old Rob Brandt in his sixth-floor apartment at 4101. He too gave a detailed statement to police, though his attorney would also claim in court that it was coerced.

Soon, four men stood charged: Brandt, Tolliver, Alexander and Willie Hunter, 23.

The high-rise at 4101 was a nest of drugs, guns and gangs. The suspects were allegedly members of the Gangster Disciples, which protected its turf with a deadly arsenal hidden beneath a refrigerator in a vacant fifth-floor apartment. Their drug operation seemed to thrive despite ongoing police pressure. Ferenzi and Ceriale, like so many cops in the Wentworth District, rushed to the building repeatedly as it exploded with violence and gravitated to it on their own, knowing they could make an arrest there.

For three of the suspects arrested in Ceriale's shooting, the court system had proved to be a revolving door.

Just three days before the shooting, police had arrested Tolliver at 4101 S. Federal and charged him with possession of a controlled substance after allegedly finding the teenager with 30 small plastic bags of cocaine. He was released by a juvenile court judge and was awaiting a hearing. Alexander had been charged in June 1998 with possession of marijuana after police allegedly found 15 grams in his pocket. That arrest also had taken place at 4101. The case was dismissed. And Hunter had been arrested at 4101 in September 1997 after a police officer allegedly found him carrying a plastic bag containing 16 packets of what was thought to be cocaine. That case also was dismissed.

Details about the shooting are still sketchy. Defense attorneys have been reluctant to share information. The police and prosecution version of events, which follows, comes from witnesses, from statements allegedly made by the suspects, who have pleaded not guilty, and from descriptions provided by Ceriale and Ferenzi.

A little after 3:30 a.m., Alexander shouted, "On them popsicles!" -- street code meant to warn other gang members to get their guns.

Tolliver emerged from the building wearing an orange shirt and hat and carrying a .357 revolver, followed by Hunter, who held a

9 mm pistol. They strode toward Root Street in the direction of Ferenzi and Ceriale, who lurked among the trees.

Tolliver fired once, then everyone bolted.

The day after the shooting, Hunter called Brandt and told him to get the gun from under the refrigerator and drop it out the window. From there gang members would stash it in two more places: a hole in the wall at a vacant apartment and an electrical-meter box on the 13th floor at 4022 S. State St.

Detectives found it in the electrical box after interrogating Brandt. There was a blade of grass in the barrel. There was one empty chamber.

According to Brandt's statement, he did not know until after the shooting that the victim was a police officer.

Police traced the serial number to Chuck's Gun Shop in Riverdale and a buyer named Ezra Evans, who purchased weapons for the gang because he owed them drug money. They arrested Evans later in the week at his home.

The gunrunner would weep when he pleaded guilty.

Between helping with the investigation and their regular duties, officers kept a vigil at the hospital.

The waiting forged a curious community, doctors and cops and girlfriends and nurses bonded by the experience of watching a man fight for his life against tall odds. Some officers camped out at the hospital through the warm nights of waiting. A handful of close friends and relatives set up a table and chairs outside the emergency room doors. Television stations beamed images of the nightly soap opera to an anxious and concerned city.

Ceriale's father once found Supt. Hillard standing quietly at Mike's bedside in the middle of the night.

On the wall behind Ceriale's pillow were photographs of him, including a newspaper clipping showing Ceriale reaching to catch a touchdown pass for Gordon Tech, taped there by his mother, Maria Ceriale. She had hung a St. Christopher medal there too. And a rosary. A figure of the Madonna sat on the shelf.

Ferenzi hesitated before approaching Bed 3 the first time, a little more than 24 hours after the shooting. He wanted to visit his partner but he was afraid of giving Ceriale germs.

He walked in and stood alone beside the bed.

"You have to get better," Ferenzi said, touching his unconscious partner's head. "We're supposed to be detectives together."

**F**erenzi visited Ceriale several times that day. And again the next day, Monday.

After one long bedside vigil he went outside and stood beside the driveway to the emergency room. It was 1 a.m.

Lt. Michael Byrne drove up. Byrne was the supervisor who granted Ferenzi's request to work with Ceriale in plain clothes the night of the shooting, a common practice in police districts in Chicago even though many of the younger officers have little training in such work.

Byrne approached Ferenzi with tears in his eyes.

"It was a real stupid move putting you guys in plain clothes. This never would have happened," Byrne said.

Ferenzi looked tired, but he consoled Byrne.

"Mike's gonna make it. He's hanging in there. He's gonna be OK." Ferenzi said.

Since the shooting he had been upbeat, at least on the surface.

Everyone had noticed. "When Mike gets better," Ferenzi would say. He prefaced so many statements that way.

"When Mike's out of the hospital?"

Byrne went inside and stood over Ceriale.

"C'mon, Mike," he said. "You gotta come around. We need you back at work."

Byrne saw Ceriale's father, Tony Ceriale.

"If only I hadn't sent them out there. I was giving them a perk, a reward," Byrne said.

In the throes of his own anguish, the elder Ceriale felt sorry for the lieutenant.

"Don't worry about it," he said. "It wasn't your fault."

But he couldn't help thinking: Maybe my son and his partner shouldn't have been out there. Maybe they were too young, not ready. Maybe they shouldn't have been transferred to such a dangerous district in the first place -- not with so little experience.

The elder Ceriale is a gruff man with a deeply lined, craggy face and a nervous, slightly distracted manner. He looked up to his son. Michael Ceriale was Tony Ceriale's greatest success. The father was stunned. He was worried. He was angry.

He stood silently beside his ex-wife at their son's side, tired but loath to give up hope.

Maria Ceriale occupied herself comforting others and making sure everyone was fed. She always checked that the order was big enough to include hospital staff.

Each morning Valencia, the nurse, would glance over toward



Bed 3 -- afraid she might see the crowd gone, the commotion stilled, the bed empty.

Then she would check on Ceriale, studying his swollen face, looking at the monitors, checking the wound, listening to his lungs.

One day while Valencia completed her routine, she saw Maria Ceriale enter the room and spot a second photo of her son taped above the bed. It had been placed there by his ex-girlfriend, a Chicago cop whom Ceriale still loved though their relationship was over.

Valencia watched as Maria Ceriale took down the photo. She said her son's hair was combed all wrong in it.

Day after day Valencia watched Ceriale's life parade past: The women he loved. His football coach from high school, where Ceriale had played tight end. His buddies and instructors from the Police Academy. Byrne. Even Sotos, the paramedic. He visited several times.

And then there was Ceriale's quiet, solitary partner.

Ferenzi was a frequent visitor at Ceriale's bedside, standing alone, speaking to his partner, always reaching to touch his arm or his hair.

Officer Geraldo Teneyuque, who had worked with both Ferenzi and Ceriale, found Ferenzi at the hospital and they hugged. Teneyuque drove them to a nearby Jewel to buy soft drinks for the Ceriale family.

"Are people blaming me for what happened?" Ferenzi asked.

"Don't even think that way," Teneyuque said. "It's nobody's fault except the guy who pulled the trigger."

On Tuesday morning -- three days after the shooting --

LifeSource Blood Services set up three six-bed mobile donation centers outside the hospital at the request of the Police Department. So many people came they had to take numbers and wait under a tent outside on a hot August day.

Valencia took a number too. During the weeklong vigil at Cook County Hospital, 509 donors from all over Chicago would give blood at the hospital. Overall the blood drive would net more than 2,000 pints throughout the city.

"You wouldn't believe how many people are here for you," Ferenzi told his partner.

On Wednesday Ferenzi left the hospital and went into the Loop for an appointment with Beverly Jackson, the Police Department psychologist. Jackson had called Ferenzi to see if he wanted to talk.

Ferenzi pushed through the revolving door into the massive Old Colony Building on Dearborn Street, and rode the wobbly elevator to the eighth floor.

Inside her office, Jackson rose.

"This isn't counseling," she told him. It's what she tells every cop when they first enter her office.

Torn between a need to grieve and a fear of being stigmatized, many cops reeling from the loss of a partner or any other traumatic event eschew counseling. Often, they find solace in a night out with fellow officers.

The department is considering mandatory sessions for officers who have been through a traumatic event, Jackson says. Though cops ostensibly are required to call her after a shooting, that rule isn't enforced and many disdain such a plea for help -- the perceived baggage of which is evident in department vernacular that favors the military term "debriefing" over the word "counseling."

Jackson told Ferenzi what she tells many of the officers who visit her: "Someone once said police work is God's work. Somebody has to protect the rest of us from those who would do us harm."

After about an hour, he left feeling no better -- never to return. He went back to the hospital and took a number to give blood.

**A**s the days passed, Ceriale's face -- so smooth and clean-shaven that night he had rushed into work late -- grew dark with a five o'clock shadow, and a mustache crept across his lip. But the eyes stayed closed. The fight to save Ceriale never progressed much beyond the basic objectives of paramedics in those first, chaotic moments among the trees. Attending physicians and nurses struggled to keep him from bleeding to death, operating five times and giving him more than 200 pints of blood -- about 20 times the amount circulating in an average adult.

And then surgery no longer was an option. Ceriale couldn't be stabilized enough. More than once his heart had stopped. Though doctors had revived him, circulation in his limbs had suffered. Ceriale had thrown a blood clot and it had lodged in his left arm. His hand became pale and mottled. Doctors decided to amputate. But instead of taking him to the operating room -- a trip Ceriale was in no shape to make -- they performed a medical amputation at his bedside, tying off the left hand with a tourniquet five inches above the wrist, then packing it in dry ice.

Tony Ceriale agonized quietly but dealt with it his own way. Mike's right-handed, he thought. He can get a prosthesis. He can still play golf.

Each day, when his vital signs appeared to rebound, the family celebrated. "I know you think we're crazy," Tony Ceriale told Valencia. The nurse smiled.

She was momentarily glad for the family, but in her heart she

feared Ceriale was waging a losing battle. His kidneys had shut down -- a common occurrence for someone losing large amounts of blood; the body shunts all the blood to the most vital organs, including the brain and the heart, while others go into decline.

Almost a week had passed now, and Ceriale was no better.

On Thursday there was a candlelight vigil on the heliport outside the hospital.

On Friday, Valencia told Tony Ceriale, "He's having a bad day." She stayed on the unit after punching out at 3:15 p.m.

Valencia watched a solemn procession of visitors, even more subdued than before, as they took turns standing beside Ceriale, touching him, talking to him.

That evening Ferenzi returned to the hospital after dinner to be greeted by Ceriale's cousin. You better go see him now, the cousin said.

Ferenzi stood alone at the bed.

"I'm really sorry I took you over there," he said, the words choked and broken.

He put his hand on Ceriale's head.

"I know you tried your best. You gotta be tired."

Ceriale was blue by the time his mother and father stood with their only child.

"You've fought long enough," Tony Ceriale heard his ex-wife tell their son softly.

"It's all right to give it up."

Early Friday evening, Ceriale died. It was six days after the

shooting.

Valencia, nearly 10 pounds lighter than when the week began, took down the photo and the medal and the rosary and handed them to Maria Ceriale.

*Chicago Tribune, Tuesday, August 17, 1999*

PARTNERS IN PERIL  
Part 4  
‘ALL OF US  
ARE SUFFERING’

**H**e isn't sure why he called a dead man. Joe Ferenzi just wanted to hear his partner's voice again. Driving in his black Dodge pickup truck a few days after Officer Michael Ceriale died of a gunshot wound, Ferenzi picked up the cell phone and dialed Ceriale's number. Miles away, inside a tan three-flat in Wicker Park, a phone rang. The apartment was just the way Ceriale had left it when he had kissed his grandmother goodbye and bolted out the door, late for the graveyard shift, the night he was shot. Ceriale had grown up in this three-flat with his Ukrainian mother and grandmother. Maria Ceriale hadn't the heart to enter her son's garden apartment. She would never again use the plate from his last meal.

When Wentworth District police cleaned out Locker 584, it was Ceriale's father, Tony, who bundled up the crisp, new uniform shirts and took them home.

Ferenzi, driving now with his cell phone to his ear, heard Ceriale's phone recording pick up and recognized his partner's voice. There was no room for any more messages.

After the shooting, Ferenzi was off for two weeks--the first in a death vigil at the hospital, the second in a fog of grief and regret that would block much of August 1998 from memory. Ferenzi sank deep inside himself. He declined to meet buddies from the Police Academy at Ira's, a cop bar west of the Loop where they went to drown their sorrows in Miller Lite. He was silent and brooding with his girlfriend, Colleen Higgins.

He sat at home, watching television without really seeing.

Ferenzi had not lost the feeling of desolation that so gripped him at the funeral. The sound of Ceriale's recorded voice couldn't mute the memory of the solitary church bell that tolled every 10 seconds, punctuating the vast, quiet pageant that was a city's farewell to its fallen soldier.

It was a bright and glorious August morning. Hundreds of people lined the streets of Ukrainian Village, the West Side neighborhood where Ceriale had gone to Catholic school as a kid. Old women looked out from second-floor windows and stoops, their hands clasped in the silent prayers of mothers and mourners. Uniformed cops from the nearby Wood Street station, where Ceriale had answered roll call for six months during his probationary period, fashioned a somber parade--some clutching their children, others pulling them in wagons along Chicago Avenue on their way to St. Nicholas Ukrainian Catholic Cathedral.

After spending nearly a week consoling others with optimistic predictions of his partner's recovery, Ferenzi felt reality sink in as he neared the church. Turning the corner in a van with the other pallbearers, he glimpsed squad cars lining the street as far as the eye could see. A chill ran up his spine.

A white hearse bore Ceriale in a steel-blue coffin draped with a flag of the City of Chicago. Ferenzi, along with seven other officers, carried Ceriale into the church.

Inside St. Nicholas, an imposing Byzantine cathedral, the choir sang from its loft in the rear of the church, coaxing a response from the nuns and the schoolchildren who lined the right side of the cathedral. Burly police officers sniffed and dabbed at their eyes. Filled pews creaked under the great weight.

There was Mayor Richard Daley, who himself had lost a son to spina bifida, now come to bury a son of the city. "The death of a young person is heartbreaking for a mother and father," the mayor began his eulogy. He gripped the lectern to steady himself. The tears came fast. "Less than two years ago, he stood at Navy Pier. He raised his right hand, he stood by that motto: 'We serve and protect.' He was taken from us."

There was Supt. Terry Hillard, so calm and cryptic in conversation with Ferenzi during the hospital death-watch, now trembling and sorrowful. "All of us are suffering," Hillard said. "In this cynical time where heroes have feet of clay, Michael emerged as a genuine role model."

There were the rookies from the Police Academy and the first-watch officers who had stood with Ceriale in roll call at the 2nd District--the Deuce, they called it.

There was Billy Sotos, the paramedic who remembered how Ceriale begged him to save his life, and Yolanda Valencia, a trauma nurse attending a patient's funeral for only the third time in her 16 years at Cook County Hospital.

And there was Lt. Michael Byrne.

Byrne's decision to let the rookies work in plain clothes the night of the shooting haunted him as he sat red-eyed at the funeral.

Byrne liked Ferenzi and Ceriale, and they liked him. He had taken them under his wing. Had the rookies come back to the station house that fateful night with an arrest, another step closer to making detective, Byrne would have looked like the trusting tutor he felt he had become to the two. Instead, he was burying

Ceriale and calling Ferenzi repeatedly to check on his well-being. Byrne had even visited one of the department's counselors to talk about his pain and regret.

One day, he got in a car and revisited the scene of Ceriale's shooting at the Robert Taylor Homes. Then he did it again. Then again. Soon, the drive became a ritual. Several times a week, when his shift ends at the Wentworth District, Byrne drives along Root Street alone. At the place where Ceriale first heard the gang warning--"On them popsicles!"--then the gunshot, Byrne slows his car.

He stares at the weedy spot where Ceriale fell. He looks across the street at 401 S. Federal St., the public housing high-rise where the rookies sought something that straddled experience and action. Then he steers his squad car through a fire lane for a closer look at the building before driving away.

Byrne says he would probably send the two out again in plain clothes for a midnight shift. But he can't hide the inner turmoil his decision has caused.

"It was the right thing to do, I think," Byrne said. "But you always second-guess yourself. The way I feel about it now, given the opportunity to put people in plain clothes, I would take a closer look at the circumstances and what their assignments would be."

After the shooting, some officers around the city wondered why two young rookies had been given the freedom to roam the projects unsupervised and without backup in the middle of the night. It's an assignment so unstructured and risky as to be nearly unheard of in many other big-city police departments.

"Real police work is not 'Starsky and Hutch,' " New York City Detective Walter Burnes said. "If somebody says he's going out into the projects for the night to work narcotics, you'd look at him like he was out of his mind."



As the bell tolled for Ceriale, these were the hard issues that others in the pews at St. Nicholas confronted. Among them were Wentworth Cmdr. Donald Hilbring and Lt. Virginia Drozd.

The day after Ceriale was shot, Hilbring walked into the office of Drozd, the watch commander in the Wentworth District who was on duty at the time of the shooting. Drozd, a short, stocky woman with weary eyes, looked up from her desk.

"Nobody should be doing narcotics work," Hilbring told her. "We're not trained in that."

Drozd bristled. Ferenzi and Ceriale had hid among the trees for only about four minutes before the shooting. In her mind, they were hardly doing surveillance.

"They weren't doing narcotics work," Drozd told Hilbring. "They just went over there to check the building out."

It's over, Hilbring told her. From now on, nobody with less than two years of experience will be allowed in a civilian dress car.

That night at roll call, Drozd realized how impossibly young and inexperienced the force in one of Chicago's toughest districts had become. She didn't have two officers in the shop with enough experience to staff a CD car and had to stop putting one up.

Within days of the shooting, Supt. Hillard assembled a committee of district commanders to examine the circumstances surrounding the tragedy and to determine if the department should improve training or restrict the use of CD cars.

"I might have done it a different way if I had been watch commander. But I didn't know Mike Ceriale. The watch commander there did," Hillard said.

A year later the committee has not released its report and there has been no change in department policy.

Because many experienced cops pull seniority and transfer to day shifts in quieter districts, most of those on Ceriale's watch were young and green. It was a close-knit group. The shooting shook them up. For weeks the department sent chaplains and counselors to the Wentworth District. One night at 11:30--the time Ceriale would have been arriving at the station--officers held a private ceremony with pizza and pop and prayers.

Some had been through academy together, doubtless ever imagining that they would be gathered at a funeral mass so soon.

The church bell tolled for hours, in chorus with the funeral liturgy of St. John Chrysostom and the Celtic bagpipes that met mourners on the steps outside the Oakley Avenue cathedral. The processional from the church to All Saints Cemetery in Des Plaines stretched more than a mile, joined by patrol cars from as far as Champaign and Milwaukee, their Mars lights flashing a silent tribute.

At the entrance to the cemetery mausoleum waited five busloads of khaki-uniformed recruits, each of them a portrait of Ceriale just 10 months earlier.

Ferenzi left the cemetery that afternoon, not soon to return. He felt guilty for staying away from Ceriale's tomb.

But it was just too hard. Everything was too hard.

He could think of only one thing they should have done differently that night: Not having gone to 4101 S. Federal St. at all.

He had looked forward to working side by side toward their career goal of being detectives. Instead Ceriale got a plaque in the glass case inside the front door of the Wentworth station house.

And Ferenzi got a certificate of commendation right below it that

describes how one summer night at 3:38 a.m. he "requested assistance . . . and began administering first aid to his fallen partner."

"You gotta get out of here, Joe," Byrne told him one night.

Ferenzi agreed and when an opening came up in September, he transferred to the Foster Avenue District on Chicago's North Side. The routine there was calmer.

Ferenzi believed that finding a new partner wouldn't be easy. Who would want to work with him after what had happened? They're going to think I made a mistake, he worried. But he soon met a young cop named Scott Pierson who was starting over, too. Pierson, whose wife is a police officer and who has a 2-year-old boy, had just transferred from the busy Marquette District on the city's West Side.

For Ferenzi, moving to the Foster Avenue District meant being closer to his new house, which he plans to share with longtime girlfriend Colleen Higgins when they marry in May. More important it meant working safer streets. Nights in the Foster District, with its parks, three-flats and prim bungalows, aren't routinely paced by gunfire like those in Wentworth.

It has been an adjustment. He gets bored at Foster. He picks up a lot less overtime than in the Wentworth District. Ferenzi has not worked in an unmarked car since the last night he rode with Ceriale. Because of a manpower shortage in the Foster district, CD cars rarely are staffed--especially for the afternoon shifts, which Ferenzi now works. Assuming there will be none available, he never asks.

He wonders if his career will suffer. Sometimes he forgets how to do the things that were commonplace on the South Side--forgets how to write certain reports, like shootings and drug arrests. In those moments the more experienced Ferenzi has to think back on how the less experienced Ferenzi would have done it.

But he does not plan to ask for a transfer. It would be too hard on Higgins. He calls her from the station each night before she goes to bed. Sometimes he calls his mother.

When Ferenzi is frisking someone and he makes them assume the position just right--leaning heavily on the squad car with both hands and feet spread--the subject of the search might ask the cop why he's being such a stickler.

And Ferenzi will say: "Because I don't know who you are. And I'm going home tonight."

In winter Ferenzi returned to the scene of the shooting. It was dark. He was driving with a friend. Something drew him to the place. It looked like some of the trees behind which he and Ceriale had hidden were gone. This was sacred ground. Who would cut down the trees? He felt sadness, then anger.

**E**very bulletin of a fresh assault on an officer jangles Ferenzi.

At the funeral of slain Chicago Police Officer John Knight in January, Ferenzi wept softly as he stood in front of the church. The tolling of the bell had transported him back to the funeral of his late partner.

In early March, Officer James Camp had been shot to death.

Two weeks later the cordless phone in Ferenzi's house chirped.

"I just heard on the radio a policeman was shot in 15," Lt. Michael Byrne said.

"What?" Ferenzi's voice was high and pinched.

"Another police officer got shot, over in 15," Byrne said as he listened to the police radio in his car. "Hold on. Let me see if I can hear more."

Ferenzi paced.

"They said he was shot in the vest," Byrne continued. "He's OK."

Later that afternoon there was television footage of a cop investigating Schak's shooting. It showed the officer kicking the legs out from under a young man in handcuffs.

After midnight Ferenzi stopped at a White Hen Pantry to get a soft drink. Daniel Heifitz, a store clerk, struck up a conversation.

"Did you see on TV where those policemen kicked that guy's feet out from under him?" Heifitz asked.

"We don't know what happened," Ferenzi replied.

"C'mon. Getting people off a bus and lining them up against a fence? One of the cops kicked the back of a guy's knees so he'd fall down."

"I'm sure they'll check it out," Ferenzi said.

"Well, I think they went too far. You can't do that when you got somebody handcuffed--just kick a guy's feet out from under him."

"Well, emotions were probably a little high. Here you've got a police officer downtown with his star being retired the same day you got some piece of filth shooting at a sergeant."

The man Heifitz had seen take a fall on the West Side was Dorian Lamont Hughes, a 21-year-old who had served 18 months for drugs possession and was discharged in December. Police officers grabbed Hughes and handcuffed him. The TV cameras caught it all.

"Sure on TV he might look like Joe Civilian," Ferenzi told Heifitz, his blood rising. "But that guy probably had been

arrested several times before. He probably had something to do with it or knew who did."

Hughes was charged with disorderly conduct, but the case was dismissed.

"It's bad out there," Ferenzi added.

Heifitz grinned.

"How often is it really that a cop gets shot at, though?" he said. "It doesn't happen that much."

Ferenzi's brown eyes grew wide.

"You gotta be kidding me," he said. "You are sadly mistaken. It happens all the time. It just doesn't always make the news. You live here among transplanted suburbanites where everything smells like roses. I was shot at three times in five months.

"You've heard of Michael Ceriale?" he said.

Heifitz nodded.

"Well, I was his partner."

Ferenzi left the store seething and climbed back in the car with Pierson. The job felt thankless. Ceriale's shooting had changed him in subtle ways, he knew.

At times he could still plumb the optimism of his early days in the department, and he says he plans on taking the detective's test in October.

"If somebody's doing something and I don't catch them today, I know I'll catch them the next day," he says one day on patrol.

At other times, he feels more jaded, as though it's us against them. And he is more acutely aware of the futility of the job. Just

three days before Ceriale was shot, the accused gunman, a 16-year-old, had been released by a juvenile court judge after being charged with drug possession.

A year later, the four men charged with murdering Ceriale have not yet gone to trial. They have pleaded not guilty and defense attorneys will be challenging police conduct in the case, arguing that statements were coerced and innocent men railroaded in the heat of investigating the shooting of a cop. "I know I can just go out there and throw anybody in jail," he says. "But what's the point?"

On Good Friday Ferenzi got some allergy shots, ran a few errands and returned home to shower and dress for work. He pulled on his black police boots, lacing first the left, then the right. He reached into the closet by the front door and took out the backpack that held his gun.

As he left for work, he heard polka music coming from the home next door. Ferenzi slid into his purple Camaro, steered down the alley and drove into the fading light of a late afternoon.

At the station, he dressed in his blue uniform shirt and pants. He wore a digital watch his fiance had given him. On Ferenzi's badge was a black band, still in place long after Police Department protocol suggests removing it. He held his checkerboard Chicago Police cap, a prayer card with Ceriale's picture tucked into a pocket where other officers keep photographs of children and wives.

After another slow shift driving the quiet streets of the Foster District, Ferenzi went home, climbed the stairs and stood alone in the dim light of his bedroom.

"I hope you'll watch over me," he told Ceriale in quiet prayer. They were the same words he spoke every night before bed.

"I miss you."

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