

Fountain Square

Presentation to the Literary Club 9/21/2020

Good evening, gentlemen.

The stories you will hear tonight are true. I know because I was there.

The names have not been changed to protect the innocent, for two reasons. Firstly because you'll not hear about innocence this evening, and secondly because I probably cannot remember them.

Be that as it may, please join me in a trip down my memory lane.

I guess everyone has been to Fountain Square at least once. Most of you have been many times...taking grandkids to ice skating, after-dinner strolls, victory celebrations for the Reds, Super Bowl Bengal celebrations, no scratch that last one. My point is that you probably have pleasant memories and associations with your Fountain Square visits.

Usually considered to be the city center with its iconic fountain, the police division realized that safety was a prime consideration. Whenever possible, at least one officer was assigned to patrol the square on foot, so during my quarter century career I was on the square almost daily.

Truth be told, most of my time on the square I was not actually doing anything but "showing the flag" and discouraging an undesirable element. I mainly smiled, gave directions, and watched. But there were moments.... Please believe me, I do not wish to rain on your parade or paint too dark a picture of Fountain Square, but hope to perhaps flesh out your views of the square.

My police introduction to Fountain Square took place in the summer of 1974. Although assigned as a "Hyde Park Ranger" on Erie Avenue, as a rookie I was dispatched to District 1 on Ezzard Charles Drive. Told to ditch my white hat, I instead wore a blue riot helmet and clear plastic shield. As I remember, Cincinnati during the Vietnam era was relatively quiet and uninvolved, most of the anti-war protests took place on the UC campus and even there, the violence was muted. Anyway, back to my situation, it may surprise you that the police do have an intelligence arm and that squad indicated that a protest on Fountain Square between war protesters and construction unions was expected to turn violent. As a rookie, this was the first demonstration (and the last) I attended. Wearing riot gear, perhaps 50 of Cincinnati's finest were arrayed between the factions. Neither side wanted us there. The predicted violence did not, thankfully, materialize but it was a still a tense encounter.

It was at this time that I began to develop the theory that any officer who needed to be loved should have become a fireman. Everybody likes firemen.

One last comment about that incident, almost 50 years ago. I have to compare that confrontation to the so-called protests of 2020. What has happened?

Police culture, I guess like for all professions, demands certain behavioral norms, maybe not all explainable. For example, you'll never see a cop using an umbrella for some reason or standing with his or her hands in his or her pockets. Donuts are never mentioned, but you'll never see a cop eating an ice cream cone. As a young cop, I had caught on to most of these behaviors so you can understand my curiosity one day when my senior partner bought a huge chocolate ice cream cone. He did not explain himself nor did he begin to eat his dripping treat. I thought that Cincinnati had a relatively small vice problem. Downtown had only one pimp that I knew of. After buying the chocolate ice cream cone, we walked to the top of the parking garage which overlooked Sixth Street, four floors below. Without conversation we looked over the edge seeing the pimp's Cadillac convertible parked at the curb. In the parlance of the day, the Caddy was "three-way white," white top, interior, and exterior. Again, without comment, with a gentle toss, the ice cream sailed out from the roof and splattered all over the three-way white Caddy's hood and body and windshield. We resumed patrol looking for crime and disorderly disruptions of the peace.

Fountain Square has been a work in progress during the last 50 years. The square of 2020 is much changed from the place I knew so well. In the early 70's the City Fathers spoke of the Square and the new Westin Hotel lobby as the City's "living room". Some living room!

There has been a large community Christmas tree on Fountain Square for as long as I can remember. However, the Jewish community applied to obtain a permit to erect a large menorah during Hanukkah. A legal wrangle ensued both locally and in higher courts. The menorah won out and shared the Square with the Christmas tree.

These events set the stage for one of the ugliest incidents I saw on the Square. Not to be outdone, the Ku Klux Klan also applied for and received a permit to erect a cross on Fountain Square. The cross itself was a crude wooden affair, painted white, planted in concrete in a 5-gallon bucket. Later iterations were more substantial, but still fragile. The Klansmen did not wear their robes or silly hats or display any signs claiming sponsorship of the cross. I remember standing feet from the incident as Klansmen unloaded their old pickup truck on Fifth Street. In spite of the police presence, the Klansmen were obviously worried. I think they expected to be attacked at any moment.

There was no initial violence, but over the next several days several well-meaning citizens crossed protective barriers and destroyed the cross display. While there was no person-to-person combat, uniformed cops standing within feet had no choice but to effect the arrest of the protesters. Chants of "cops and klan go hand-in-hand" were heard for a week. As one of those cops, I am still disappointed by the lack of understanding by so many citizens.

The purpose of wearing a uniform is to distinguish the officer to the citizenry. If one needs help, it becomes easy to see who the “good guys” are. However, having worn a uniform for a long time I can tell you it has its downsides. I never liked being tarred with the same brush with thousands of other cops, even the good ones. The uniform did simplify the decision of “what should I wear today?” Fortunately, I like white shirts and navy-blue pants. It’s my favorite outfit even today. Unfortunately, the uniform gives a green light to every goof, wacko and nutjob to confront officers.

Case in point, standing in the middle of Fountain Square one evening talking to my partner I was approached by an attractive young woman. Standing too close to me she cooed “Ooh you’re a big one!” She then placed both hands on my chest, fondling my badge as she did so. Got to say even through my bullet-proof vest I got a twinge. “I am going to do you (I am paraphrasing here) until your chest caves in,” she whispered. “That’s nice,” I replied in my best man-of-the-world casual tone. She turned and began to walk away saying “you”!

Admittedly stunned, I turned to my partner who asked, “Do you know who that was?” “No,” I answered, “I never saw her before.” “Doug, you just met one of Cincy’s most notorious police groupies. She is called ‘Sea-food Sally’”.

I just had to know. “Why is she called Sea Food Sally?” With a deadpan expression my partner replied “She has crabs”. My ardor quickly subsided. Sometime I’d like to write an exposé on the sex-life of your police officers, but I have to arrange commendation in the witness protection program.

You can always find a cop on Fountain Square no matter your intention. He or she will probably be the one in a uniform.

Of course Fountain Square is historically the logical location for large mass gatherings. While our Riverfront area is much larger, the square is centrally located and is the traditional location. You may have fond memories of the “Big Red Machine” era and the World Series celebrations on the square. Sure, I may be a fair-weather Reds fan, but from a police perspective I did not enjoy the celebrations. I must immediately assert that the vast majority of participants were well intentioned, well behaved, and reflected admirably on the Reds and the City. Having said that, now the bad news. A small percentage of the crowd, almost invariably young males, attended these event with a different agenda.

Formula: young male + testosterone+ crowd courage+ most essentially alcohol = police headache. Fights, drunkenness, disorderly behavior, resisting arrest the most common incidents. Correctly, the news did not emphasize these behaviors since they were peripheral to event. Several cops were injured, and I remember one cop thrown through a plate-glass window and seriously hurt. The only ally that police have is bad weather, preferably heavy rain, but it seemed to me the weather was always great. Whenever there is to be a large crowd event, believe me the cops are hoping for a downpour to reduce the crowd size.

Out of the public eye, the police staged the paddy wagon on Convention Way off Vine Street between 5th and 6th Streets.

Prisoners, often bloodied, and cuffed, angry, and resisting were forcefully taken to the wagon to be temporarily held. The patrol wagon held perhaps 15 prisoners and I would guess that was about the total number of physical arrests made each night.

Prior to the development of chemical irritants and electrical tasers, the primary tool of law enforcement was the night stick. Though trained not to hit prisoners in the head, it seemed to me there were a lot of head injuries.

I remember at the end of the nights' celebration, it was necessary to match up bloody prisoners with their arresting officer and presumably the guy who inflicted the injuries. Guess what? There were more prisoners than arresting officers coming forward! As a result of this phenomenon, future mass arrest situations required each prisoner to be photographed with his arresting officer. Over the course of my career, I made hundreds of arrests for everything from spitting on the sidewalk to aggravated murder. The majority of arrests were misdemeanors and even minor misdemeanors. Of all these arrests I really only clearly remember the best one I made on Fountain Square.

Cops begin each day with a roll call where they are inspected and important information is disseminated. Crime trends, auto thefts and wanted suspects are discussed. Several days prior to this arrest we were shown at roll call a police sketch of a wanted rapist. The rape had occurred on the plaza level between Riverfront Coliseum and Riverfront stadium. Having raped the victim, he sat on her chest and ejaculated in her face. Male white, early 20's, but the key to his recognition was the fact that he was one of the oddest men I have ever seen. Those of you who might remember Mad Magazine and its iconic image of Alfred E. Newman would be close to the image of the suspect, add a mouthful of rotting teeth and odd skin eruptions. A quarter century later I'd know him in an instant. Seated amidst 5 or 6 other losers passing a joint, I immediately recognized the suspect. I told the others to get lost before I found time to deal with them too. As the arresting officer, I was not subpoenaed for the trial. I heard he was sentenced to 25 years, but that's not enough.

One last vignette, if it's okay. I include this one because it is actually historic in a way. Please think of this incident the next time you visit Fountain Square.

It began as I was working alone and walking west bound on 6th Street near Walnut Street. I was out of the line of sight of the Fountain itself but could surely hear the laughter coming from the square. The laughter could only augur bad things. It was akin to a teacher leaving the classroom and closing the door, then hearing loud laughter.

Tyler Davidson Fountain at the time was located much closer to 5th Street than its current location. Being mid-summer and dusk, the fountain was in full flow and brightly illuminated. A large crowd was enjoying the evening. There was nothing unusual about this scene. What was not normal with my keen eye for detail was the raving, laughing, drunken goof sitting on top of the Genius of Water's figure with his thighs clamped around her head. As least he had the decency to position his crotch against the back of her head and not her face. Wikipedia tells me that this perch was 43 feet in the air. In my mind's eye I saw the Enquirer's headline "Maundrell allows fountain to be destroyed."

Being the guy with the white hat I had to be the party pooper. Standing at the base of the fountain, I motioned for the goof to come down. In response he made rude finger gestures with both hands. The crowd loved it and roared its approval. Having a keen appreciation of my size and lack of agility, I quickly decided that climbing up the fountain through the cascade and making an arrest was probably not a good idea. Besides, I wasn't wearing correct climbing shoes.

After a few more lame efforts to persuade this goof to descend I resorted to the tired option to resolve this the easy way or the hard way. He responded with the F-bomb and two more middle digits which I took to designate the hard way.

What to do? I startled myself with the speed of my solution. I know, I'll kick the resolution "upstairs" and make it everyone's problem. I figured the Marines were probably busy, but the next best solution was the Cincinnati Fire Division. Firemen get called for all sorts of issues, cats in trees, bombs, medical emergencies, elderly falling out of beds. Firemen have the tools and aptitudes to solve anything. This was right up their alley.

I called for a fire company to respond to fountain square. Now it was their problem, I was off the hook.

Within minutes, looking west on 5th Street I could see fire trucks with red lights flashing responding to their yet unknown dilemma.

The fire truck pulled up on Fifth Street next to the fountain. I did not have to explain the situation, it was obvious.

Fire rookies are called "roughnecks" and you'll see why. I was joined on the square by several firemen, one of whom took charge. Just to be sure, he too asked the goof to come down. He too was met with the middle finger. After being rebuffed the fireman's first order was to turn off the water in the fountain. What a novel idea! It had not occurred to me.

The fire truck was parked close enough to the fountain that its remote ladder could swivel easily to reach the top of the fountain. One of the young, agile "roughnecks" scrambled up the ladder and engaged the goof in conversation. Although the fountain itself was quiet, I was unable to hear what was said. Though the fireman motioned to the fire truck and then to me. After a very brief consideration the goof unwrapped his thighs from the statue's head and

climbed awkwardly over the aluminum ladder. Soaking wet, he climbed down the ladder preceded by the fireman. I was on him like white on rice and handcuffed him.

The roughneck accompanied me as I led the prisoner to the cruiser. As we walked across the square, I heard a few boos and cat calls, but the prisoner said nothing.

Again I had to know. What had the roughneck said to the goof?

“I told him that if he did not come down, I would blow him off the fountain with a 5-inch hose and 300 pounds of water pressure.”

The goof was sentenced to 1 year in the justice center, the maximum for a first degree misdemeanor.

Everyone loves firemen. The end.

Doug Maundrell