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CSI:LA

Crime, Captured



To help keep the City safe, the LAPD Photography Unit documents some of humanity's worst behavior. The photographers stay positive and dedicated through it all.

— SEE PAGE 24

Alive: photo by Summy Lam

The LAPD Photographers (day watch) in the unit's production room at Piper Tech, top row, from left: Gary Glade, Photographer III; Robert Stichal, Photographer III; Ryszard Niscior, Photographer I; Chuck Siegler, Sr. Management Analyst I; Mark Mynhier, Sr. Photographer II, Club Member; Andy Millett, Photographer I; Peter Ferraro, Photographer III; and L'keva Harris, Photographer III, Club Member. Bottom: Garry Brod, Photographer III; Ellen Sahara, Sr. Clerk Typist; and Oshin Noubarian, Sr. Photographer II.



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LAPD

Crime, Captured



Photos by Summy Lam, Club Director of Marketing, and courtesy LAPD Photo Unit

■ **To help keep the City safe, the LAPD Photography Unit documents some of humanity's worst actions. The photographers stay positive and dedicated through it all.**



The logo of the LAPD Photography Unit, designed by M.C. Sallaberry, Photographer III, 8 years of City service.

Editor's Note:

The LAPD photos on these pages do not depict the entire reality of what LAPD Photographers see every day, but are the limit of what the *Alive!* editorial staff felt was appropriate for our readers. Again we thank the brave Photographers for their service in keeping the City safe.

Housed in new facilities in Piper Technical Center (with a small Valley branch in Van Nuys), the LAPD Photography Unit is responsible for photographic services to the LAPD and is staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The staff consists of 18 Photographer IIIs (field photographers), four Photo Is (lab work), four Sr. Photographers (supervisors), one Sr. Clerk Typist, one photographer dedicated to the Office of the Chief of Police, and one Sr. Management Analyst acting as Officer in Charge.

Field and Production Details

The Field Unit is responsible for forensic, crime scene, aerial, and evidentiary photography within the City of Los Angeles. The Production Detail is responsible for the printing and retention of all imagery produced by the LAPD. This detail also oversees the LYNX Photo Management System, which allows digital imagery to be rapidly accessed by investigating officers, detectives and court personnel.

In the first half of this year, the Unit responded to more than 1,800 crime scenes, completed more than 800 studio sessions and participated in more than 40 public affairs events. This translates to 5,400 orders, 56,000 images and 5,300 CDs/DVDs burned into case files.

Each case gets its own individual camera card; multiple cases are not loaded onto one card.

No image is ever deleted, in case a photographer is ever questioned in court why a photo that might have exonerated a defendant was deleted.

All the images are stored digitally on a 23 TB (terabyte) triple-redundant RAID server array housed within the City.

As part of the LYNX system, the LAPD Photo Unit supplies and manages 20 point and shoot cameras to each policing area, for officers to document minor incidents.

Criteria

Here's a general list of the kinds of events that the LAPD Photo Unit covers:

- all major crime scenes
- all bodies on the scene
- all crime scenes involving evidence, including tool marks, fingerprints, shoe prints, tire prints, etc. (anything that will be forensic)
- search warrants
- surveillance
- crime stings
- development of film/scanning of images that are found as part of an investigation
- officer-involved incidents
- claims against City property
- violent crimes against people
- reports of child and domestic abuse
- traffic accidents involving a fatality
- public affairs events involving the Chief of Police and/or the mayor

THE ALIVE! INTERVIEW

Satisfaction From a Tough Job

On Aug. 13, Club CEO John Hawkins and *Alive!* editor John Burnes interviewed three members of the LAPD Photography Unit – Mark Mynhier, Sr. Photographer II, 17 years of City service; Oshin Noubarian, Sr. Photographer II, 19 years; and Chuck Siegler, Sr. Management Analyst I. The interview took place in the Unit's conference room in Piper Tech. — Ed.

Thanks for joining us today. First, tell us a little bit of how you got to be an LAPD Photographer.

MARK MYNHIER: I was hired as a Photographer I after going through the process doing the in-house stuff. Then I became a Photographer III, a field photographer for a couple of years. A position opened up as a Sr. Photographer. I took the exam and I was promoted. I've been there most of my career.

What did you do before the City?

MARK: I was a combat photographer with the Air Force, working Joint Task Forces in Bosnia and the Gulf wars. My first project was the SR-71, TR-1 and U2 projects, doing high-altitude strategic reconnaissance back during the Cold War.

So you loaded and unloaded the camera equipment?

MARK: That's all done by machines because the camera weighs several hundred pounds. We took out the imagery, which was anywhere from one mile to two miles long, process it, and pull out selected prints for them to view. I was in Berlin when the wall fell, covering chunks of the wall.

Before the Air Force, were you interested in photography?

MARK: I picked up a camera when I was 11 years old. My father brought back cameras from Vietnam, and I've had a camera in my hand ever since. It's what I've always done.

I'm 14th-generation military.

Fourteenth generation?

MARK: Yes.

Put a year on that.

MARK: 1732.

In the United States?

MARK: Yes. And before that, in Holland.

That's unbelievable. Okay, how about you, Oshin?

OSHIN NOUBARIAN: Well, in 1986 I moved here from Paris, France. I've studied photography.

I picked up photography early. My dad told me, "If you do good this year, I'll get you whatever you want." I did really well, and I wanted a motorcycle. He said, "No way." So he got me a camera. I fell in love with taking pictures.

While I was studying photography, some of the classes I took used books that had some LAPD and NYPD photographs in them – crime scene photography. That really interested me. When I moved here, I saw an ad in the newspaper for the LAPD, and it rang a bell. I applied for it. One of the decisive factors for them to hire me was the fact that I had some background in the early stages of digital imaging, around 1988.

And how about your history, Chuck?

CHUCK SIEGLER: I've been with the City for just over 14 years now. I've been laboratory director for almost three. All of my time with the City has been with the Police Dept. I've worked administrative assignments from Records and Identification to being a project manager for Facilities Management Division, doing the Area Station renovations under the Prop Q bond program.

What initially drew me to the Technical Laboratory was the relocation project to move the unit out of Parker Center, which took far longer than expected. In the meantime, I've been the

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From left: Mark Mynhier, Oshin Noubarian and Chuck Siegler with John Hawkins and John Burnes.

Alive! Feature

CSI:LA

LAPD PHOTOGRAPHY UNIT: Crime & Evidence Documentation

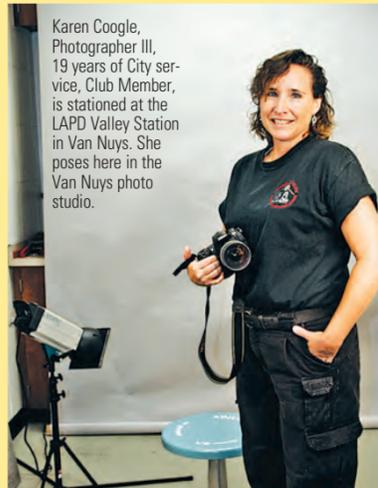


The LAPD Photography Unit's p.m. watch, posing in the Piper Tech photo studio, from left: Larry Day, Sr. Photographer II, 26 years of City service; Harry D. Sarkisian, Photographer III, 9 years; Chuck Siegler, Sr. Management Analyst I; Norm Sugimoto, Photographer I, 8 years; Jeff Seaman, Photographer III, 9 years; M.C. Sallaberry, Photographer III, 8 years; and Norm Thomas (day watch), Photographer III, 20 years. Not pictured: Gary Raives (day watch), Photographer III, 19 years of City service.

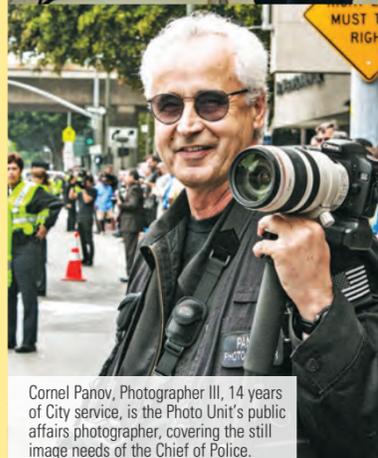
A common function of the LAPD Photo Unit is to capture scientific work performed by other crime lab units. This photo captures work done by the firearms unit showing bullet trajectories.



Renato Viduya, Photographer III, 15 years of City service, captures images of possible evidence.



Karen Coogle, Photographer III, 19 years of City service, Club Member, is stationed at the LAPD Valley Station in Van Nuys. She poses here in the Van Nuys photo studio.



Cornel Panov, Photographer III, 14 years of City service, is the Photo Unit's public affairs photographer, covering the still image needs of the Chief of Police.



The LAPD Photo Unit in the 1970s doing its work.



Gary Glade, Photographer III, uses LAPD Air Support to capture images.

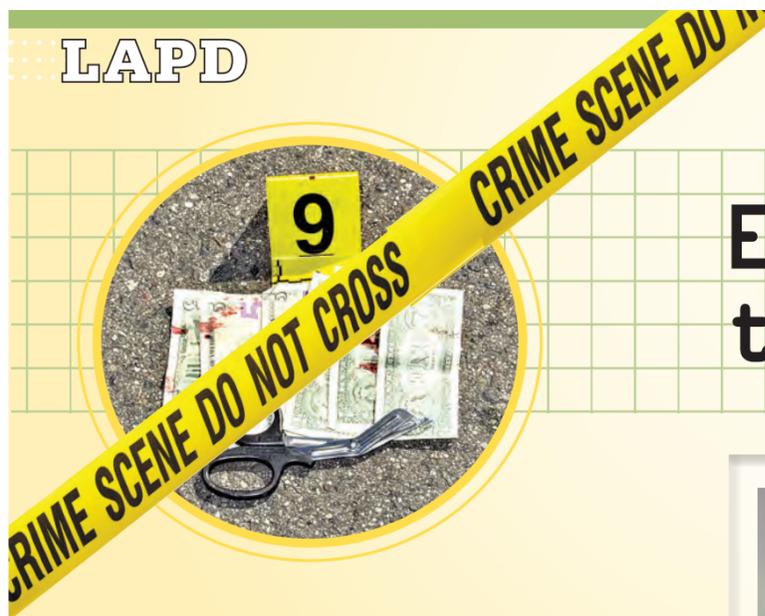


Traffic accidents are a major part of the workload of the LAPD Photo Unit.

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LAPD



Elements of the Photo Unit



Photo Studio

The Piper Tech facility contains a highly functional photo studio. The studio has many uses, but a majority of the images shot here are of children in cases of alleged abuse. Demonstrating the studio are (from left) Ryszard Niscior, Photographer I, 8 years of City service, and Andy Millett, Photographer I, 8 years of City service, Club Member.



Main Production Room

This long room contains workstations where the photographers process their photos.

LEFT: Processing LAPD photos are (from left) Ryszard Niscior, Photographer I, 8 years of City service; Garry Brod, Photographer III, 15 years; Gary Glade, Photographer III, 16 years, Club Member; and Robert Stichel, Photographer III, 14 years.



RIGHT: A long worktable in the production room doubles as an anchor for conversation, strategy and breaks from the photographers' duties.



Craig's Wall

The back wall of the main production room is dedicated to the late LAPD Photographer Craig Roberts, who died last year of cancer. Craig was instrumental in moving the Unit into digital/modern photography.



The wall contains dozens of pieces of photo equipment that the unit used in the past that were stored in closets in Parker Center. When the Unit moved, the equipment was put on display.



Children's Waiting Room

One of the requests of the Photo Unit in moving to its new space in Piper Tech was to build a proper waiting room for children who are waiting to be photographed in the photo studio (see Photo Studio entry). This space, designed with the assistance of Cultural Affairs and the J-Cars (juvenile cars) unit of the LAPD, eases the nervousness and worry of the children for what can be a difficult shoot.



RIGHT AND ABOVE: Chuck Siegler, Sr. Management Analyst I (left), explains the strategy of the children's waiting room to Club CEO John Hawkins.

Alive! Feature

CSI:LA

LAPD PHOTOGRAPHY UNIT:
Crime & Evidence Documentation



Digital Storage/Archives

Andy Millett, Photographer I, 8 years of City service, Club Member, goes into the CD/DVD storage/archives to retrieve images. These disks contain hard storage of images from all current cases.



Dispatch Area

Ryszard Niscior, Photographer I, 8 years of City service, staffs the dispatch area, where photographers on their way to an assignment can pick up a radio or other equipment.



Here, Andy Millett, Photographer I, 8 years of City service, Club Member, scans negatives from a 1980 cold case that is being investigated.

Scanning Station

The LAPD Photo Unit regularly scans old prints and negatives from cold cases or from current cases, where film or prints were discovered as part of a search warrant, for example. The Photo Unit is a dry unit; it no longer develops film. When unprocessed film is entered, a Unit photographer will accompany the film canister to an approved film developer and monitor the process at every step.

THE ALIVE! INTERVIEW

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Mark Mynhier, Sr. Photographer II.



officer in charge of each of the supporting units within the Tech Laboratory at one time or another.

Structure

Tell us about the structure of the Photo Unit.

CHUCK: Okay. The Officer in Charge position is filled by me. But I currently do not have the position authority for an officer-in-charge spot.

Then there are four Sr. Photographer II positions under that. Below that would be the Photographer IIIs, the crime scene photographers. There are currently 22 of those positions, three of which are vacant. We've had a number of positions deleted over the years due to the budgetary cuts throughout the City. So, where we used to having approximately 40 employees covering the City; we're now down to 26.

The Photo IIIs are the crime scene photographers. They also respond to special events for the department. They respond to protests. They provide the photographic documentation of everything the department needs.

The entry-level position is Photographer I. They do mostly studio photographs and production work. The Photo IIIs I would consider a journey-level position. They do it all. If they're not out in the field, they're doing production. If they're not doing production, they are filing or creating disks and doing a lot of the background work for the digital photography.

And one Sr. Clerk Typist.

CHUCK: Right. On loan.

And you supply cameras to Officers in the field, right?

MARK: The Officers have picked up some of the assignments that we were traditionally doing in the past. The Officers have always photographed a small amount of things, such as a traffic collision with no fatal injuries. They would always do those. With the LYNX program, Officers are given digital cameras, to backfill on some things that are of minor consequence. Or they'll do a domestic violence case – which is of consequence, of course – if the people don't want to come in to the studio. In our communities, some people really don't want to go to the police stations themselves. So the Officers will take care of some of them.

Do they have to use a specific camera?

MARK: We issue cameras to the divisions, and we're fairly strict on the standards that we have. That way, across the department, we make sure we maintain the same standards. There's actually an FBI workgroup that helped set the standards. We make sure that we maintain the same standards that are put forth by the group called SWGIT (Scientific Working Group on Imaging Technology).

CHUCK: Mark is the chair of it, by the way. MARK: Yes, I'm the chair of the Forensic Photography part of the Scientific Working Group on Imaging Technologies for the FBI. They offered me a job but I decided to stay with the LAPD instead.

But anyway, we maintain those standards here at the LAPD. That way, if we ever have to

go to court, we don't have to worry about it just being us. It's been vetted by the lawyers and the mathematicians – in digital photography, the mathematicians are just as important as the lawyers are. The cameras that the Officers use meet those standards.

Assignments

Other than what the officers shoot, list the kinds of things that the Photo Unit is tasked with shooting.

MARK: We do all of the major crimes. We absolutely do any child abuse cases because those are just as important. Burglaries. Fatal traffic collisions. Really, anytime there's a death.

We also cover a lot of public affairs work for the department. Every time you see the Chief of Police sitting up there with the imagery behind him, that's all of our work as well.

We provide for our crime lab, because they need a lot of very specialized things. They need microphotography, whether it's the firearms analysis, the trajectories, things like that.

We do search warrants. We also do some specialized stuff. There's an organization called ICAC, Internet Crimes Against Children. Whenever they serve search warrants, there's a huge amount of things that have to be gathered from that. We work with the FBI. Sometimes we work with the state and the L.A. County Sheriff's. We go after the predators out there.

You do a lot of surveillance.

MARK: Yes, surveillance on gang investigations. And we'll do parolee searches.

CHUCK: The key things that the photographers do includes all major crime scene photography; they do a lot of documentary work for the department; they're doing the photographic documentation of crime scenes. They go out when there's a DUI checkpoint and cover a lot of things from a City liability standpoint. We do all of the portrait work, except for ID cards, for Employee of the Year, Supervisor of the Year – all that's done in the studio.

What occurs in the studio here in Piper Tech?

MARK: The studio is for two major purposes. One is our portraiture for recognizing the officers and civilians who do outstanding work. The other purpose is typically victim photography, whether it's the abused child or domestic violence. If an individual has accused the police of abusing them, use of forces, we document any injuries that are attached to that as well.

If a search warrant would find some film, would you develop that?

CHUCK: We would take it out. We are a completely dry lab at this point. We would send a photographer out with the film to a secure lab to maintain the chain of custody and oversee the production work each step of the way, and then bring it back and scan those negatives.

A Tough Job

You do more than just take pictures. There's a lot that goes into this.

MARK: A lot of what we do is make the community feel like we are doing everything possible to take care of them, to solve the crime and to make them whole. They want to know that we are taking all the steps necessary. Most of what we do here is document the crimes, document the victims, and document the things that have happened. We're not just out taking pictures. It's a mindset, a way of realizing that we're not just some happy snappers out there with a camera; we actually have huge skill sets. It's tough. We're experts. We're the best in the world.

What's the toughest part of your job?

OSHIN: Dealing with injured children, by far. And then dealing with injured elderly, dealing with victims who are defenseless. I think if I were to use one short descriptive sentence, it would be observing defenseless victims and the effect of the crime on them. That's the toughest part of the job.

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Getting Creative

The work of the LAPD Photo Unit is documentary in nature and not creative. But some of the photographers in their off-hours find an outlet from their often-challenging work assignments by taking creative photos.

Alive! is happy to showcase some of their work here.

M.C. Sallaberry, Photographer III



Garry Brod, Photographer III



Gary Glade, Photographer III



Karen Coogle, Photographer III



Karen loves to take selfies on her fishing trips. Here's an example.

THE ALIVE! INTERVIEW

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Chuck Siegler,
Sr. Management
Analyst I.



CHUCK: In talking to our photographers, that's the most common response that I hear. For me, even in the workspace, seeing the stream of children on certain days coming through can be a real challenge. When I brought my daughter in, she likes to play in the kids' room and be happy. But you see these kids coming in here who have already been victimized and are in a strange environment, and the officers and the photographers are amazingly kind with them. Seeing that takes a little bit of the edge off.

The first child who came in and saw the room that we built new here, his face kind of lit up. More often than not, the kids leave here with a stuffed animal, and they're smiling. That's a part of the photographer's job that isn't in the job description. They come into contact with these victims that, for the majority of people, would break your heart initially.

MARK: The average crime scene photographer sees more homicides in a year than the average homicide detective does his entire career. And there's vicarious trauma attached to that as well for the photographers, because some of the homicides are gruesome. Some of the homicides – you take them home with you. As much as you try not to, they're there. One thing that's sometimes overlooked with the department is just how much vicarious trauma builds on the photographers day after day after day. It can get to you. Speaking from just personal experience, I had a case once that I actually ended up taking five weeks off because it was so bad that I just couldn't handle it. I'm not unique in the fact that these things bother me.

CHUCK: The department has come a long way, especially in recent years. There is a police psychologist from Behavioral Science Services (BSSS) section who is assigned to Scientific Investigation Division that really works a lot with the field response people. It's very rare to hear any of the photographers say, "Hey, time out, give me a little help here." So the department has been a little more proactive. They're giving the employees an opportunity to discuss some difficult scenes that they've had to attend.

Mark, what is the toughest part of the job for you?

MARK: It's the children, especially children who've been abused by their parents, because those are people they're supposed to be able to trust. It's never easy when you're dealing with abused children and abused elders. When you've had children who have been killed at the hand of their parents, it absolutely tears you up. Those aren't things that you can just take home, have a drink and move past the next day.

BSSS has been very supportive of us over the course of my career. We've had a lot of psychologists and psychiatrists come over here on a regular basis just to check in and say hi. They'll pull people off to the side and say, "Hey, I heard you had a bad case last week," or whatever. "You still okay?" And they are very responsive. But some things just take time for your brain to process. The people who are helpless, people who can't fend for themselves, those are the ones who bother you the most.

OSHIN: I photographed a scene once where a municipal bus had backed up and rolled over a little girl in a tricycle. When I was processing the entire scene and I was looking at the photographs, it wasn't that bad, until I saw the photograph of the kid – the little girl looked exactly like my daughter. That was 17 years ago. Some things you can't undo. The department is very supportive. But there are some things you can't do anything about, unfortunately.

MARK: 99.9 percent of people in the world just can't do this job. It takes a special person. You have to be able to compartmentalize a lot of things. You have to leave your work at work, and it's not always possible to do that. But it really does take somebody who's either learned or who naturally knows how to not carry these things around.

OSHIN: I have gone through periods of what I would call arrogance, where I thought, "Hey, I saw this, and it isn't much." And then something else comes and brings you down to your knees.

Can it be dangerous?

CHUCK: Yes. The photographers typically respond to crime scenes after they've been secured, but every photographer is issued

a bulletproof vest. It's part of their standard gear. The work environment, their office, can be an alleyway, can be a junkyard where a body was found, or can be a restaurant where a gang dispute erupted and there are bodies everywhere. That's their office.

OSHIN: The scenes are secured to their highest possible level. But nothing is ever 100 percent.

Satisfaction

MARK: In so many ways, it's an absolutely phenomenal job. How many jobs do you have out there that help millions of people every single day? We do this on a day-to-day basis, whether we're dealing with the small, low-level criminals, or the really big, high-profile criminals. We affect people's lives for the better in the community every single day.

Is that what drives you to do this?

MARK: Yes, knowing we put all the jerks away. That child molester? He's not doing it again. The murderer? The gangbanger who's out there doing all of this stuff? They're not doing it again.

OSHIN: I take pleasure in knowing that all of us are contributing to making the society we live in a better place. We're never up-front and personal with what's going on in the City, but the support we bring to law enforcement, starting from the cops and going all the way to the district attorneys, gives me a sense of satisfaction. I know that, in a small way, what we do contributes to the betterment of the society we live in.

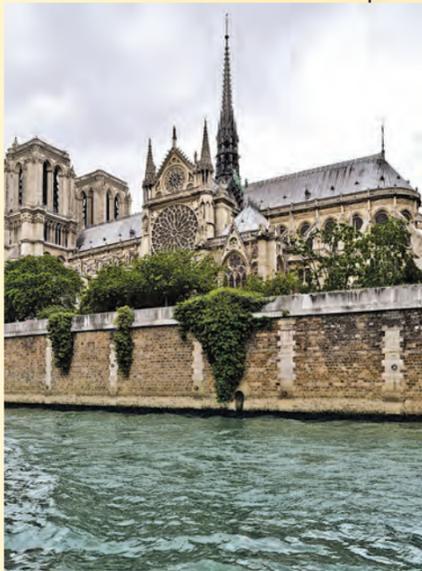
If you ask me what was the best day of my career, I would say today, and then possibly tomorrow.

MARK: Can I leave with a story?

LAPD



Oshin Noubarian,
Sr. Photographer II



Yes, please do.

MARK: Back just before I became a Sr. Photographer, I was working nights. The officers brought a kid into the studio, and he was 12 years old. Oddly enough, about six months earlier, we had that same kid in the studio. He was starting to get into gangs by the second time. I always address everyone, especially kids, by a formal name – Mr. Johnson, Mr. Smith, whatever. Sometimes it's the only time the kids have ever been shown respect.

He came in there, and I recognized him, except he looked a bit harder. I looked at him, I said, "Good to see you again, Mr. Johnson." He kind of looked at me and said, "Good to see me?" And I say, "Yes, it really is. It's good to see you." He says, "Why?" And I said, "Well, usually whenever you start getting into gangs, the second time I see you, it's usually because somebody shot you or you're dead." The kid started crying right then. About six months later, the cops came back to me and told me that he had gotten out of gangbanging, he had cleaned up his act, and he was getting straight A's in school.

Days like that are what you remember whenever you have the really bad days, that you can touch somebody's life that dramatically, just by being a professional and by being nice.

At this point he's 26 years old or so. Who knows where he's gone with his life, but at least at that point he had a chance.

Everyone here has some story where they've touched somebody's life in some way.

Mark, Oshin and Chuck, thank you for sharing your experience with our readers. ■



ALIVE! One-on-One

Life as an LAPD Photographer

On Aug. 13, Club CEO John Hawkins interviewed Club Member L'keva Harris, Photographer III, 15 years of City service, about how she handles her unique and difficult job.

'You have to separate yourself emotionally ... or you won't make it in this job.'

– L'keva Harris

I can't spend time focusing on that one because I won't be effective at my job if I focused on this one, so I had to move on.

Have you ever walked into a crime scene and suddenly realized somebody you knew or were distantly related to was connected to that case?

L'KEVA: Yes. Once. I learned I had a connection after the fact. I had a fatality KTC (killed in a traffic accident) of a young man several years ago who was en route to work.

Some years later I had some friends over at my house, and one of the young ladies that I had known maybe a few years told me this story of how her brother was killed. And at that immediate moment I didn't put two and two together, and I started talking about that case I had a few years before that, and she said, "That was my brother." My heart stopped because I didn't know it was her brother.

What did you do?

L'KEVA: I immediately apologized to her for saying what I had said. She said, "No, it's okay. We're past it now."

Do you have any idea of how many crime scenes that you've photographed in your career?

L'KEVA: No idea. I'm sure it's in the thousands.

Do you use photography creatively when you're not working here? Is that an outlet for you?

L'KEVA: I don't. A lot of photographers do outside photography. Because of the nature of this photography I don't want to do any other photography outside of work. The most photography I do outside of work involves my children; that's about it. If I go on vacation, obviously I'll do photographs of that, but I don't do any other photography.

Where is your job satisfaction? What makes you satisfied that this is a rewarding career for you?

L'KEVA: I know that I'm helping someone or something. We respond to more calls probably than any other unit in SID, so I know that we're in high demand. I'm satisfied knowing that I'm doing something that makes a difference for someone. I know I'm a part of that crime scene being solved, that my pictures tell a story. A lot of the latent-prints people get called to court; a lot of the criminalists get called to court. We don't get called to court a lot because our pictures tell the story; it's right there in front of you, in color or black and white. What satisfies me the most is that I'm making a difference; I'm helping solve that crime in different ways.

I know burnout is a particular issue amongst crime-scene photographers. Is that something that you feel?

L'KEVA: I feel it a little bit because we're a little bit short staffed, so I do feel burnt out sometimes. And sometimes you have to take a vacation day just to gather your thoughts.

Do you like the job?

L'KEVA: I love my job.

Why?

L'KEVA: I can't see myself doing anything else in the City. I love when I show up at a scene and people realize that my job is to photograph the scene. People are always excited by that. People always have questions. Sometimes I don't even tell people what I do because I know I'm going to get a lot of questions ...

What I'm doing now.

L'KEVA: Right! People are so intrigued by my job that it makes me excited to do it.

Do a lot of people tell you that they couldn't do your job?

L'KEVA: Every day. Anytime people hear what I do or learn what I do the first thing out of their mouths is, "How do you do it?" The second is, "I couldn't do it." And I know that there are jobs for everyone, and this one just happens to be mine, and it's a great job. ■



L'keva Harris, Club Member, with Club CEO John Hawkins.

Thanks for talking to us today, L'keva. You're a frequent contributor to *Alive!*, and we wanted your perspective on how you manage as an LAPD Photographer.

L'KEVA HARRIS: Sure. I'm a happy Club Member.

Good! Have you been in any other department, or this was your entry into the City?

L'KEVA: This was my entry into the City. I started with the photo lab.

What's your typical day like here? Do you even have a typical day?

L'KEVA: Our days are not typical because they vary. Some days you may be in the field all day; some days you may be in the lab all day; some days you may shoot studios. It's not typical at all, but the responsibilities are all the same.

Is it a challenging job?

L'KEVA: It's a very challenging job.

How so?

L'KEVA: To be a photographer you have to have a strong stomach. You have to have the know-how to separate yourself emotionally, because if you can't, you won't make it in this job.

Why do you have to have a strong stomach?

L'KEVA: We photograph a lot of homicides, and people die in many different manners, from suicide to fatalities in traffic collisions to gunshots to hanging. Some people look like they're sleeping, and others had their heads blown off. You have to be able to tolerate it.

The other part of the job is that we photograph a lot of dead kids and dead babies, and that can be difficult, too.

Did you have to learn to separate yourself emotionally, or is that just part of your nature?

L'KEVA: Because I knew what the expectations of the job were, I think I came in and immediately started separating myself from the job. The one thing I find it difficult to separate emotionally are the dead babies and dead kids, because I myself have three kids, so that part of the job is difficult. My coping mechanism is to lock it away in the back of my mind – don't think about it, don't daydream about it. Just do the job.

Where did you learn your photography skills?

L'KEVA: In the Navy. I was a Navy photographer for seven years.

The Best Day, the Worst Day

How many crime scenes do you shoot a week?

L'KEVA: We may see three or four horrendous crime scenes in a week, whereas different units see maybe one or two a month. Since I've been here at the photo lab, I've had five homicides in one day – in one shift. Not in a day, in one shift.

In one shift.

L'KEVA: I worked a.m. watch for a number of years, and in one shift I had five homicides.

Do you remember how you felt after that?

L'KEVA: I just felt like oh, man, this is a record. I've had two, I've have had three, but five, wow. I think maybe three had bodies, and in the other two, the body had been transported (but eventually died).

Tell us about the best day you can recall on the job.

L'KEVA: I have a lot of best days. One of my best days in the last couple of years was, unfortunately, when one of our detectives was convicted of homicide. One of my pictures played a big role in that conviction because the bullets used were bullets that only officers carried. One day I'm sitting at home, I'm looking at the television, and I see the picture of the bullet that I had taken being shown in the courtroom. So that was one of my best days, to find out that my work was ultimately part of the conviction.

How about worst day?

L'KEVA: My worst day on the job – now this one I can remember vividly. I had just had my third child and he was maybe five months old when I came back to work. That week, one of my very first calls was a four-month-old who had fallen out of a three-story window and she succumbed to her injuries. That baby was the same age as my baby, and she was lying there on the ground deceased.

After your worst day, did it take some time to go to the next one, or do you know that that's your duty and your job?

L'KEVA: I know that that's my duty and my job. I can't dwell on it. I may hug my kids a little tighter, but I just go on to the next one.