



Roll call for Officers Jim Tuite (left), Charles Hudack, Anthony Fusilli, Ray Cleary, and Gary Birkahn.



Lieutenant Gordon Urlacher (left) and Sergeant Anthony D'Angelo give assignments at roll call.



Officer Birkahn watches injury incurred with...

An Evening on P

5:20 p.m. Goodman 266, family trouble at

Officer Gary Birkahn turned patrol car 266 around and buzzed toward the site. He was patrolling a district within the Goodman area bounded by the city line on the north, Clifford Avenue on the south, Hudson Avenue on the west, and Portland Avenue on the east. Officer Birkahn described the area as predominantly middle class, with 10 per cent black, 70 per cent Puerto Rican, and a lot of elderly, Polish, Ukrainian, and Italian.

5:22 p.m. Officer Birkahn whipped off his sunglasses and put on his hat, in accord with Rochester Police Department dress code, and was out of the car and into the house.

5:35 p.m. Officer Birkahn returned to the car. A daughter had quarreled with her mother's boyfriend and somehow in the tussle the grandmother had been thrown from her wheelchair. The officer recorded the stop, called headquarters, and started cruising.

With sunglasses on again, Birkahn explained, "The violence that you see on television is really a very small percentage of police work. Most of our calls like this one require mediation and conciliation."

Gary, a graduate of SUC at Brockport with a degree in education, worked a year as a teacher and a year as a probation officer before joining the force five years ago. He described the policeman's role as basically one of educating the public. "I would say very roughly that 80 per cent of our calls are service calls and only 20 per cent crime.

"The police are a symbol of authority. When people have an immediate personal problem, the police are often the only ones they can call," Gary called police work "the king of social work."

The chance that a policeman might be killed in Rochester is small, according to Officer Birkahn, who reported that only one man has been killed in the past ten years. The possibility of being injured, however, is much greater. Birkahn has been injured three times by persons resisting arrest and bitten by dogs twice. Police, members of a semi-military organization, are trained in a special procedure to

use when force is required. First hands, then mace, then nightstick. A policeman uses his gun only when confronted with a deadly weapon, Officer Birkahn explained.

Only twice in five years has he needed to call for assistance. Policemen now carry portable partners, radios that they can take with them in case they need to call for help. Gary has participated in only a few high speed chases and perhaps a dozen pursuits on foot.

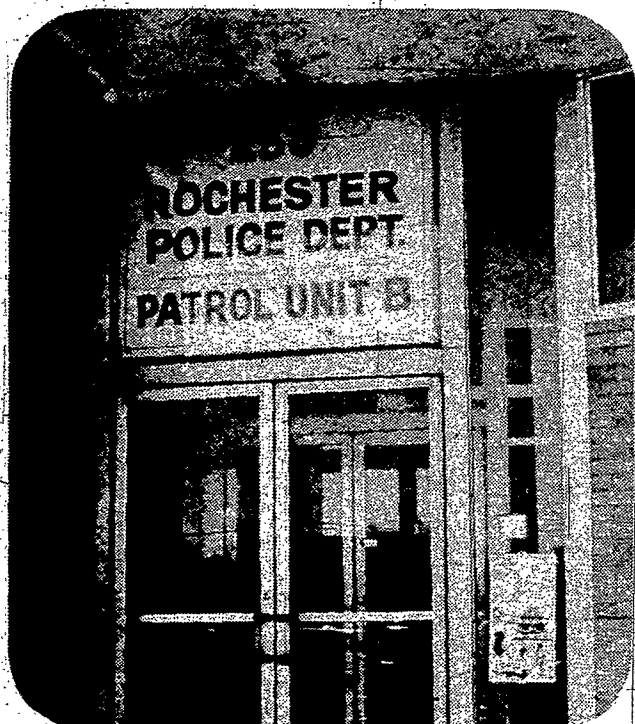
Working hours can pose problems for a policeman's private life. As a member of the third platoon, Officer Birkahn has spent the last five years working from 3 p.m. to 11 p.m. and sees his wife, a teacher, only two evenings a week and Saturdays and Sundays during the morning and early afternoon. "I think we have a fantastic relationship," Gary said. "If we had kids maybe it would be harder." Once out of every six weeks he has a weekend off.

6:05 p.m. A call on the radio requested that 266 keep a close eye on a house where a man had threatened to shoot someone that night. Officer Birkahn drove past the house, explaining that if he knew exactly where to find the address it might save crucial seconds should an emergency arise. He estimated that he would drive past the house a dozen times during the evening.

Officer Birkahn explained that while patrolling he will stop speeders and issue parking tickets, but if he is on his way to a job he sometimes has to let minor violations pass. He said that occasionally people see a policeman overlook minor infractions, don't realize he is answering a call, and complain that the police are not doing their job. Police have also been accused of sleeping in their cars when they are actually looking down to fill out reports.

6:15 p.m. Goodman 266, call your complaint department.

Officer Birkahn drove to the fire department to call. Catholic Family Center in Syracuse had called the Rochester Police to report that a 15-year-old girl, raped by a member of her family, was on a bus headed for Rochester. Her bus was expected at 7:30. Would Officer Birkahn pick her up and try to find a place for her to stay?



Rochester Police Department substation in the Goodman area.



Filling out reports is a big part of an officers job.



Officer Birkahn checks in with headquarters.



Through grill which separates seats in his job to

Text by Bonita Baldwin
Photos by Susan McKinney