

Policing Detroit Oral History Project

Detroit, MI

Matthew Zani

Interviewed by

(Ryan Strobe

Monday, November 24, 2014

Detroit, Michigan

As part of the Oral History Class in the School of Library and Information Science

Kim Schroeder, Instructor

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Brief Biography

Matthew Zani is a married father of three who has worked in private security for the past 10 years. His former profession was that of a decorated police officer with the city of Detroit, where he spent almost 10 years in patrol and enforcement. During his tenure with the police department Matthew was a member of the first class of Field Training Officers responsible for training new recruits. Matthew's first three years as a police officer, starting in 1994, were spent in Southwest Detroit at the 4th Precinct, where he received two Officer of the Quarter awards. In 1997 Matthew was assigned out to Narcotics Special Enforcement Section to work as a gang specialist, earning both a chief's merit award and a chief's unit award due to his work on gangs and the vast number of narcotics arrest he made. In 1999 Matthew formally transferred to NSES (Narcotics Special Enforcement Section) and continued plainclothes street enforcement throughout the city, with a focus on Narcotics enforcement. In 2001 Matthew was transferred to the 3rd Precinct, where he worked as a uniformed officer and as a plainclothes officer assigned to resolve nonfatal shooting cases.

After being indicted in a federal civil rights probe and being cleared of all charges, Matthew left the department in 2003 with a 99% conviction rate that still stands. In 2005 Matthew began working for Delray Security, being assigned to a neighborhood patrol in Midtown. While conducting the security patrol Matthew developed a working relationship with Chief Holt and acted as a liaison between Wayne State University Police Department officers and Detroit Police Department officers. Through prompt reporting of criminal activity, and clear concise reports, Matthew's efforts helped WSU close many robbery, narcotics and homicide cases.

Interviewer

Abstract

This is an oral history interview with Michael Zani, a former Detroit Police Department officer and current neighborhood patrolman in Midtown for Del Ray Security. Zani discusses his work with the DPD, detailing his experiences as a training officer, plainclothes officer, and narcotics enforcement specialist. He discusses his experience as part of a federal civil rights probe and indictment and his being exonerated of all charges, as well as his subsequent exit from the DPD. He talks about his time as a neighborhood patrolman and his involvement in the revitalization of the Midtown area of Detroit through working in concert with the DPD and Wayne State University's Police Department. Throughout the interview he offers insight into police procedures, developing informant networks, and other aspects of public and private security work.

Restrictions

None

Original Format

Transcription

Policing Detroit Oral History Project

Walter P. Reuther Library

Wayne State University

Detroit, MI

Transcript of interview conducted November 24, 2014 with: Matthew Zani,
Detroit, Michigan

By: Ryan Strobe

STROBE: This is an oral history interview with Matthew Zani, done for the Midtown Policing collection of the Reuther Library. Can we start with your full name and your birth date?

ZANI: Matthew Michael Zani, 6-28 of 1966.

STROBE: How did you come to be a police officer with the Detroit Police Department?

ZANI: The story starts back sort of in the eighties. I used to do a lot of bouncing in a lot of bars and my parents looked at me and said “you know, this really isn’t what you should be doing, you should be doing something else with your life.” My mother just said to me on a whim “why don’t you try being a police officer?” I said that I never really gave it much thought but, you know what, I’ll put it to good use and I’ll think about it. So I was going to Macomb Community College and I applied for to go to their police academy. Because back then, this was in 1990-91, you could put yourself through a police academy. Now you actually have to be sponsored by a department, they won’t just let you pay for it out of pocket

yourself. I went through their little interview process and everything and I wound up going through their police academy. Everybody... most of the class was sponsored. I want to say there were like six of us that weren't sponsored. At the end of it we all started putting out applications everywhere. And this in 1991 when I graduated from it. Applications, took tests where there were massive... I mean one test I went to there were two thousand people testing for one position. The likelihood of your getting in was slim to none. Ultimately I looked at the guys in the class, and we're all talking around, they said "well, where do you think you're going to go" and I said "there's only one place I'm gonna go." They said "where's that?" and I said I'm going to Detroit. They said "what, are you crazy, you're not going to Detroit..." and there was some colorful scattered language in there... but I said that they're the only ones that are insane enough to hire me.

I had laughed about it and had put in an interest card with Detroit. I was working a construction job. Fast forward to 1993, I was married at the time, my first marriage... been married twice... but my first marriage, which lasted a very miniscule nine months, my wife sends a 911 page to me because pagers at the time were the thing, we didn't have cell phones, and I call her back and she says "someone from Detroit just called you and you need to call them." I was all the way out in Pontiac and had to find a payphone, bum change, and called the Detroit recruiting office. They said "Mr Zani?... I said "Yeah?" ... "Academy starts in two weeks and we have one spot available, do you want it?" ... I was like "yeah, I'm there." So I started the academy in, uh... my seniority date was 1-4 of '94. So January 4th of 1994 was when I started with the Detroit Police Department.

STROBE: So had you grown up in the area?

ZANI: I grew up, actually, on the East Coast in New Jersey. I transplanted out here because my father became vice president of F&M, the pharmaceutical chain, for their Human Resources, he was their Human Resources director, he was like C.O.O at the time. I came out here right after high school, that's when everything happened in 1984. He was like "I got a new job, moving the family to Michigan, what are your plans for school?" I said that "I really don't have plans for school right now." I was one of those guys that, uh, high school wasn't my thing and I was more into work than I was into school at the time. Just a slow starter is the best way to call me.

STROBE: So what sort of assignments did you have as a police officer in Detroit?

ZANI: In Detroit I started in uniform. My first assignment was to the 4th precinct in southwest Detroit and it was uniform patrol and I did that for a number of years. I wound up actually, after a couple years, I became so proficient with how I worked and the type of work I was doing on patrol, I was mostly a midnight guy, that my lieutenant said "hey, you know, they're starting this thing and it's called the Field Officer Training program." I said "what the hell is that?" and he said "that's where you would go to school through the academy and then you would come out and you would start training new recruits coming out of the academy." Because the department was in transition going from, like, when I came on most of the guys that taught me how to do the job had at least fifteen years on them. After a couple of years they were all transitioning out, retiring, different things, you know the old school guys were gone and it was all us young guys that were there that had two, three, four, maybe five or seven years on. They wanted someone to teach these kids how to do their job because the academy can only

teach you the knowledge as far as what it is in the book. What translates to the street is something entirely different than what your classroom, your academic process would be. It's just that you throw everything out, it's gone. The book is literally rewritten as soon as you graduate because they, the best way to put it is, you're taking shortcuts... you're still doing things legally... but you're taking shortcuts to complete your paperwork or you're taking shortcuts to get to the police run and different things like that. Your speed is kind of overlooked, where in the academy it's like "you will use your lights and sirens, you will stop at every intersection, you will make sure that your turn signal..." and, I'm sorry, I'm not going to lie, it just doesn't happen like that. If you get a run that there are kids stuck in a house and the house is on fire... yeah... I can remember doing 60, 75 miles an hour down the side street to get to a house. With cars parked on both sides.

STROBE: So this Field Training Officer program, it was veteran cops teaching...

ZANI: Yes, it was veteran cops teaching rookies. So I went through that and I came out after, it was like a two week course, came out of that and started teaching new recruits. I was assigned, I didn't have a regular partner anymore, I got a new fresh academy graduate every six weeks I think it was. We'd rotate new rookies, if you want to call them that, and I would teach them what I knew and show them how to do things. And then they would rotate to someone else and they'd teach them some things and we would grade them. It's just like teaching a class actually. You'd give them tests. One of my favorites was "close your eyes."

STROBE: What do you mean by that?

ZANI: I would start driving and I would say “close your eyes.” They would say “What?” and I would say “just do me a favor, I want to see how well you’re paying attention to your sense of direction. Close your eyes, look around right now, now close your eyes.” Then I’d drive. I would make a left, a right, a left, a right, and say “Okay, open your eyes.” Stop the car and be like “I just got shot. Where are we? What’s our direction?” You may not see street signs but you would at least know you are North or West of your last location by X many streets because I had to make turns. People still talk about it. Girls that I trained would say “I still remember when you made me shut my eyes and it was kind of cool.” I was like “that’s the only way you were going to learn.”

STROBE: So you feel this was a productive program?

ZANI: Yes, it was a productive program because the people that I taught... they actually lived. There’s a lot of death from not doing what you’re supposed to do. And that’s usually what accounts for most officer deaths is they made a mistake, they didn’t pay attention, they rushed, they got lazy, and someone took advantage of it.

STROBE: So after being a part of this program, and teaching the rookies, where did you go on in the police department to?

ZANI: While I was doing that I was in court one day and Robert Dunlap, who became assistant chief of the Detroit Police Department, he was a sergeant at the time, and he said “hey, you’re kind of a go-getter.” I said “Who are you?” He goes “I work in Special Operations at number four,” and I said “Funny, I’ve never seen you.” He goes “Oh, I work the day shift.” So I would never see him because he works eleven to seven and I work midnight to eight in the morning. So he doesn’t

start until three or four hours after I get off work. I said "What's going on?" and he said "I'm taking a plum assignment over at Gang Squad. I want you to come over and I want you to be part of this unit called the Gang Specialist Unit." I said "my knowledge of gangs is limited to my contact..." and he goes "No, no, no... no problem. What we're doing is targeted enforcement in the 4th precinct and in the 9th precinct over on the east side. And you're going to take guys from Gang Squad and show them how to do enforcement in southwest Detroit. Because Gang Squad, or at the time I forget what their name was, they go through so many changes, they were city-wide so they really never... they were kind of like a shotgun. Shoot it out and whatever they hit they'd take in. But they didn't really know each individual neighborhood. They had to rely on people like me, who had worked in southwest Detroit and the 4th precinct for the past four years. So I knew every street, I knew every vacant lot, you know, all the places people would run and all the places people would hide. Hot spots, you know, just different things. I knew where everything was in that precinct. So you would rely on me to get you where you wanted to go. Sort of like a guide in some way. They were still, they were competent officers, it's just they needed a little help to get around.

So ultimately I wound up doing that, and all I got was dope. But it was all gang related dope. See the whole premise was it was a federal grant. You were doing gang enforcement and you were there to target gang members for guns and narcotics, home invasions, any type of felony crime and even misdemeanors. You'd want their information, take their pictures, write down any gang tattoos they had. So you got to meet a lot of interesting people over the course of the assignment, is the best way to put it.

STROBE: And by dope you mean specifically...

ZANI: Crack cocaine, heroin, powder cocaine, marijuana, some pills but mostly crack cocaine. Crack and heroine were really big and probably still are, but they were huge and so it was like shooting fish in a barrel. Like everybody, everywhere had cocaine. It was just one of those things.

During the course of it there's one little funny story I'll tell you that came out of it. I had a lieutenant that was... he was a little hard and on us as far as he didn't want to believe that we could be doing this above board. That we could actually be getting narcotics that easily. Because I would literally, there were three crews, there was my crew with me and one guy on it and there were two other crews with two guys on each car, so there would be three cars running, six guys total on our shift. We'd work days and afternoons and sometimes midnights. And I would literally make sure that every car got a dope case. I'd take them sometimes and be like "go over there, you go over there, the guy's going to run out of the building, and when he runs out the building you grab him." And they would be like "oh..." and sure enough he'd have narcotics on him. It's like it's so easy. So somehow or another this lieutenant, he was upset and he was like "you know, I can't believe you're getting narcotics like this. You guys gotta be doing something that's not quite kosher or something." And I said "Lieutenant, any time you want, ride with me. Come with me whenever you want. You don't have to specify... you can surprise me." He was like "ah..." and gives me the mouth a bit. I said "whatever, dude" and I walked away. So about two weeks later, it's like four-thirty, we were working nine to five, it was four-thirty in the afternoon and I'm coming in from tidying things up at the base and he says "come on, let's go." I said

“what are you talking about?” and he says “you said whenever I want to” and I said “okay, dude, whatever you want, whatever you want, Lieu.” So it was me, my partner at the time was Orlando Avicella, and I take him down off of Michigan Avenue and I park on a street called Turns. And we walk over to the next block, I can’t remember what the next street over was, it might have been Spring Wells, but whatever it was there was a very active corner house one block southeast of that corner. So I said “let’s get out of the car,” and he’s like “what are you doing?” and I say “shhh... don’t say a word, don’t say a word, just follow me.” So we’re walking in a line, it’s me in the lead, it’s my lieutenant... it was Scott Kohls, nicknamed “Beef...” I think he’s passed now, rest his soul... but he’s walking behind me and Orlando’s behind him. I look and I’m waiting and I hear voices and I hear this guy and he’s cursing this chick out. He’s like “whatever, I ain’t frontin’ you shit,” blah blah blah, all this stuff and the chick’s going “Oh come on, I’m good for it...” and I’m like “oh, this is perfect.” So I just run up and I faceplant the guy, I drop him right down to the ground, don’t even ask any questions, I just drop him and sweep his legs and throw him on the ground. I go “Lieutenant, check his hand, check his hand.” He had a sack of crack cocaine in it. My lieutenant was so mad. I said “hey, lieutenant, you know, looking at my clock here, it’s like almost five o’clock, you know what this means?” He goes “what?” and I said “well, you and I both get overtime.” He goes “what?” and I said “you recovered it, I spotted it, we both have to go to Narcotics now, thank you.” I started looking at my watch. He was so damn mad at me, he turned so red, so I was like “dude, what’s wrong?” and he goes “Oh hell no, Orlando you recovered it” and I said “oh, so you’d better write a PCR that you let Orlando transfer your dope to Narcotics.” He goes “okay, I’ll do it” and I said “alright, just has to be in our package when we go

down.” Because you can’t break the chain of custody. But I wanted him to have to do the recovery. It was like I couldn’t have set it up better if I had set it up. That’s how easy it was to get narcotics in the 4th precinct at the time, you could go anywhere and get it.

STROBE: So it was just rampant?

ZANI: Rampant. So I leave and my next rotation would be... I actually transfer to Gang Squad permanently and they become the Narcotics Special Enforcement Section. Under that I work city-wide and I wore plainclothes of course. And I did enforcement all over the city, and really my whole schtick, my niche, was narcotics. It wasn’t guns. If I got guns I was pleasantly surprised. But for me to get dope, I mean, guys would come to me and they’d be like “we want to get some dope,” and I’d be like “why are you looking at me?” and they’d be like “you’re like our good luck charm, take us somewhere.” And I’d be like “really, I have to take you somewhere to get dope in the city? Can’t you find dope on your own?”

STROBE: Do you think that’s because drugs were more prevalent than guns at that time, or were other people finding guns?

ZANI: There was a crew, they were two guys, and they were great. They were getting like two or three guns today. And I was like “how the hell are you doing that?” and they’re like “well, you know, you’re just looking for the right thing.” I said “well you guys are really, you guys are amazing because me finding a gun is like a needle in a haystack for me. But point me in the right direction, I’m your dope guy all day long, I’ll find it all over the place.”

STROBE: So when you went to other sections of the city would you then get, essentially, a guide cop to take you around the area or did you learn the areas yourself?

ZANI: What we would do is we would go into, and it was a wonderful tool that they had back then, it was called the narcotic complaint book. Every precinct had one. Where you, if you lived in the 9th precinct, would call and be like “there’s guys that are selling drugs, they’re right behind my house” and you know, whatever. So they’d list the information in the narcotic complaint book. Then they’d send it to Narcotics. Narcotics was so overrun, the actual Narcotics unit with the raid vans and everything, was so overrun with doing raids, because they were assigned to do a minimum of three doors a day. Hitting three doors a day, every day you work, is a lot of work for a Narcotics crew. So ultimately I’d go through the narcotic complaint book and I’d look for the freshest complaints. And I’d take the narcotic complaint book, go over to the copier, burn myself a copy, put it in the car, and we’d go drive around. There was a place in the 9th precinct, this little (unintelligible) at Gunston and Gratiot, there’s a street called Christie that runs right behind the 9th precinct and it runs right into Gunston. Just off the corner of Gunston and Christie, literally within line of sight of the 9th precinct. Dope all day long. I used to go over there and hit that place every time I went into the 9th precinct. They were like “damn...” and I was like “what’s wrong, you got hit again by me? Why don’t you learn to not be so stupid, stop selling dope and we wouldn’t have this problem?” And they would be like “(unintelligible)”, you know, the mouth and everything like that. So I was just like “whatever...” and that’s what I’d do. I’d just go to different, and every precinct had one of those, they had a narcotic complaint book, so I would go find the

information and if I didn't know, like I didn't know the 6th precinct over on the northwest side or the 12th precinct, but I would go get their narcotic complaint book and I would just find the street and find the address and wait and see if there was any activity. If there was activity I'd take enforcement action. That's how I did a lot of my business when I went outside my comfort zone as far as areas I knew. Or I'd have someone take me around that knew the area. Because over time you do get to know it but mostly...

STROBE: At this time your rank would have been...

ZANI: Still a police officer. I never made it to sergeant. I tested for sergeant. I was denied... I was skipped over because subsequently I was federally indicted. That's another machination of this story. Gang Squad or Narcotics Special Enforcement Section gets downsized in 2001 and about twenty two of us get shipped back to precincts. I wind up over at the 3rd precinct instead of the 4th precinct. They abut one another, they're neighbors right at Junction... their line used to be Junction and Fort street all the way up to Michigan Avenue roughly. The number streets, like 23rd and everything, it continues on, but the general gist is it would run all the way back the old train station from there.

Wound up over there, back in uniform and out of plainclothes. And I get transferred down to their plainclothes unit, what they call their 30 Series unit. I was working what they call non-fatal shooting packages. Where anything that didn't wind up at homicide, let's say someone just got shot and they lived as opposed to dying, would wind up back at the precinct level. And they were so overrun with non-fatal shootings that they flipped them all to the 30 Series unit.

So they would go out and investigate, we'd get some closure rate on them, but that's basically what we were doing.

And then my partner and I got federally indicted along with 17 other people for violation of civil rights under color of law was the actual... that's a federal charge, the color of law thing. It's for law enforcement officers. Ultimately it was predicated upon the fact that there were a lot of drug dealers that were complaining, not that they got arrested, but they were arrested wrong. And I scratched my head and said "what are you talking about, arrested wrong?" In fact, when I first met my attorney, I was incarcerated by the federal government because they wanted me held with no bond, where was that... Sanilac County Jail. I was in there for six days and my attorney came out to see me. And he, I'd never met the guy before in my life, his name was Frank Eamon, he throws this federal indictment in front of me. He goes "before I even take this case, I gotta know right up front, did you do this?" I said "well, yes, but not the way it's spelled out here." The FBI and the U.S. Attorney's decided to, they must have majored in fairy tale 101, because there was a lot of colorful writing throughout the indictment as far as what we did as opposed to what our police reports said. Ultimately I told him "well yes, I arrested this person for a gun, which was rare, I arrested this person for dope, every one of these is dope, this person was dope and a gun" and I just went down the list. Myself and one other guy were allegedly the masterminds of this group of rogue cops that were going city-wide violating civil rights. And how they made the leap was that I myself worked midnights at number four and the other gentleman involved worked afternoons at number four. But then I left and went city-wide and then I, you know, like "All Hail Hydra" from the comics, we

spread out like snake heads and everything else and created other rogue units that did bad things.

So ultimately it comes to the trial... and it was so ridiculous at the trial level that the people who were there testifying against us first of all couldn't pick half of us out of the line of us sitting at the tables. Which was odd. The second thing that was really weird is that, and we kept telling them "you're doing this wrong," I told the feds when they asked me "you're barking up the wrong tree." I only had one conversation with them, that was right when I got arrested, they're like "well just tell us what happened" and I said "there's nothing to tell, you're doing this all wrong and you're going after the wrong people, but you'll find this out at the end. You're going to lose, I'm not mad at you but do what you do." I should have been mad at them, because my name is pretty much "mud" because of it but they had, they actually put people on the stand, that swore to them that... like one guy swore that I planted a gun on him, that he never committed armed robberies or anything like, and when I caught him he was trying to rob a Subway. Fast forward to this case going to trial in 2004, he doesn't even come up for trial because while he's awaiting testimony he gets caught by Lincoln Park after doing an armed robbery at the 7-11 on Outer Drive and then his girlfriend, his ex-girlfriend, comes in to court and testifies "I told Jason not to take that gun down to southwest Detroit." And they said "what gun are you talking about" and she goes "oh, the .45 with the maple handles" and they say "what?" and she said "oh yeah, he bought it from my cousin in Kentucky." That was the gun that I "planted" on Jason. So this is how ridiculous the case went. They couldn't stop laughing at it. They polled the jury after they came back and said everybody's not guilty on all counts. I remember the U.S. Attorney and FBI agents were like "well tell us why

did you do that? Why did you believe them over us?” They said “your witnesses were scary; they’re the same people who hold down our neighborhoods all the time. And they weren’t credible, they lied.”

Your fiancé is in the medical field, not to bring her into it, but have you ever heard of a baby being born without a rectum?

STROBE: No...

ZANI: That’s walking around without a bag. Without a colostomy bag, let’s put it that way. Because one girl who opened up a drug house on Turns, which was a pretty hot street at the time, they way she got the rental property was she went to... and he’s the Wayne County Treasurer now, I forget what his name is... but he had this rental property on Turns. She showed up in a nurse’s outfit with a little boy and she said “yeah I’m looking for a place to rent, I don’t know if I can afford it, but you know he has special needs.” And this landlord says “if you don’t mind me asking, what’s his special needs? Do I need to put in a handicap ramp?” Cute little boy and everything. She says “Oh, no, he was born without a rectum.” The funny thing is she doesn’t have a son and she’s never been a nurse. So do you see the ridiculousness... and these were the witnesses that the federal government was putting up as straight arrows and honest Johns that were just framed by career criminal cops that were out to do rogue things and just clean up the street by any means necessary. Now they never accused us of stealing money, they just accused us of planting drugs on drug dealers.

STROBE: So out of this case there was...

ZANI: Zero conviction for... the only people who got convicted, and I feel very sorry for her, was a young girl who had very little time on the job, she had a new baby, but she did a narcotics arrest with me and my partner. The FBI was on her so tough to turn her story and say something different, what they wanted her to say, that she finally cracked and told them "yeah, you're right, they planted dope on him, they did this that and the other thing." She came in to court and no one believed her. They're like "no, you're absolutely lying. You're one hundred percent lying." She took a conviction, a misdemeanor conviction. A guy who was actually, we had one rogue cop in the group, he actually had a couple rental properties in southwest Detroit and over on the east side. He was letting drug dealers sell dope out of his places and when Narcotics would come into the 4th precinct to raid they would tell him "hey, you know, we're going to go over and hit your building." And it's funny how every time they went to his building no one was there. They'd hit a dry hole every time because he was telling them. So they got him on a wire because he threatened one of his drug dealer friends saying "you know, I could have you killed." I looked at him and said "really, dude? Did you really threaten to have someone killed? You are stuck on stupid. But good luck with your life, because you're done." And he was ultimately, he got convicted and there was a third guy who got convicted because he had a case file probably about three feet thick and they just came in and said "hey, we want to know about this case over here, tell us what happened" and he said "oh yeah, they all did it wrong." Came into court and he was just as unbelievable as the drug dealers that he was helping protect. So there were three people out of seventeen that took convictions. Fourteen did not, were acquitted. And that's the way that cookie rolled out.

My career with Detroit at that point was pretty much toast because what they did was they took one of... the department, after I was acquitted, took one of the cases, and it was a simple error of a mis-transcribed number, an arrival time at a location for an arrest, and it wasn't even my transcription, it was my partner's, he wrote on our log that you have to turn in that we arrived in an areas at thus and such a time and that's when the time of arrest was. When actually we arrived at, the easy way to explain it, our arrival time was 5:15 or whatever time it was on the sheet but the time of arrest didn't occur until like 5:30 and then there was a long carry-out where we had to explain everything. And he wrote all that correctly, he just put the wrong time down for the actual time of arrest. He had put it down at the start when we first arrived over on the far west side, he put down that that was our time of arrest, so the department said "you falsified your log sheet, you're fired." And I said "what? This wouldn't be like sour grapes or anything because I was acquitted and you would have had to promote me because I was next in line to make sergeant at the time the trial started?" They said "oh no, we'd never do anything like that."

STROBE: So after you were fired from the police department what did you go on to do?

ZANI: I went into private security and I was working for a couple of guys that used to be partners of mine at number four. One of them being Rudy Garcia who had a company called Del Ray Security. He tells me, I was doing a couple different little construction sites and stuff for him, he goes "you know, I'd like to put you down around Wayne State." I said "I don't know anything about Wayne State." I mean I did some work right outside there, there's an apartment building off the corner of

2nd and Warren that has those raised columns that you could walk in underneath, I can't think of the name of the building right now off the top of my head, where I got a guy for selling guns out of there to kids over at the Magic Stick. He would go pilfer his wares over at the Magic Stick, selling twenty-fives. I said "yeah, I know something about the area but I don't know much," and he said "well just go down there, just a neighborhood patrol." I said "okay, neighborhood patrol." I said "what do you want me to do?" and he said "well, you have a blinking light on the top of your car and you drive around, park for like a half an hour, then move and park again. You just want to be a visible presence."

So I'm sitting there, and I'm looking around, and my dope nose is going. I'm sitting there and I'm like... so I call Rudy up. I said "Hey Rudy, what do you want me, on this little report you have me doing for this neighborhood group..." at the time I think it was called the North Cass Community Development Group and then they changed it to Midtown, it was all these business owners and residents of the Midtown area... I said "what do you want me to do with this report and this information?" and he said "well, write down whatever you want to write down." I was like "really?" and he said "yeah, go ahead."

So I start writing down everything I'm seeing because at the time, literally, this is 2005 because I probably have been doing this now for almost ten years and things have changed dramatically, I want to say it was 2005 when I start doing this here. I'm writing down these plate numbers of these vehicles that just keep making loops through the neighborhood. I mean they're driving around like they're going through a McDonald's drive-through. I'm like "what the hell is going on... this is crazy over here. Wow, I didn't realize it was like this." Because, ultimately, you

may look at it just cars driving around like any lay person would say, but the problem is that they're driving around and they're stopping in the middle of the street. And they'd make another pass and they'd go someplace else but they're always making a continuous loop. And they would always hit, they'd go 2nd North, then they'd go Prentiss west, then they'd go South on 3rd, then they'd cut through either on Willis or Alexandrine, come up to 2nd, keep making loops through. Because all throughout the area, nothing but homeless people and vagrants. All over the place. Back in 2005 a lot of homeless and vagrants, and, oh yeah, Wayne State Students that like to dip into pharmaceuticals as well... so ultimately they would make all these stops.

STROBE: They would be looking for customers.

ZANI: Yes, that's what they were doing. They were selling openly, in broad daylight, from their car. They would stop in the middle of 2nd Avenue, which was a one-way at the time, so you would have cars going on both sides and they'd be dealing out their window. They'd deal in front of Mario's, they'd deal in front of the Traffic Jam, and they'd deal in front of the Tomboy Market. The Tomboy Market was notorious, it just recently finally closed, but they'd sell in front of there all day long. The park at 2nd and Selden. Just blowing up with dope. Calumet Townhouses across 3rd that run from Calumet and 3rd going north to Forrest, basically, and Lodge Service Drive, it's that little bound area. Shootings, murders, dope dealing. Stolen cars, carjackings, gangs of kids running up and down the street carjacking people, robbing people. It was crazy. So this is my first, I'm doing this thing for Rudy, this is probably my first month. Rudy calls me up and goes "hey, you did such a good job, can you type that report up? What you wrote out?"

Because I would hand him just hand-written reports at the end of the week. He said "I'm going to give it back to you, can you type it up?" I said "why?" and he goes "well, the Midtown Group is so impressed with you they'd like you to do a presentation." I said "okay, I'll do a presentation."

So I go to this meeting and Scott Lowell's there, Kim Schroeder's there, Bill Marsh is there from the neighborhood, Ken Davies from the neighborhood, just a bunch of people from the neighborhood are at this meeting. There are probably forty or fifty people in the audience, and it's at Mario's. A commander from the 13th precinct comes in and I said "hey Commander, how're you doing?" and he goes "good, how are you?" and I said "good, have you had a chance to read my report?" and he goes "oh, no, I'm good" and I said "okay, alright." Because at this point I have no love for Detroit but I wasn't trying... I didn't want him to take a pie in the face. I wanted him to be prepared. So he gets up there and does his spiel, and he goes "I just want to let you all know that crime is down in your area. There's no narcotics issues" and something else and something else. And I'm just sitting there and going "you are the biggest dumbass I've ever seen in my life." He was a nice guy but he absolutely put his foot in his mouth because what he didn't know was that everybody in that room had read my report. And they were looking at him, it was kind of like when Daffy Duck takes the stage in the old Bugs Bunny movies. Crickets, that's all you could hear. They go "we'd like to hear from our local security officer."

So I get up there and I'm like "well, Commander, respectfully I just have to tell you that you probably should have read my report before you spoke, but I just want to let you know that maybe you might want to take some notes on this." And I

rattled off, straight from memory, plate numbers and vehicle descriptions. That's how bad it was, because I knew them just right off the top of my head. All these vehicles are selling narcotics, they're selling narcotics here and they're selling narcotics there. You have an active dope house at 459 Prentiss, you've got an active dope house at 4962 2nd, you've got an active dope house over here at the Beethoven. Which has been rehabbed now because Scott Lowell bought it and re-did it and stuff like that. But back then it was like the Beethoven at the corner of Prentiss and 3rd, if you've ever seen the movie New Jack City, it was The Carter. And so was 4962 2nd right at Alexandrine. I think it was called the Century building or something like that. Because you could go in there, you could get your drugs, you could get a prostitute, and they'd let you a room so you could smoke it, use it, whatever you're going to do. I mean it was insane the amount of narcotics that was flowing throughout the area. So ultimately that Commander looks like he has egg on his face and he's a little ticked at me. I said "I warned you before you got up there sir..." and he says "you used to be on the job" and I said "yeah, I used to be on the job." He said "because yeah, only someone like you could speak like that and know all that stuff" and I said "yeah, you might want to do some different things." And I advised him on where he should position his men.

Now at the time Wayne State was sending Chief Holt, he would show up intermittently at different meetings. Well he showed up at a couple of these meeting and what he kept hearing was... now see, because his assignment for his troops for Wayne State was that they would respond to any criminal activity that was happening on Wayne State's campus... now this may have been unwritten but this is what I took it to be... was that they were responding to anything that took place on Wayne State's campus and anything that was occurring at their off-

campus housing that they would respond to. But they really weren't going in to the neighborhoods so to speak. They would only go to that location and then come back. Everything else that happened, they had blinders on. Between, you know, if they had some off-campus housing down on, let's just say, down on Prentiss between 2nd and 3rd. They'd only respond to that location. They'd go in there, they'd do what they had to do and then they'd leave and then go back into patrolling Wayne State University property. But they wouldn't take any enforcement action in the street.

So after a while, I don't know if it was the fourth or fifth meeting, Chief Holt said "You know what, start sending me your reports. Directly to me. And I'm going to give them to my guys and I'm going to put you in touch with the street supervisor that I have. I want them to work with you. I want you call Wayne State if you ever see anything. If you see anything we're going to respond. And if anybody gives you any lip, and tells you that they're not going to respond, you let me know immediately and there will be hell to pay." I said "well thank you, sir, I can appreciate that." He goes "this is ridiculous, I'm going to start having my guys go out and do enforcement in the street."

STROBE: Because Wayne State has its own police department and Detroit has its various precincts and...

ZANI: Yes, but ultimately they overlap each other in the Wayne State area. Because you had 13 which used to be here on Woodward and Kirby or something like that... no, farther than that, my mind's drifting... but ultimately they would overlap one another. But he said "you know, this is ridiculous" because you wouldn't see a Detroit car in all the, literally from... because my area of patrol

initially was from Selden north to Warren, from Cass over to the Lodge. I could go, at that time I was running a five-hour shift five days a week, literally would see no Detroit police car for the entire week. They wouldn't even drive through the area. That's why everything was happening here.

So, ultimately, Chief Holt gets his officers to start coming down into the area, and I was working with a guy who actually lived, he was a lieutenant, and he lived over right next to the Bronx Bar. His name was Ty O'Mara. He was a lieutenant and he worked strictly midnights. And I got him into various things. I called him, I caught a crew that was doing police impersonation and pulling people over and robbing them. Wound up taking care of a homicide that occurred down at 3962 2nd, at 2nd and Selden in the vacant field with a girl who came out with her boyfriend, came out of the crack house. She wanted more money for dope and he said "no, you're crazy," she pulls out a little .22 and shoots him and leaves him there in the field, runs in all freaked out because she just killed him and gives the gun to the dope dealer that's running the dope house there. I'm driving north and I don't see the body in the field because it's real tall and overgrown, but I see my guy in there, and his street name was... man, I can't think of his real name now... I looked at him and said "hey, everything alright?" He goes "oh yeah, everything's great," literally this must have just happened and I missed it because I was over a couple blocks or whatever. And he was acting all crazy. So the next day I saw his wife, who was also a drug dealer and she used to sell at 2nd and Selden in the park, I say "what's going on with your boy there?" She says "he's got to talk to you, you need to call." I'm like "I need to talk to him, what the hell?" so I said "alright, whatever." So I call him, and I mask my number, and I said "hey man, what's going on?" Because he felt like he actually felt like he owed me a debt because he

was one of the people that got robbed by the police impersonators. They were going to kill him. So he goes “listen, I got this girl, I got the gun, I got everything, I got her bloody clothes.” I said “you have what?” and he goes “that homicide that happened” and I said “what homicide?” and he goes “the one, the body in the field.”

STROBE: So he essentially had all the evidence right there.

ZANI: Right. So I call Wayne State, I call my buddies at Wayne State, and I said “hey, is there a body in the field over there? They said “how do you know, we just found it...” and I said “because I’ve got the guy who’s got the murder weapon, he knows where the girl is that did it and everything else.” So I called Detroit Homicide, because they had the case, and the chick on the phone is like “how do you know all this?” I said “because I know the drug dealer who’s holding all the evidence for you, do you want it? And do you want the person who did it?” She says “well hell yeah.” I said “well come out here and meet me and take some information down or I’ll come down to see you.” She said “oh no, I’m on my way.” So I gave her a statement, wound up hooking the drug dealer up with Homicide, he turned over all the evidence and ultimately Wayne State caught the female that did it. They gave him the accolades of going to get her out of the apartment building she was in.

STROBE: So while you’re driving around you essentially have informants or you have people that you see regularly who will tell you things?

ZANI: Yes, that’s one thing that I did while I was on the job that I didn’t really touch on. But for some reason I have a knack for endearing myself to the sketchier crowd, if you could call it that, in the sense that I... over the years, I used

to smoke, I don't smoke anymore, but back when I smoked I was not opposed to giving someone a cigarette. I was not opposed to giving someone a bottle of water, a piece of chewing gum, whatever, giving them a piece of candy or something like that if I had it in my bag. I would be like "yeah, you want a lollipop or something, sure" whatever it was. If you're nice to people, especially people who are not treated with too much respect by society in general, they tend to endear themselves to you or you become endeared to them, however you want to say it. And they like you and they'll tell you things. And ultimately you can, if you're in a position to help them out, you can as far as like, when I was on the job, I would tell every prostitute I saw that they were they were the most beautiful girl I'd ever seen in my life in some form or another. I'd tell them like "you know, if I wasn't working you and I would hook up for real." I had a couple of them tell me "I'll quit drugs if you start dating me" and I said "well you quit drugs first and I'll date you." It was stuff like that, and it was also "hey, you want a cup of coffee, I'm headed up to get some... you want a cigarette, have a cigarette..." so then when someone beat them up, stole from them, or ripped them off, who would they tell? They'd tell me. They'd be like "so and so over here, so and so over there did this that and the other thing."

The case that I was talking about with you before, one of the big cases that I lost which was a kilo of cocaine, I got that information from a female that I saw. I'd never seen her before in my life. I saw her walking southbound on Livernois from Michigan Ave. with like a forlorn look on her face, so I stopped my scout car. My partner was like "what are you trying to pick up a hooker?" and I said "well, yeah, if I can, ha ha, whatever." I got out and I said "hey listen, you look like something happened to you." She said "well, yeah" and I said "here's my card, if ever

anything goes crazy for you call me and let me know.” She goes “you’ll really take care of me?” and I said “sure I’ll take care of you, whatever you need, I’ll help you out any way that I can.” She said “well, there’s a guy who lives over on 30th, his nickname is Scar and he sells thirty dollar rocks.” And that’s how I got on to this guy named Scar, whose real name is Charles Marcellus, that I caught with a kilo of cocaine.

But back into Midtown, so I’m not getting too far out of the loop on this, but that’s what I did. I would endear myself to all these street people out here. Because I would talk to them, when they were drunk I’d pull them out of the middle of the street. When they weren’t drunk, if I had extra booze in my car, like I got rid of, you know how everybody collects booze after weddings, I had a bunch of booze in my car. And one of the ways that I kind of influenced my way into their lives was I’d be like “hey, it’s Christmas time, here, Merry Christmas.” Give them some old cheap booze or whatever. They were going to drink anyway. I would be like “you just can’t drink in front of the business.” I would shoo them away from all the businesses. I would be like “no panhandling, come on, not over here, you gotta go over there, that’s one of the businesses that I don’t do. The businesses that I do, like the Bronx Bar and stuff like that, you’re not panhandling in front of it.” They’d be like “alright, alright, cool, we respect you for that.” They’d tell me stuff too like “hey, this guy over here he just stole some stuff, this house over here is a fence house” and I’d take all that information and I’d report it to Wayne State.

STROBE: So would you say... is it easier to develop a rapport with people on the street since you are not an active cop who can arrest them?

ZANI: Hmmmm... I had the same ability as a police officer. The only difference is that now I just used it in a different manner. I'd report instead of taking enforcement. The thing that appealed to them when I was on the job is that they knew that, if they told me, some heads were going to roll on the backend of their information. They were like "oh yeah, I got that guy who just threw me out of a car" or, you know, whatever it was. There was always... that's how street people think. They're thinking revenge, there's a motive for them to tell you. A lot of them will tell you things just because they like you and they're friends with you and they don't like seeing... like there's one guy in the neighborhood and he's still around, I'm not going to mention his name, but ultimately he liked the fact that he could actually... because he's a homeless guy but he wasn't on the criminal end of the homeless, he's just homeless by choice and likes what he does... he liked the fact that when I was out there patrolling he wouldn't get messed with too much and different stuff. So he'd tell me "anytime you need any information you just let me know." And I said "oh, good to know, sounds good." So a couple of times I tagged him for some information and then, you know what the funny thing was, immediately after he told me stuff he was getting stretched by the police. They'd put him on the hood. He said "man, every time I talk to you someone's putting me on the hood of a car." I said "that's just because there's something going on in the area and they think that you either match the description or whatever it is." He'd say "that's what they told me." I'd say "well, you know, hey, I'm sorry, you can't help them, they're going to look." And I said "ultimately they're going to get to know you." And I shooed them away a couple of times saying "no, that guy's alright, he's someone I talk to."

So that's the way it sort of... it started off slow and it developed that way. Wayne State at that point takes off in regard to... they start writing grants and they start getting more officers. And then what they do is they either reestablish or establish a CAT unit, which is a Crime Abatement Team, which would be what Detroit would have as a 30 series, a plainclothes unit. It goes out into the neighborhoods and takes active enforcement against drug dealers, car thieves, home invasion crews, armed robbery crews, things of that nature. And they develop through... some of their guys are really, really good and now are assigned out to Detroit for their auto theft unit, Narcotics, things like that, but they're very good at what they do and they've developed quite a database of information on all the local characters in the area. And they've also gotten money for bait cars and surveillance vehicles...

STROBE: A bait car would be...

ZANI: A bait car would be a vehicle that is set up for you to steal but ultimately when you break into it they either jump on you for breaking into it or they let you try and take off in it and then they kill the vehicle electronically. And you're trapped inside. And then they arrest you for stealing a motor vehicle. But that's how it developed and what happens over time is, as Wayne State takes a more active role and there's more information shared, all of a sudden Detroit decides to come back to the table. They're like "well, you know, we're going to start patrolling the neighborhoods." I was like "well, it only took you like four years." But ultimately they come back into the picture a little bit, Wayne State comes into the picture, and guess what happens? All the drug dealers start moving south of Selden.

STROBE: Would you say there is now a fair amount of collaboration between the two?

ZANI: There's a ton of collaboration. I am not one to take credit for that collaboration but it would not be a stretch to say that I played a role in helping bring the two of them back to the table just through my aggressive reporting of everything that was going on in the neighborhood. Because literally if you looked at some of my work from the early years you wouldn't want to live down here. You'd be like "really, all this is going on?" And the neighbors, I mean there were good people that lived down here, but bad people outweighed the good people as far as they were doing all sorts of crazy stuff in the street all the times

As things... eventually the Beethoven gets shut down, gets taken over I think by the county and then it gets sold at auction, Scott buys it, he rehabs it... 3962 gets lost or gets sold at a loss to the owner and I think Scott Lowell owns that one too. And Sue Mosey, who's with the Midtown something... she's with the Midtown Development Corp or something like that, she has something to do with the all the neighborhoods out here... she got the park at 2nd and Selden set down. And had it fenced in and now there's no more prolific hanging out and homelessness going on there. There was a plot of land at the corner of 2nd and Willis that is now a garden, a community garden, people rent the little plots in there and...

STROBE: So with more enforcement the area just started regenerating...

ZANI: Everything started coming back and people started saying "oh, no more drug dealers, great." I'm sure there's still drug dealers down there but nothing like there were. Not even, it doesn't even hold a candle. I could count, this one guy Rob, would literally drive around... now I was there to drive around for five

hours... he would drive around for five hours and keep going. He'd be driving around eight, nine, ten hours making loops, just making loops. The same loop all the time. He would stop, go see some girls at 459 Prentiss, drop off some dope, then he'd shoot around just non-stop. I mean, literally, you'd just sit there and you'd watch him. And what happens is that, most of the people at these meetings, they start paying attention to the vehicles that I was dragging to them. They'd come to the meetings and be like "I saw that vehicle again." And I was like "oh, good, that's one I didn't see the other day. They'd say "yeah, they're over here now, or they're over there now" because they'd move a little bit. But a core group of them would just stay down in the Midtown area. So over time it just, I don't know, it flourished and it changed. So the streets got better.

STROBE: So as we get towards the end, I have to ask... what would you say you're most proud of from your career? Either in Midtown or during your days as a police officer.

ZANI: The thing that I would have to say I'm proudest about... I mean it's a twofold thing. On the department the thing that I was proudest of is that I absolutely... there wasn't one day, you know my reputation may be a little tarnished by the federal indictment, but ultimately anybody who knew me knew there wasn't one day I didn't come to work one hundred percent. No matter what. It was just all out all day. If you got in the car with me, and you were tired, you were going to regret your day. Because I would drag you kicking and screaming to everything I did. It didn't matter if you were like "man, can we take it easy today?" Oh no, I was full tilt all the time.

There's not any one incident that stands out with the department because there were just so many of them. I never put much thought behind awards or anything like that. I had some over the years and I never wore them. I just put all the ribbons and medals in a bag and left them alone. And my mother would say to me "why don't you wear that stuff?" and I'd say "because that's not what I'm about, the badge is all I need. All that other stuff is just gravy. It's gravy, I don't need anybody to see. Because then it looks like I'm a something. And I don't want them to know I'm anything. I want them to think I'm just some dumb guy wearing a uniform. That's going to be your weakness, because you're going to underestimate me and I'm going to get you." So that, for the department, would just be my work ethic.

For Midtown I just like the way it changed. Ultimately I liked seeing how things developed and changed over a period of time. Now I'm almost like, when I go out there and work, I'm like "wow, I have absolutely nothing to do." I literally drive around like "whoa, I remember when this place used to jump." I almost feel guilty. I'm driving around and I don't have anything to put on my sheet except that I checked these locations. That's what I'm proud of in the Midtown area. It's the fact that I got watch the change from prolific drugs and just crime throughout the area... to now you can, you know, not to say you still don't have to watch yourself, but not like you used to. Ten years ago that was a whole different world. Everything from Warren down was just crazy. I mean I had guys that were running bags of dope up on Wayne State's campus on bikes to sell backpacks full of weed. So ultimately that's what I'm proudest of. Just the fact that I think I helped change the area a bit.

STROBE: As the last question, what do you think the future of Midtown is? What would you like to see or where do you see it going?

ZANI: The future of Midtown...

STROBE: Or is there anything you would like to see more in the future?

ZANI: For Midtown I'd like to see the continued progress. I certainly hope now, with the fact that Detroit has come out of its bankruptcy, which affects Wayne State and everything else, and the Midtown area going forward... I'd like to see it continue to go forward and not falter and fall backwards in any way, shape or form. And I am noticing a steady progression of things. New restaurants opening up... trying to get an apartment down you're going to be pressed to do that because it's expensive and also there's not many available because they're almost... I think they're almost at one hundred percent capacity. When the development for the Forrest Arms gets done at Forrest and 2nd I guarantee you every one of those rooms is gone, including the penthouse. The same thing with the Elmore at 2nd and Alexandrine, when that thing gets done it'll be full.

You know you have the stadium moving in, but what tends to happen... have you been to Atlantic city ever... okay, Atlantic city, the boardwalk used to be, now I don't even know what it looks like, but back when it had the nice boardwalk and they brought casinos in everything looked great on the boardwalk. But you wouldn't want to go behind the boardwalk. Very bad. So ultimately with this area, even though they have this, they're going to develop the Red Wings stadium down the street, hopefully the neighborhood doesn't suffer behind it and just continues to prosper with the M-1 rail going forward and just keep moving north with the develop that's going on down here. That's what I'd like to see happen.

STROBE: Alright, well thank you very much for talking with me today.

ZANI: Sure, no problem. Anything.

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