

Is That Policeman on the Beat Sister Eleanor?

By JUDY EDINGER
(NC News Service)

Washington — (NC) — It's easier to join the D.C. Police Department than it is to enter the convent these days, according to a woman who has done both.

Sister Eleanor, or Officer Niedwick, doesn't look like either, except for a gold cross she wears on a chain around her neck and a very large handbag. The cross indicates she's a nun; the handbag, she says, is the only way you can spot a D.C. policewoman because they don't have uniforms.

She's been a Daughter of Wisdom since 1962, and last October was sworn in as a member of the police force. Dressed in a simple, hand-somely-sewn dress made from a chocolate brown burlap material, the petite, soft-spoken 25-year-old nun-cop looks more like a college girl.

Sister Eleanor, who assumed her new job in March upon completion of training, doesn't consider the situation so unusual.

Last August she came to Washington looking for a job as a nun in social work but was unable to find one. About the same time, the D.C. Police Department, in an all-out effort to crack down on rising crime in the nation's capital, had launched a massive recruiting campaign to swell the numbers of men (and women) on the force.

Sister Eleanor said in September she took the exam. She was quite surprised that she passed, and suddenly found herself faced with deciding whether to take the job.

Thinking she would benefit from the experience and expecting to be placed in the youth division, Sister Eleanor accepted the job. The usual character investigation was waived because of her status as a nun, she said, so she was sworn in a month later. Investigation of applicants usually takes about two months, she added.

Her training consisted of 12 credits in law at American University, which, she noted, was very useful. She also underwent extensive physical training, including aspects of self-defense through judo and karate. This, admitted the nun, was not her best subject. However, she feels she's never been in such good physical condition as she is now.

"They even taught us how to use the clubs," she said, almost not believing it herself.

Later she confided she had heard such terrible stories during training that "I was frightened to death and thought I'd be killed the first day on the job."

But, she added, "I'm one of the most protected women on the force." Even though stationed at the 10th precinct, located in the inner-city, she always travels with one or two men in the scout car. "I'm never alone, and I've never been in a situation where I was in danger." Nor does she anticipate such circumstances in the future.

Sister Eleanor's principal project has been visiting the area's 27 elementary schools to conduct a "rumor clinic" to help students understand the potential danger of a rumor, particularly in a time of disruption.

Her next project will be planning summer activities for the students when they are dismissed from school. She described the students as "mostly Negro, some Spanish and some white."

The Brooklyn-born nun entered the convent after high school graduation in 1962. She explained: "I wanted some way to serve in a different way, and to live a dedicated life—different from single or married life."

At 5 p.m. she arrives home at the convent where she attends Mass with seven others, all university students, and they have supper together. Sister Eleanor said she has no

particular hobbies, but does make her own clothes. "You can make three for the price of one" ready-made dress, she noted.

Sister Eleanor has to put up with teasing from the policemen she works with; but she obviously enjoys it. "They can't understand how I can turn my paycheck over to the community," she said, noting her salary is \$8,000 per year, plus overtime.

It was reported that Sister Eleanor was one of the top marksmen with a service revolver, in her rookie training school class of six policewomen. She confirmed this, even though she had never used a gun before that, and was afraid of it at first. "I thought it was going to shoot me," she laughed.

She really finds carrying a gun somewhat of a burden, because it makes her purse so

heavy. Her badge and other police identification add to the weight. She said she had a pair of handcuffs as part of her equipment; but keeps them at home because they would only make her purse heavier.

Yes, she carries "live" ammunition — which is why the purse is so heavy. Apparently, carrying her purse is the only thing she doesn't like about her new job. "It's so very heavy," she emphasized.

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