NYC 9/11 Public Portal Document

Over and Dunne for Cop's Cop

It seems almost everyone in town expected Joseph Dunne to become the police commissioner — everyone except the mayor and the mayor-elect, both of whom had the last call.

After all, here was a police officer who looked as though he had stepped out of a tintype photo of a 19th-century cop — a strapping 6-foot, 4-inch man with a thick moustache and a dazzling record of achievement.

But when former Police Commissioner Howard Safir resigned last year and recommended that Dunne succeed him, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, to almost everyone's surprise, chose his former driver and bodyguard Bernard Kerik.

Dunne took that decision standing up.

"Whenever I see a Miss USA contest and they announce the runner-up, I will know just how she feels," he quipped, even though he was disappointed.



Dennis Duggan

Last week Dunne was once again the runner-up for a job considered to be the top job in American policing — a job once held by Theodore Roosevelt, whose gold shield now adorns the commissioner's office in One Police Plaza.

But mayor-elect Michael Bloomberg chose former Police Commissioner Ray Kelly for the job. Interestingly, it was Kelly who put Dunne into the limelight. In 1994, Kelly, who yesterday asked Dunne to stay on, promoted Dunne to deputy inspector.

That second snub convinced Dunne it was time to leave a 31-year career that he loved with passion, even though it almost cost him his life on Sept. 11.

On crutches with a torn Achilles heel suffered in a police volleyball game July 4, Dunne barely managed to escape the deluge of debris from the collapsed towers.

Like Kelly, Dunne's career began walking a beat in the roughhouse 75th Precinct in Brooklyn's East New York, where a T-shirt read, "You give us 22 minutes, we'll give you a homicide."

Dunne says he recalls vividly his first day as a rookie.

"At roll call I and a dozen or so rookies were given our posts," he said. "Mine was on Fulton Street and I didn't know where that was.

"They gave me a radio but no one told me how to call in and identify myself. I was in dread of something happening that day and I wouldn't be able to call for help," he said.

A few days later on the beat, Dunne said he heard a woman screaming.

"Police! Police!" she said.

Dunne ran to the young woman who said her grandmother had just attempted suicide.

"I ran up the stairs with her and saw an elderly woman lying in bed in a pool of thick blood. Her wrists had been cut and were dangling over the edge of the bed," Dunne said.

"I called the precinct and they said where are you? I didn't know and the young woman was hysterical. So I ran down the stairs and up the block to the intersection to find my location."

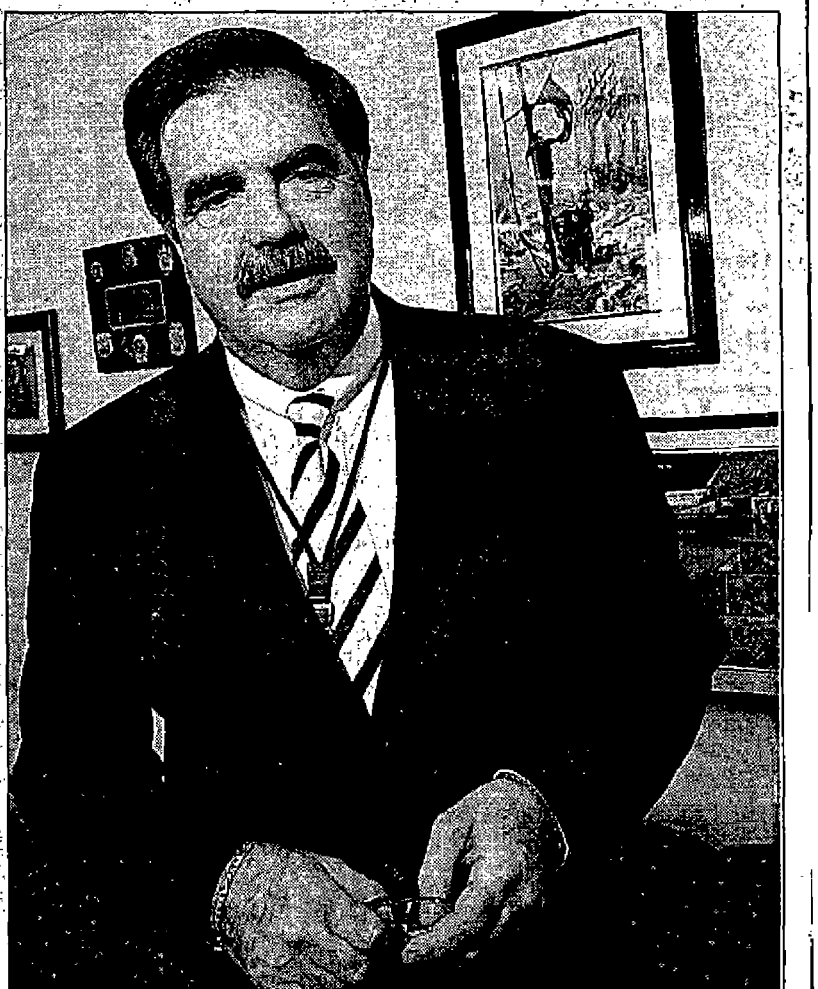
Dunne says he tells rookies today that story and he says, "I tell them always to know where you are."

Young Dunne, towering over most of his peers, was noticed from the start. In his book "NYPD: A City and Its Police," former police officer Thomas Repetto, co-author with James Lardner, describes Dunne as a "quick learner" who mastered each and every job as he rose through the ranks.

Dunne was tough but understanding, especially in the poor neighborhoods where he worked.

That's because he grew up poor, the son of an investigator for the Board of Education. He was one of five children, three boys and two girls. He slept in a bed with his brothers Thomas, a lawyer and lobbyist, and Eddie, who is a teacher and community activist.

"We called ourselves the Irish triplets," Tom said yesterday. "My brother had compassion for the poor."



Newsday Photo / Jiro Ose

Joseph P. Dunne, first deputy commissioner of the NYPD, in his office yesterday

"All they want is what we want," Joseph Dunne would tell Tom, "a good education and a chance in life."

I asked Dunne, 53, who resides in Whitestone with his wife, Barbara, and two grown daughters, how hard it was to quit the force.

"It was hard," he said. "But I thought about it and decided it was time to move on."

Dunne, a graduate of St. Francis College in Brooklyn, says he has received offers from the private and public sectors and he cautions me not to write off a return to his beloved Police Department the way Kelly has.

"The thing I am most proud of," he said, "is my reputation with the rank

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