

English 100, First Place; Professor, Barbara Harroun

## **Law Enforcement Autoethnography**

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As I am venturing on a ride along with a McDonough County Sheriff's K-9 officer, a call comes through on the radio. It's dispatch saying we need backup, we've got a runner. Officer Andy looks at me with adrenaline filled eyes and says "Are you ready?" He flips the switch and the red and blues light up. Another switch is flipped and off go the loud and piercing sirens. In the caged-off back seat, it's Officer Andy's trusty sidekick, Cato, who's just as excited as Officer Andy and I, barking and pacing back and forth in the back seat. We pull a U-turn going about 25 mph. I was convinced we were on two wheels. Gas pedal goes to the floor and we're off going 25 to 65 in about 2 seconds. Officer Andy calls back to dispatch about the location and lets them know he and Cato are en route. This is the discourse community I belong to, being a law enforcement major. Eventually, I want to do what Officer Andy and Cato do. Yes, there are professions in this field besides being a normal street cop and a K-9 officer. You can go into working in jails, airports, doing things dealing with juveniles, secret service, FBI, and you can even be a science geek and spend your whole day in a lab analyzing blood. One of the most important things I feel while going into the law enforcement field is waking up every morning (or night if you work the "graveyard" shifts) and putting your life on the line every day in order to protect and keep the community safe. I want to find the bad guys with the help of my own trusty sidekick, but in the meantime, I'm going to be taking every law enforcement class I can in Horrabin Hall and go for my master's degree.

Recently, I set up an interview with one of my law enforcement professors, Dr. Anthony McBride. I asked him questions like when it was he knew he wanted to go into the law

enforcement field, who helped him get to where he is now, and also how that community impacted him. “But I think I met some of my best friends in the criminal justice field,” Dr. McBride stated when asked how the law enforcement community impacted him. The interview really showed me that even the people that studied law enforcement or criminal justice are not guaranteed a spot in that field. It’s all about your passion and how far you’re willing to push yourself. I belong to a discourse community of law enforcement majors, and I intend to make a difference not only in the community I serve, but for everyone in that community as well.

Being a member of the discourse community of law enforcement majors has shaped my identity by making me tougher, more alert, and also more understanding. In high school, I took an AP Psychology class, and my first year at Western, I took a behavior class and that’s where being more understanding comes in. I understand people’s behavior more, and I can also determine/make a good conclusion as to why criminals commit the crimes they do. I feel I have gotten tougher as a law enforcement major because for one, I have been taking women’s self-defense classes, and just being in this discourse community and being around other people in the community has changed my attitude on not being so “vulnerable” looking. I try to make it seem like I’m not the type of person you want to mess with. If you were to take a look at officers on duty, they are going to look very serious like they don’t know what the word “fun” means and like they’ll put you in handcuffs the second you give them a wrong look. As soon as they’re off duty and out of uniform, however, they are just like you and I. “I want to say in the law enforcement field, a lot of us sometimes are much too focused and we give up the fun part of our life because we think we’re law enforcement, but a lot of the friends I talked to were guys who still had a life,” Dr. McBride said.

I have been more alert as well because, to be honest, I was quite a ditz growing up and still have some of those moments. I'm always really aware of my surroundings even if I know where I am. I can see someone for three seconds and tell you exactly what they are wearing, how their hair was styled, what color their eyes were, and a good estimated guess on height and weight. Being a member of this discourse community, I believe I have impacted the larger community because that's one more person that is willing and wanting to protect their community and keep the field of justice alive. The quote from Helen Keller, "Alone we can do so little, but together we can do so much," definitely pertains to the field of law enforcement. Just wanting to pursue a career in this field is already making a difference. I like to think of careers in law enforcement as relatable to a university. There're all these different departments for majors and minors, but as a whole, it becomes one student body and one university.

Here in Horrabin Hall, there are flyers all around advertising self-defense classes, the law enforcement fraternity (Lambda Alpha Epsilon), a lot of 5k runs, and other things that deal with the Macomb Police Department, Sheriff's Department, campus police, and state police (e.g., internships and ride alongs). Writing in the discourse community of law enforcement is crucial especially being a regular police officer. "This is the lifeline of our organization: paperwork. The way red corpuscles carry oxygen to the body, paperwork carries information through the department," said Jake Gyllenhaal's character in the movie *End of Watch*. That quote alone should show how important writing is when it comes to being a police officer or working in/for a police department. When I went on a ride along with Officer Andy and Cato like I stated in my introduction, he asked me if I enjoyed writing and I told him it doesn't really bother me. He said and emphasized, "Well good, because that is about 90% of what you'll be doing in a law enforcement career!" This discourse community shapes writing because it's not like writing an

essay. There are a lot of abbreviations and everything is quick and to the point. There is no need to dwell on stuff that isn't going to help the case and help the judge in making decisions. Making things short and sweet is key but also using the correct terminology or "cop slang" is important. I still have a lot of terminology to learn, but Officer Andy was telling me a few and I picked some up from listening to the radio. The ones that are most popular would be 10-4, which means affirmative and that the officer understands; 10-20, which means what is your location from one officer to another; and J3, meaning there is a road block.

As you can see, the discourse community of being a law enforcement major is quite grand. For all the other law enforcement majors that chose to write about this, I'm sorry to tell you information you already know and make it sound like I am a broken record. Western Illinois University has the biggest law enforcement program in Illinois and is one of the top in the nation. Being in English 100 and doing a lot of writing throughout the semester is not only preparing me for my future, but also it has given me a sense of what writing for hours is like. I am proud to say I am a part of this discourse community, and I hope you all enjoyed me babbling on about law enforcement! What a relief it is to say that this stressful-fiasco of a project is finally done with. The end.