

GUARDIAN



ANGELS

SECTION I

T-Shirt Insignia

Williams: We are, first of all, intrigued by the symbol on your shirt. Where did it come from? Did one of you devise it? Some of the symbols look familiar. (See Drawing on facing page).

Sliwa: Basically, it was my idea, but the embodiment of it -- putting it down on a piece of paper -- I was incapable of doing because I'm not artistically inclined, so I sat down with another member. At the time, we were the Magnificent 13 Subway Patrol and our symbol was a train.

If you've ever seen the advertisements for the 'train to the plane' (a train coming out of a cloud), it was like that, only with a 13 on it -- and that was it; except that it said 'Subway Patrol'. But we had a concept of not just subways, not just streets, not just parks, but an idea.

The center of this idea was this 'eye', which did not have a religious meaning. It wasn't the 'divine eye' or 'God's eye' as it is used on the pyramid, but rather, the eye stood for seeing in all directions. If you look at the eye, it has no definition of color: you don't know if it's a black man's eye, a white person's eye or an oriental eye. You don't know what the eye is. It is just a human eye. The rays of the eye; the scope of the eye goes in all directions -- and that is what it is that the Guardian Angels do.

You don't see a fist (on the shirt), you don't see words, but you do see a shield. The eye is on the shield, but that is the symbol of strength. But what the eye really represents is that we are there to look after everyone regardless of who they are, where they are from, how much bucks they have in their pocket, who they voted for in the last election or what their sexual preference is. Everyone. Even those who don't want us to look after them: we will protect all.

As I said, the shield stands for the strength, because obviously, when you go out and risk your life you have to be strong. I want you to understand that the Guardian Angels carry no weapons, carry no shields, carry nothing. You'd better be able to take care of yourself, because from time to time you'll run into a 'situation' -- but you have to be physically capable of dealing with it, and that is the sign of strength.

The wings? The wings are there because supposedly we are of angel-like qualities -- above the norm. That means we're upholding a code of conduct that is above what is normally accepted from society. We have to. We're in the public eye. People are depending on us. The things that young people normally do, you think nothing about, but if you saw a Guardian Angel doing the same thing, you'd be very disappointed. In fact, it would probably reflect on the group.

You may say, 'Well, it's a good group, but what a bunch of immature idiots' or that type of thing. That's why the clouds (in the insignia). We have to put ourselves above it all. Not that we're 'superior', but we have to put ourselves above -- literally -- above all the bull-shit. When we first started, we didn't know what people were going to say about the Guardian Angels. I didn't know. I had an inclination that it would be accepted very favorably, but one does not know until it happens; until you start getting opinions.

Our theory was that regardless of what our reception would be on the part of the officials or the police, that we would, on putting ourselves above it, that we would work on a singular plane: for the protection of all people, and that is what the group is.

The reason for the words 'Guardian Angels' is that no matter what language you speak, people understand immediately what a guardian angel is. In every language I've come in contact with, when a person reads the words, they understand, and the words don't offend you. The name doesn't indicate (like gang-names might) that we're being too powerful or that we're trying to dominate a person. Most people know the guardian angel from the little things they've seen when they were five or six years old in a book, and they see a person who seems to be of angelic quality looking over their shoulder. That's basically the idea we're trying to get across. We're not there to intercede in your personal life. We're just there to try to prevent any harm from coming your way, and that's simply it.

It's a very simple symbol -- nothing complicated. It didn't take me a long time to think about it: I had a dollar bill in my hand and I was looking at the back of the dollar bill and I said (to myself) "Hey! that's it! That's the symbol!" And I understood what the 'divine eye' is all about. You might run into a person of far-eastern quality or Muslim orientation and they might say "That's the devil's eye" or this or that. But I say, "to hell with that". That's not what it stands for: it just stands as an eye. That's it. It's a person's eye. It's not God's eye, this person's or that person's: it's every persons' -- and just leave it at that.

Different Concept

Williams: When you first began, as the Magnificent 13, your group was solely subway patrol. What was the Magnificent 13 like? What were the beginnings like?

Sliwa: I'd like to go back a little before that, because the Magnificent 13 started with a lot of fanfare. It was received very well, but both those who eventually became our detractors, and the riding public (who eventually became our supporters) were...sort of, like, viewing the group as a 'phenomenon'. You know. Here today and gone tomorrow. Thirteen here today: thirteen dead guys tomorrow. We'll read about 'em on page one today and in the obituary column tomorrow. It's as if people thought, "It's insane. It's kamikaze-like; it's absolutely mind-boggling to think that anybody in 'gun-city' (i.e. New York City) is going to go on trains and try to protect citizens -- not have weapons and do it in groups of three. Absolutely, totally -- either this guy Sliwa is ready for Bellevue⁶ or he's looking to get people killed".

What they didn't understand was that a lot of work went into it before they saw thirteen young men running out on the trains in their poses, with their shirts on indicating that they were going to protect people. The concept is that we institute our rights in making citizen's arrests. This is what makes us different from any other group.

Now that's a very broad term, 'arrest' or 'citizen's arrest'. 'Arrests' from what crimes? I mean -- spitting on the subway, is a 'crime', but what are you going to do? Bust people for that? Publically drinking, smoking marihuana, writing on the walls, urinating or whatever -- ripping people off -- those are crimes too. Are you going to bust people for all that? There were things we knew that we could legitimately bring a person to justice about and there were other things we had no business dealing with -- not because we didn't want to get involved with it, but because we would ourselves become the person being arrested because we would be infringing on another person's rights. We are not cops. We are not Starsky and Hutch.¹⁰ That's the thing we had to establish before the group even went out on the train.

So? What about citizen's arrest? It is easily said. You turn on TV and watch programs that talk about citizen's arrest; people talk about it -- this and that. Americans associate it with revolutionary days; the thirteen colonies and the Wild West, but the first time I ever made a citizen's arrest (which was not as a Magnificent 13 member, but long before that), the cop was spell-bound. He didn't know what to do. He didn't want to deal with it.

The Paper Super-Market

He called in his superior and told him that I'd placed this individual under citizen's arrest. "You got to be kidding! What is a citizen's arrest?" They wouldn't say so, but the looks on their faces indicated that this is just something in the books -- it can't be for real. You get taken down to the precinct and the captain (or lieutenant) says, "Forget this. I don't want to be bothered". All of a sudden, you see grey-haired men coming out of their offices with cups of coffee in their hands and cigarettes hanging out of their mouths and looking at you like you just destroyed their whole night. "Citizen's arrest? That's just for the movies, kid". This is what they would tell me, and I will never forget the first one I ever made.

I happened to have been a manager for a McDonalds' at night.¹¹ I had closed the store and was riding home on the infamous IRT 7th Ave. Line,¹² number 2 train. Three men were ripping off an old man who was sleeping. He wasn't a derelict type or a 'wine-o'; just a regular old man who happened to fall asleep. The three men were into his pocket and were slashing at the pocket while he slept. I intervened. Two of the men got away, but I caught one.

The old man had waked up by then and realized what was taking place. He was the complainant. I was the person who pursued and apprehended the person. We got the police. Clearly, 'on the money', one hundred per cent, and no questions asked, it was a legitimate citizen's arrest. It was not for a phoney, trumped-up charge, nor for something small. It was a legitimate arrest and the police were not capable of dealing with it.

Eventually, eight hours later (I wasn't being detained, that's just how long it took), they gave me a slip that indicated that I was the complainant and not the person who made the citizen's arrest, so I objected. I said, "I'm not the complainant. He's the guy who signed the papers. He's the one who said he was robbed of all his valuables. I made the arrest". "No, you didn't," the police official said, "our officer made the arrest". "No, he didn't. I made the arrest".

Four hours later, the decision came down that I would have to go to court and that is what happened. But once again the process does not look upon a citizen making an arrest: it was the police officer who was credited with the arrest and he was brought before the judge as the arresting officer. My name was never mentioned.

I was only there in case the incident went to trial and nothing nowadays goes to trial unless the defendant indicates he wants a trial because they just want to plea-bargain it -- and that is what happened in this case. The thief had a little bit of a record; he 'copped a plea'; he did six months on Riker's Island for that.¹³ That was it. It was over with. After being subpoenaed three or four times to the court and watching, I saw it like a super-market up there, with papers going back and forth with very few words said. You don't really know what's going on and it's over with. So that was it; my first citizen's arrest.

The 'Rock' Brigade

Now I'm saying to myself, "Hey, you know, actually citizens can now start getting involved in a group -- as bad as the subway system is. They're not going to do what I just did". They would consider that -- well, 'irrational', you know; just totally nuts. But how could I get some other people involved in a group where there are no weapons and where there is a consciousness of peace? Not disharmony. Not going around trying to abuse authority, because even though I wear this red beret and this T-shirt, people don't think I have authority.

In fact, many people would like to give me authority, and it is very easy to abuse what is thought of as 'authority', you know: I could easily come up to you and just in the way I look or the way I treat you, you might think I was a person with authority. I had to get a group organized that would manifest that. But still, there was the

problem of citizen's arrest. Doing that as a group is different from doing it one-on-one. And I went out there riding around with people.

At the time, they (i.e. compatriots who were to become the Magnificent 13) were involved with me in a program called the 'Rock' Brigade, which was a volunteer clean-up group in the Bronx. We used to supply waste containers, sweep up and clean-up. In fact, that was my first run-in with the authorities: we had an all-volunteer program in the Bronx in cooperation with businesses, providing brooms, bags, containers; everything. Perfect program!

I have plaques on the wall at Headquarters¹⁴ from every Honcho¹⁵ in town, from the Mayor right on down. They all jumped on the bandwagon. If you clean streets, the first thing their secretaries want to do is send a plaque. "Let's get him down for an award ceremony". And they all want to have their pictures taken with you. They all love that. So, we have ten thousand plaques and you look on the Guardian Angel wall and all you see is plaques from Civic Organizations -- but very few from political people.

All right. Second year of the 'Rock' Brigade program, the Sanitation Department decides they are not going to pick up the garbage. They said, "Sweep it, Bag it, Can it" (all the garbage they give out on TV), but they are not going to pick up the stuff, because it's too much garbage. There were (most of the time) three hundred waste containers, and I could see legitimately where they'd have to put one truck full time to maintain that. But we were emptying the cans. We were placing it on corners in trash bags. All they had to do was hoist it into a truck.

They (the Sanitation Department) refused to do it. Told us that if we wanted it done, we'd have to go hire a private carter to do it. I needn't tell you that this ended our program. Businesses are willing to contribute just so much. You can't really blame them, because literally, the city was telling us they'd rather see garbage all over the street than in a bag and, eventually, in a truck. So, there were hostile feelings to begin with in dealing with the city (government).

Citizen's Arrest (Again)

I've shown you, before the Guardian Angels program began, that I had a legitimate program that didn't step on anybody's toes. However, the city found a way to foul it up. And they did it effectively, but by this time, I was very much involved in the concept of citizen participation and patrolling the subways. But not as (police) auxiliaries¹⁶ because to me, the effect of an auxiliary program is -- good -- but it is different from the concept of the Guardian Angels.

I hate to be limited. I like to actually be able to achieve something and I wanted to be able to get across that it was citizens doing something -- no one else -- not because they were getting 'mega-bucks' from Washington, D.C. or because they were getting awards from (Mayor) Koch, or because someone was appointed to a 'Board' or a group at a paying salary. I wanted a group of citizens who went to school, but did all this in their spare time in a disciplined manner.

Finally, I went out with groups of people and we began making citizen's arrests dressed just like you are, sometimes as complainants, sometimes as people having arrested people based on the statements and testimony of other people -- like, where maybe we didn't see it, but when the person was detained, the (stolen) purse that a woman claimed that a snatcher had, was found on the man -- not by us, but by the police who arrived. ¹⁷

The Guardian Angels will not touch anyone; we detain him (or her) until the police arrive. Naturally, we had to surround the person and detain him, but there are eight or more of us (on a standard patrol) and you have a little area to breathe! We do not hold you. Technically, you can leave, but the problem is that to leave, you have to knock one of us over, which is then assault and battery on your part. We become the complainants and I feel, basically, in my heart that if you are correct, if you didn't do it, you have nothing to worry about because evidence will not be found on you. We're not planting evidence on you. We're just detaining you right there until they (police) come down and then if you have justification, you charge the complainants (us, and/or the victim). As long as the complainant is standing right there willing to press charges, we will detain the individual (the assailant) as long as we have probable cause. We won't even go near the person, and we did all this without the benefit of T-shirts and berets. But the police were troubled. They didn't know how to deal with it. ¹⁸ It was 'blowing their minds'. We were detaining people in Rockaway and in the Bronx and they were getting reports like this from all over the city and it bothered them a great deal.

'Hare-Brained' Stunts

One time, when I was the arresting person on an individual who had just attempted to rape a woman (we had seen the attempt in the back car of a train) and the woman acted as complainant, the cop took the barrel of his gun, shoved it at my throat and threatened to blow my brains out, "if we ever attempted a hare-brained stunt like this again". This more than ever convinced me of the fact that we have a police department that is many times insensitive to the needs of the community, to say the least.

But in our travels, comments from the police are that their job is to keep the 'savages' from killing each other: their job is not

to educate the community; not to make sure that they love one another; they just keep them out of each others' houses and cars and keep them from killing each other.

When you're down in the subway system as we were quite a bit at the time, you find out that the job of a police officer or a transport cop is not a pleasant one. It's not a job that many would aspire to. But we're not really dealing with people who really want to be down there. Very few officers I've run across (both those who like me and those who don't) will admit that they really don't want to be down there. If they had a choice, they'd be somewhere else. Finally, though, I put it all together and conceptualized it on paper: the group that was the Magnificent 13.

The Magnificent 13

No weapons, wearing the red beret, the T-shirt, at the time carrying handcuffs, because handcuffs were legal at the time; that is, to be in the possession of average citizens. Our Mayor, upon learning of all the people we were bringing to justice, decided three weeks before the transit strike last year¹⁹ that private citizens should not be able to carry handcuffs.

You would have thought that in 'gun-city' it was the handcuffs that were killing all the people in the streets because of the way they sent papers to the City Council, where it was signed, sealed and delivered. It was treated like major legislation: that if we don't take handcuffs away from people, thousands of people are going to get killed in the streets.

I said to the Mayor at the time he signed the Bill that what he was asking the Angels to do, instead of handcuffing the individual, was to place that person (and us) in more jeopardy -- in more danger of getting injured. Because if that person struggles, what are the Angels supposed to do? Hold him (or her) in a 'yoke-hold' until the police arrive? What happens if the individual has a weapon or anything like that? I asked him if he realized how many people he was jeopardizing. I told him that if the Angels made a mistake in handcuffing an individual, it was the Angel who paid the price. I told him, "We're all there; we can go to jail, the handcuffs can come off then and not only can the suspect press charges against us, we can be sued. So why are you taking the handcuffs away?" "Well", he said, "we do not want, as they say, 'police paraphernalia' to be in the hands of civilians", and I said, "That's totally ludicrous, but I understand why you're passing the Bill".

The Number 4 IRT

But you have to have the concept of three-person patrols to understand how things were then. There were only thirteen of us: four three-person patrols. And we began to ride the subway system of the City, particularly concentrating on the IRT #4 line, which was at that time named 'The Mugger's Express', not by me, but by the cops that rode there.

And it was bad. By that I mean that your chance of getting 'ripped-off' on that train was super-great. From the time you got on there was total lawlessness on that train. People were getting shot, stabbed and set on fire. Because of incidents on this train (one where a police officer was shot with a sawed-off shotgun), police officers had (bullet-proof) vest drives and all that. Incidents on the IRT #4 included a man who was set fire to on a station platform. A woman was raped on the platform of the Woodlawn station in full view of the public -- just really horrendous crimes. So we tackled that train to begin with, and in the beginning, it was a struggle.

Young men in particular -- seeing a guy there with a T-shirt and a red beret -- just for the hell of it would challenge us. They seemed to be challenged just because we were there, so it was constant confrontation. I used to come home at night sometimes looking like a coconut, I had so many bumps on my head. The police weren't being very helpful either, because they just wanted us to go back home and let mommy tuck us in bed and put us away.

But the organization began to grow slowly.

East Brooklyn

There was one particular incident that high-lighted our existence up to that point. It occurred in the Brownsville section of East Brooklyn, which is absolutely the worst section in the city -- no doubt about it. I don't care where you take me, it's the only place where the Guardian Angels ever had problems. Even now, with the reputation we have, it's a bad hot spot.

There is a particular train station there; an interconnection, like a junction point between two trains. But it's separated and connected by a totally unlit, two hundred and fifty foot platform. There are no lights. Not only must you get from one train to the other across this platform, if you live in East New York and want to get to the Brownsville side, you must also pass over the platform unless you intend on going a half-mile out of your way in either direction, because below the platform (thirty feet below) are freight train tracks. You cannot pass through.

You must go over the platform -- no lights -- a rough neighborhood to begin with and a criminal element that was not in fear of the cops because the cops were never around. So, literally, when we first began to patrol this platform, there were guys that would be hanging around up there, smoking their reefers and just waiting. Many times, we would see honest people just walking through there with their families, having just come from the store, with machetes about the size of my leg, walking through. And sometimes, they almost sliced us because they couldn't perceive us -- you know -- you can't see a person until they're right on top of you. Sometimes we had to yell "Yo! Yo!"; they'd say, "it's you guys -- OK". That's how bad it is.

You'd think the city would spend what -- a few cents? -- to screw in a few lights and put them on, but it's not that the bulbs are not in there. The bulbs are there and set, but nobody turns them on. You go to the city; you write letters and you do your thing the way they tell you to work through the system, and the subway system says, "Ah, nah. That's not our responsibility. Those are Long Island railroad tracks underneath -- freight train tracks". And then you write to the Long Island Railroad: "Nah, that's the subway". Then you sit back and you say, "Wait a second. I watch the news and I see Mayor Koch and he appoints someone who is supposed to be head of the Motor Transport Authority (MTA) and I thought the MTA was in charge of the Long Island Railroad, subways, Westchester Railroad and others. They're supposed to be in charge of all public, municipal railroads. Why the hell can't they screw in a few lightbulbs?" When you go to the head of the MTA, he says, "What? Brownsville, East New York? Where's that?"

To this day -- two years after we brought out the fact -- there's not a light bulb in sight. And in fact it was a particular incident that occurred there that finally brought a lot of light to the area: I happened to take a dive off that thirty-foot platform.

Three Is Not Enough

Not that I wanted to; but we were patrolling one evening and saw six men attempting to rape a woman. We didn't see them before they saw us because of our shirts and berets, but we could see the actions they were taking and then one of them tipped the others off. "Oh, my God! The Magnificent 13!" And then there was what we call 'a throw-down' in the street, because they couldn't get away. We had them boxed in like rats, and you can imagine the scene that followed. They attacked us. There's a scene like out of a Kung-Fu movie: bodies flying up -- ours and theirs. Nobody was getting the better of it.

At one point in the fight, one of their men pulls a sawed-off shotgun. He's got it in an army coat. He pumps it once and aims it at the woman. She gets up and starts running down the steps that are thirty feet above the ground. The woman is running -- really moving -- and this guy is ready to blow her to smithereens.

What's to say he's not going to turn the gun and blow us to smithereens? At that particular point, I throw a kick at him and I'm hoping to hit him and the gun because he's standing right near the railing. Well, I was off-balance and I only knocked the gun out of his hands into the street. He spun around -- sort of did a pirouette -- and went down the stairs, but I had the misfortune of crashing into the railing and then falling into the street below.

Had it been a normal street in a normal neighborhood, I probably wouldn't be here speaking to you. But in a place like Brownsville, East New York, the Sanitation Department is virtually invisible, so there were boxes, (bed) springs, washing machines, cans, bottles, newspapers and all a good ten feet high. You know, a whole pile of it. And I'm looking at the end of the world as I'm falling, but I crash into this.

Some of my body hit the rough spots; some of my body hit the soft, but I bounced off that pile and then hit the street. I was out -- out to the world -- but had I hit the street (from a straight fall onto concrete), I would have been half in Brownsville, half in East New York. To give you some idea of the nature of the place, the police would not come until three squad cars could come together. Police officers had been sniped at previously in the area: two police officers had been killed, so the police were exerting caution.

Well -- an ambulance came and brought me to King's County Hospital. Two days later, I was out -- badly bruised and wondering if my head was screwed on straight -- but being able to survive that. You know, saying to myself, "Boy, I was very fortunate".

I was more committed than ever to the effort, but I know that three is not enough. No way! Three is not enough, even if you're well-conditioned and you know how to fight. Three is not enough. And I began to say, "Wait a second. If I intend to expand this program and take in people who may not be as -- well, physically trained as myself and the other two Angels who were involved, I have to take care for those others, because down the line there might be people who will be involved who don't have the same physical qualifications, but who will have to be able to take care of themselves". So, in September of 1979, we started the Guardian Angels.

The only changing concept (from that of the Magnificent 13) was that we were no longer going to primarily concentrate on the subways. We began to patrol Central Park from eight p.m. to four a.m. And we instituted the eight-person patrol.

Called 'Vigilantes'

At that particular point also, we began receiving into the organization our first female members and our first members who -- in

terms of the 'official' society -- might be perceived as people who are physically handicapped.²⁰ They can qualify for us, but could not hope to become any kind of law-enforcement official, either because of educational mis-opportunity, or physically, as society says, "not up to par".

We began to expand our concept. We began to march into Central Park. All the politicians and city officials say, "Nah, we don't need this. This is full of bunk. This is publicity-seeking. Who in hell would be in Central Park after eight o'clock at night anyway? There's nobody in there".

The Mayor's statement at that point was that this was just an effort on the part of a Vigilante group to encourage people to go into the Park at night and it would all end up getting them mugged and ripped-off. The Park Department Commissioner said, "We don't want them. We didn't ask for them. Let them go home". And the Manhattan Borough President said that there was no room for a Vigilante organization in Central Park.

Meantime, we're here waving a flag: "Hold on! We are not a vigilante organization.²¹ We operate within the law. Why don't you walk through Central Park at night -- especially in summer -- and we'll guarantee you, we will bring you to spots in there where you'll find more people than you'll find on Forty-second Street or on Times Square at the same comparable period and hour".

"No, that can't be", they said. "Yes, sir", I said. So what happens in January -- just a little bit later than the September we started? The Manhattan Borough President was walking through the Park in his nice coat with his 'chic' dog. He walks out an hour later without his coat, without a hundred dollars, claiming he was ripped-off by two violent looking, degenerate young people. He also said that groups like the Guardian Angels were needed! It seems the cops really moved on that investigation, because they had the assailant two days later.

Shut Down Your Life

But the point of the matter is this: here's a guy who is representing a constituency in Manhattan that utilizes Central Park and either out of ignorance or callousness or just total insensitivity, did not realize that so many people use the Park at night and that they need protection. They are getting ripped-off. But the officials are saying, "We shouldn't encourage people to use the Park at night. We should encourage them not to go to the Park".

I say, "Why don't we just close up the city, leave and give up?" What did they do at Union Square Park about a year ago? They closed the whole Park. They said there was a curfew at ten p.m. and no one goes into the Park. What kind of attitude is that? We close down certain institutions in our society, public areas, and say we can't use them.

Now you know who's going to be in the Park. The criminal. He's not going to leave the Park because of the curfew. He's going to continue to do his thing. We're closing the Park to the good people. That's what they're saying. Can you just imagine: A SWAT²² team of police going through Central Park at night? You know -- there is a curfew in Central Park at night -- few people are aware -- at twelve midnight. We've been picked up many times in Central Park. Us. We get picked up by a cop and given summons for being in the Park after midnight, and yet there are cyclists going by -- and joggers. "Hey, how ya doin', Angels?" And there's a cop writing us summons and violations. You see, what are we going to do? Send police to make sure everybody is out of the Park? It's absolutely insane!

That's what gets me so angry many times: it seems we're trying to encourage people not to use things. Stay at home. Lock yourself in. Don't wear your jewelry. Don't wear fine clothes. Be afraid. Live in a cocoon. Give up. Wave the white flag. And all of that is the reverse of what the Guardian Angels stand for.

Augmented Police Patrols

Yet, the program worked in Central Park and it began to grow. Now we have the subways and Central Park and we started going into Prospect Park in Brooklyn. We began to patrol there and all of a sudden we were called into other areas. There was a senior citizen area in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn: a whole row of them off Senanamy Church Avenue, who were becoming prey for the young criminal element. They were being 'thrown' in their apartments; being killed, shot, mutilated, mauled, raped. The police were unable to do anything, so a call came for the Guardian Angels. An old lady called me in the evening to ask me, "Is there anything you could do? I live in fear". I explained, "Ma'am, you know that could be said almost anywhere in the City". She said, "That's not so, because now all of us are at the mercy of criminals. The cops say they can't do anything for us". We started patrols.

All of a sudden, we saw more cops there than you ever saw in your life! And this is another factor in the history of the Guardian Angels: wherever we go, the police augment their patrols; increase them. Incredible! Where you find the red berets and shirts that say 'Guardian Angels', you will find the men in blue. They may not have come beforehand. So the Guardian Angels have served a two-fold purpose: they

have brought 'impact', in effect, to areas that never before had police coverage. They also intensify and bring in volunteers that are not 'mercenaries'²³ to patrol areas.

For instance, you're not going to find people patrolling Central Park who come from New Jersey. You'll find New York Guardian Angels. If you go and walk the streets in Elizabeth, Newark, Jersey City or Hoboken, the Guardian Angels who patrol there also live there. They are not 'mercenaries'. If you go to Long Island or Westchester, you'll find Angels patrolling who live there. They all operate under the same rules and regulations.

Paramilitary?

And even though they follow rules and regulations, sometimes the Angels are big, tough, strong kinds of guys, so how do we know they're not going to go around and abuse people? How do we know they're not just going out there and doing all this for 'kicks'? Kick somebody in the head or smack somebody around -- even if it is a criminal? How do we know that the Guardian Angels are not going to organize themselves into some kind of political movement and overthrow the political establishment? How do we know they are not Fascists, Brownshirts or paramilitary and all that?

These are legitimate questions. But when you ask legitimate questions, you have to have factual answers, and if you go through the factual evidence of what the Guardian Angels have been able to achieve in their two year history, you'll find there is no evidence for any of that.

One of the objections that is given goes this way: "Well, we might be able to say that the Guardian Angels are good and they do good work, but how do we know that's not going to encourage another group to form that may not have their motives? A group that might use the same modus operandi?"

Wow! Totally incorrect, because in two years, with international, national and local exposure, I've yet to have any journalist, visitor or person writing to indicate to me that in any way, shape or form any kind of 'other' organization has been formed because of the input of the Guardian Angels. I've yet to see it.

Williams: Have you had any imitators, though: people who might get a beret and shirt like yours and run around saying that they are Angels?

Sliwa: Yeah, sure -- but again, that's not just an excuse and I'll explain fully. You see, there are about ten thousand arrests²⁴ made per year by the New York City police department for phoney imitation cops. I'm not just talking about the guy who comes to you, flashes a phoney badge and claims he's a police officer: I'm talking about people who go down to Herald Square and 34th Street and buy a complete police uniform, stick, thick badge, all the credentials, police identification-type cards and all that.

They are sold right out in the open in a store for public use, and it's done time and time again. There is a problem because since the Guardian Angels have received so much notoriety and press, they are bound to have some imitators; people who should not be saying they are Guardian Angels because what they are is a total contradiction to what we are, but, it has not been that great.

What we've done now is that by January first (1981) we will have a system of identification cards that will be processed for all real Guardian Angels. They will be worn on the outside of the shirt.

"We've Got 'Rock'"

One time, a guy got arrested on 145th Street. He's holding a hammer; he has no shirt and no beret. He claims he's 'Rock'.²⁵ He goes up to somebody and tells him, "Give me ten dollars or I'm going to hit you with this hammer. I'm a Guardian Angel". The cops arrest this guy and rightfully so. He's a little off his bird, but the cop thought (in making the arrest) that instead of filling out his paper work like any good police officer should, he'd be more intent on throwing dimes into a telephone box to call up newspapers and TV stations to tell them, "We've got Rock".

The guy turns out not to be 'Rock', but the story gets around anyway that some guy passed himself off as a Guardian Angel. How can I stop that? How can I stop anyone from saying they are a Guardian Angel? If a person has any intelligence, they'll say, "Prove it. Show me some proof -- some I.D. How do I know you're a Guardian Angel?"

But what does it cost to go out and get a red beret? A person with an artistic eye might be able to cut out a sheet with our emblem and just start rolling off shirts. It's a possibility, so we've gone to the extreme now and began taking precautions: that's why we've established the I.D. cards.

Body Language

Williams: There are two subjects that interest us especially that are connected with what we call 'body language': first, I believe I could recognize any of your people on the subway whether you were wearing your shirts and berets or not. You mentioned earlier certain 'poses' or postures that you assume. The Guardian Angels do make a point of physical training, do they not -- of what Feliciano, the twins and Carlos²⁶ have called 'the discipline'? Second, would you agree that it is possible to recognize (as many criminals do) people who, because of the way they move, are easier 'marks' than others?

Sliwa: Most definitely so. But I think you're also dealing with a young criminal element now that is so bold and so disregarding that many of them don't pay attention to that so much. They see a man with a sheepskin coat. Maybe he's six feet tall and weighs 240 lbs. The only thing they worry about is if he has a gun. They think, "There's four of us. Let's jump him. Maybe one of us will get caught, but one of will get the sheepskin coat".

There are definitely obvious targets for crime such as older people -- and there is a way you look: there's a way you hold yourself, a confidence. Suppose a guy is standing around, eying everybody. He looks at you 'bad' and you look back at him just as bad. You know, they're not going to mess with you. But if they see you're afraid or fearful and you're looking off into the wild blue yonder, or you're walking around like you don't know where you're going, well, you become a target.

But I will say this: it's gotten so bad that it's to the point where there are no guarantees on anything. You could be strutting down the street 'ditty-bopping' in the same manner that the worst of the hard rock criminals would be, and you're still prey to being ripped off. It's really what's going on in their minds and what they think you have that's of value to them...are they worried? My God! They've even tried to rip-off police officers, so why won't they try to rip-off a normal citizen?

Williams: O.K., but what about some of the elements of Guardian Angels' training?

Sliwa: Sure. To begin with, you have to understand what kind of a person would become a Guardian Angel. It isn't easy. There are different levels of accomplishment and training -- everything from martial arts experts to what we consider 'basics', but that's not the most important thing. When a person is fully admitted, their patrol leader has to be ready to vouch for them. The new person has to have proved themselves and you can't get in unless a patrol leader will step forward, laying down his or her shirt and beret, putting it on the

table and saying, "I vouch my colors for this person". There's an interview process. You're interviewed in a series of about four different occasions and in the process of being trained, you're constantly being interviewed.

Laying it on the Line

If we feel at any given point that the person you brought is totally unqualified; in no way has any of the characteristics we're looking for (is immature, is wasting everybody's time), that shirt and beret you put on the table is gone and YOU are a 'hello and goodbye'. You're gone too.

It's a 'one strike'²⁷ policy in the angels. A mistake is a mistake. There's no retracting it: there's no getting away from it. You didn't put enough thought process into it. You didn't think highly enough of us. If you're just going to bring anybody off the street or some guy you knew seven years ago in the first grade -- well, in the meantime, this guy: he's undisciplined. He's got no sense of values, maybe he's been busted for assault and battery. We wonder, "Didn't you even bother asking this guy about that? He's not going to school, he's not going to work, he's not doing anything with his life. He's a 'hangout'dude'²⁸ and this guy, he's got bourbon on his breath. Why are you doing this to us?" You know...you're gone.

That shows that their mirror image of the group is not that hot. So possibly it may come out later on in their own activity where they're not taking the group that seriously. But all right...so finally you're recommended, brought, and you're initially interviewed. The basic interview explains all the rules and regulations.

"Can you deal with it?" "Yeah, yeah, yeah! I'm down!" Then we start asking them questions: school, home, area. "Who do you know in the group? What are the closest train stations in your area? What do you think of the crimes in your area? What do your parents think? What is your life-style? What do you normally do?"

Helping People

And they're like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah. I'm down. I'm down to do good.²⁹ I want to help people". "Right, right, sure -- O.K." Then they get to go out and see what a patrol is like. I tell them it's like I'm a used-car salesman: if I'm looking at you, I'm not going to let you test out the used car unless I think you have money to be able to

buy it. And you -- you're not going to buy the car unless you get to drive it. You'd be a dope for doing so and so would I.

So before we talk any further, go out and see what it's like with a training patrol. Just observe. They're sitting down, wearing their regular clothes. They're not participating -- just checking things out. Many times they're captured by what's on TV, or in the newspapers, or communication in the street and they're like, "Yeah, yeah! Wow! Shirt. Beret. Yeah! Notoriety. Fame. Yeah! Lots of girls". That type of thing.

Let them see what it's like. Sometimes they come back and they say, "Gee. That's kind of boring". And you can tell right there. You can tell what their motivation is. They're looking for frills. And then in dialogue with other members of the group, I'm getting feedback. The leaders are getting feedback: what kind of person is this? You know, if you think this person is going to end up becoming a problem, or do you think he will be of value to the group? Then, the person has to be physically tested; it could end up in any manner, shape or form. The group is so large now that we cannot use the way we used to test a person down in our training facility in Chinatown -- individually.

What the physical test might amount to is -- you're off somewhere with the leader of the patrol and all of a sudden he's talking to you and he smacks you right in the face. Pow! You see what kind of a person we're looking for -- not so much the 'Bruce Lee'.³⁰ We're looking for a person that's going to have self-control. We expect right away for that person to get into a defensive position -- not just stand there with their mouth open. Nor do we want a person who is suddenly going to go crazy and become a raving maniac because he's got blood...Oh my! They see blood and they go crazy!

Can you imagine? In a situation on a crowded train where Guardian Angels are singled³¹ into the cars and some guy goes up and smacks an Angel and all of a sudden the Guardian Angel goes crazy and we have to spend all our time calming the Angel down?

Now, how do you find out about all of that? In an interview, you don't find out anything. To be honest, the interview is just a bull-shitting session. All they're doing is what I told you: "Yeah, Yeah, yeah!" They've already seen it on TV. They've already heard it. They know every answer. "Yes, I like old people. I feel that they have been abused. My grandmother; she rides the train. That's why I want to be an Angel -- mother, my sister -- I love all people". Especially, you have to look into Puerto Ricans' eyes, then say, "Do you feel you have the ability to work with Dominicans?" "Yes, I love all Dominicans". So, you know they're just trying to 'get over'. That's what an interview process is, you know; it's matching wits, matching analogies. You analyzing them -- and they're like puppy-dogs, "Yeah, yeah, I'm down".

Risking the Colors

The ones you got to be careful about are the ones who don't say much because then you don't really have a 'base' to be able to analyze what they're saying. You have to be a little bit aware of it, but in the meantime, we're able to go back to their communities because we usually have a Guardian Angel from there, or in their school or the places they've worked, and we find out about the person.

If the person has been busted for something serious, the word is out in the street. That's their 'rep' (i.e. their reputation). They wear that like they wear stripes. In certain communities, the more times you've been busted -- if you've done 'hard time' as opposed to 'soft time' -- you're more of a man, or, you're more of a person to be admired. And believe me, if you've been busted, people find out about it without having to go to the police and check records and all that.

We put together a picture of what this person is going to be like and then a leader has to come forward and vouch for that person. That means they have to, in essence, take their shirt and beret off and say, "I would like this person in my patrol".

I say, "Well, in giving your shirt for this person, you understand that you are taking full responsibility for him". "Yes, I understand". This is when you are finally accepted as a Guardian Angel. It may take two months or six months. It may in some cases only take two weeks. It really depends on the individual, but I would say the average Angel waits about a month and a half to two months before that shirt is either given to them or we tell them to forget it. We just say, "No matter how long you're here, no matter how many patrols you go on, you just can't crack the muscle. It's time to just forget about it". Somewhere along the line that decision has to be made. You can't end up being a trainee for the rest of your life. It's not like in business where, you know, you've sunk so much money into the person and you say, "well, let's give them a chance". One strike and you're gone. So, that, basically is the preparation for what we need to be a Guardian Angel.

And even then, with all that preparation, a person can always do an unnatural thing; a thing that's totally out of sequence with what they've normally done before. That's why you've constantly got to be on your toes. Now, I'm not out there with the patrols. I'm out there monitoring the patrols, but there are fifty-six groups; fifty-six separate group leaders and secondary leaders and they're the ones running the patrols. I'm not making the decisions out there. They're the ones that have to deal with the cops; they're the ones that have to deal with the public; the ones that have to make the decisions as to who to detain, arrest or release, what to let go by, what to take seriously.

They're given a route; they are given a general area. Their communication is by 'phone, but they also have dialogue. They can also pick up the 'phone and say, "Hey, we've gotten reports from some people that the double G train has got 'hot' between six and eight. We'd like to hit that". "You've got it!" -- unless there's a more pressing issue. But it's not as if I sit at headquarters 'Seig Heil'³² and pick up the 'phone and give orders and you don't say anything. What I say is based on input, but I will tell you this: the final buck stops at my desk because when the shit hits the fan, everybody comes to me. And I have to be prepared to defend it. Any decision that's made -- either I know about it or I've made it myself, so I'm the one that can be held responsible.

Training

Yeah, there is physical training. We have two martial arts instructors in the City. Outside the City in other groups, there are different methods of training, but it's all physical training. The (Martial) Arts that are practised are known as Shao-Lin Kung Fu (that's a style of Kung Fu, and we have two top instructors). Everyone in the group is a member of group patrols; we have no specialized people. That is, nobody to answer the 'phone, nobody to do secretarial work, nobody to empty garbage, walk the dog. If they do that, they are doing it as an extra duty.

The main purpose of every Guardian Angel, as I say, "from the banana to the banana peel", is to patrol. And you must patrol at least twice a week anywhere from eight to twelve hours per week. That is an absolute must. If you can't fulfill that, there is no need for you to be a Guardian Angel -- but the training? I sit down in headquarters and many times we bring a group in. "Hey, what do you do when this happens? What do you do when that happens? What? You made an arrest and you didn't get the cop's number?"

And remember: the language that we use is 'right there'. It's not filled with roses. It's not immaculate. We get very basic. Yet, if the person is screwed and it's an honest mistake, we'll put a 'brake' on the person. We've got to ensure that it will not happen again. And you go over the same things: over and over and over. Sometimes I feel like making a cassette tape and putting the group in a room and just letting it run over and over.

We've got some guys with a certain intellectual ability and sometimes they're more dangerous than the person who's very simple.

We have some University people in the group, but I fear older people more than younger guys. People say, "Boy! You've got some young guys out there". The only problems I've ever had are with older guys who 'free-lance', who suddenly take rules and regulations and say, "We'll wait a second on this and this and this", and they alter things to their own particular needs or wants for that particular situation.

Generally, a younger person might be a little more frisky or playful; a little less disciplined, but they're not going to make major decisions that could alter the whole effect of the group. It's the older guy who goes out there (who may be a psychology major from college) who's saying, "I know the psychological nature of this person and I feel that somewhere in their background they've done this previously and I think we should detain this person for further questioning". Somebody else says, "Hey, wait a minute. We can't do that", and they get told, "I'm the leader of this group. I'll take responsibility. Don't worry. I'll call it in. Grab him!" That's the problem: somebody who's putting more into the situation than is naturally there.

That's why we say (I hate to use the football analogy, but it's good), it's sort of like a 'running defense'. You don't know what the offense is doing; what 'play' they're running, so you have to read it and then react. That's what Guardian Angels do. They have to read the situation first before they can take an action. Unless I see some guy on top of you that's punching away -- well, then it's obvious I'm going to separate you -- but I still don't make a judgment until I find out. I don't right away grab the guy and say, "Hey! You're under citizen's arrest". I detain him and find out what's going on. It might be a family dispute.

The Best Patrols

Many of the Angels have their own physical instructors, many of them are involved in school programs, whether it's gymnastics, wrestling, boxing -- just the ordinary, on-going physical programs. Many of them are really not in need of having every-day training.³³ Those that we feel are a little shaky are required to attend the school or their colors are removed, but I think it would be an imposition on my part to require that they all be of top-notch 'Bruce Lee' quality; able to break through brick walls.

We're not accentuating the physical. As far as I'm concerned, the best patrol is the one that never once had to bare their knuckles. The best patrols are the ones that can use their minds and their tongues (as opposed to their fists). It has been true in the Guardian Angels that the best patrols have been those that have never run into a physical confrontation because they react to the situation, they read it correctly and then make their moves. Psychologically, they have the whole thing under control.

In fact, if you asked me the word to describe the Guardian Angels best, I'd say, 'psychological'. It's the psychological effect that counts. It's a deterrent, naturally, but even when the situation gets out of control, there is the knowledge on the part of both 'bad' person and 'good' person of what the Guardian Angels will do.

People know what the Angels are capable of doing and what you can't push them into doing. They don't want to -- and you can't push them into -- taking physical action. If somebody strikes a passenger, or shoots them, or if they try to interfere physically with somebody else, then they will take action.

'The Knowledge'

Imagine, if you didn't have that physical presence: for the 'good' people... (I hate to use the analogy of 'good' and 'bad') but the person who might attempt to commit a criminal act if we were to allow him, reacts to us in a certain way. He looks at us and says, "Hey! It's not even worth my time challenging these people". You have to understand that. We're not walking around saying, "You put that cigarette out" or "you turn off that radio", because we don't do that. But the knowledge of what we will do is there.

The Guardian Angel is there: he's not going to run. The knowledge is there that if (God forbid!) somebody were to pull out a gun and everyone else runs out of the train, the Guardian Angel will remain. See. That is 'the knowledge'. And, on the part of the bad person out there; for him to challenge a Guardian Angel is tough, because he knows that where he sees one, there are many. They may not all be in that particular car now, but the Angel who is there, he does some kind of a 'trick' or 'gizmo' and all of a sudden, they're all there.

We have signals, and obviously, I'm not going to show them; except one, waving the beret. And we have to work fast and stay out of the way... you know how long those subway doors are open, and we look out of the doors every time they open. That's something I've discussed with conductors -- men in the middle of the train who have to look up and down. Some of them get a little touchy at times because they claim they can't see the people getting into and off the train. So I've spoken with the groups and asked them to bend down when they're looking out of the door, because they are looking up and down too, and their bending makes it easier for the conductor. It's really a courtesy for them. Not all groups are using the move at this point, but we are putting it into effect.

Symbolic Codes

We have movement strategies -- all the patrols do, because they have to communicate and they 'rehearse' these. What they'll do is (specifically in the trains, because in the streets you can practise anywhere) go to the last stop where the train is idle and the doors are left wide open. Then they'll practise their signals. They practise their formation and practise looking out of doors.

The idea is, we have signals: when you're looking out the door, there is a signal (beret signals, waving the beret, hand signals). Every Guardian Angel should be in that car within a twenty-five second period of time, whether the car is packed (and immovable) or whether there's nobody in the train. The rule is twenty-five seconds to be in that car. We don't tell you how to do it. We just tell you to do it.

These strategies were my idea and based on my experience of knowing how long -- how far a situation can go -- before you need numbers to keep it under control. Basically, now, our patrols are eight people. The main basic signal -- the emergency signal -- which means you need everybody in there right away -- is the waving of the beret.

Each and every other Guardian Angel up and down the cars, when they stick their heads out and they see this signal, they will take their berets off and wave it once and -- wham! Run through the train (or run outside the train on the platform) depending on what kind of train it is.

If it's a 'ding-dong' train (which means that the doors don't open between cars), it means you have to run on the outside and somebody's got to hold the door. If it's a normal passenger train where you can move freely in and out of (separate) cars, then they'll run between cars. But, you got to move! You got to 'haul'.³⁴ And once you get into the car, you've got to take a designated door. Each person has a specific area.

You don't start talking. You don't ask why the signal was made. For all you know, it could be a test or a drill -- or it may be a very serious thing. The person who finally makes the determination of what to do, based on the information he or she has received from the personal signal, is the leader of the patrol. Unless, for example, we see somebody on top of someone. Then we separate them, and everyone comes in and they know just what they're supposed to do.

They're also carrying with them a sheet of paper and a pencil in case they have to detain somebody. Individuals know specifically what their function is: to get information before the cops get there and start throwing them up against the wall, or not allowing them to speak to victims or witnesses or whatever. In essence, they have to prepare their defense.

Guardian Angels have to be on the defense. It's a sad note about our society, but in dealing with the police whenever they are on the scene, we have to defend our actions constantly if we don't have all the information right there and then on the spot. We can't be "Oh, Ah, Ah... uh" because the handcuffs will go on us. Guardian Angels have been handcuffed even when the facts have indicated that the person (who was apprehended was the one who) needed to be handcuffed. You know, needed to be arrested. But Angels have been handcuffed along with the person they have captured, taken to the precinct, questioned by detectives and it may be four or five hours before they are released. It's a fact of life we have to live with.

But, back to the signals: there are individual hand signals which mean that you request the patrol leader to come into the car. These could be anything from tugging the cap. In between the cars if the train is moving, it could be in terms of hand signals; and it should be. You know, it's like a third-base crouch; you could be doing any number of things. You don't know what he's doing, so that nobody should be able to perceive what the Angel is doing.

Silence + Speed = Effectiveness

The signals evolved out of the fact that I believe there should be a limit on verbal communication while we are on patrol. Everybody knows what they have to do. If something verbal has to be done in terms of getting across a point, O.K. People come up to you and talk, so you're supposed to talk, but I'm saying that instruction (or whatever) should be able to be made without really having to get that much into a dialogue.

Sometimes you're dealing instantaneously. You have to. I mean, one signal...Boom! That means you get at that door. I might go this way and I might go like that...things of that nature. We try to keep the movements consistent with what a person might do normally. This means signals that you might not think are signals, even though we know nobody's watching us. It's to the point that it has to be something natural -- not out of context.

And yes, it's 'secret', because if the signal is unnatural, it's a tip-off. You know, if you're a bad guy and you're bothering someone and you just see one Angel, -- maybe you're a little high -- if you saw something unnatural, you might react "Uh-oh!" and you could prepare a defense. But with natural signals, all of a sudden you turn around and you see eight Angels all over the place. The impact of seeing that stuns you. It's like somebody takes a laser gun and freezes you.

You just don't know what to do and then, if it's clearly obvious what you did was wrong, the patrol leader will deal with it, but if it was just an 'effect' to get you to stop doing what you were doing, it's also effective that way -- without anybody having to say anything.

In fact, I would prefer as little verbal communication as possible. We have an all deaf-mute group, so verbal communication isn't possible for them, and yet they have no problems whatsoever. In fact, they're better off patrolling because they are oblivious to any type of verbal commentary. The one thing you always worry about with a Guardian Angel patrol is that somebody starts getting verbally abusive. Somebody might break and lose control of themselves and with the deaf-mute patrols -- they never do. Unless they're actually staring at you reading your lips, they wouldn't know what the hell you were saying. They're walking by and maybe they pass three or four wise-guys. They don't know what's going on, but they can tell according to motions, if there is violent intent on their part.

Voluntary Membership

One of the things I want to clarify is that when Lisa or I is seen as 'the top'³⁵ of the Guardian Angels, you should not think it's the kind of organization where we control people's minds or actions, or provide them with lodging, education, money or anything like that. They are free to come and go. If you want to toss your beret and shirt on the table, you can do that anytime, at any point. We don't have educational counseling or job guidance. We don't have the time for that. I'm not saying it's not important, but we just have so much to do on our own.

We've had people who have been forced to drop out for no apparent reason other than personal. They don't want to discuss it. It's their business; it's not really our business. They're free to come and go as they please, but if you're going to remain a part of us, you must follow the code of conduct and discipline in the organization. Then, it's not 'come and go as you please'.

In the structure, I'm the leader and then there are the individual leaders and secondary leaders of each group. Wherever you go, whether it's in New York City or outside New York, that is the basic structure. Obviously, there are certain leaders who have been in long enough: they gain respect and esteem within other groups so that if they were to visit another group, their words and actions and statements are looked upon as if...you know..."Maybe you guys should be doing it this way", but no one would have to listen to them if they didn't feel it was justified. So in essence, there is a chain of command, but it's very loose.

"We're not the Army"

I don't like all the garbage of sergeants and lieutenants, petty officers or any of that. That's for an Army. You want that, you join

the Army. We're citizens and yet we have to have some form of discipline. I always get angry when the word 'paramilitary' is used to describe our activities, because 'paramilitary' to me is something that's done, you know, in a military manner. It would have to at some point deal with weapons. I have yet to hear of a military that had no weapons.

To me, a little league baseball team is 'paramilitary' if you want to take it to that extreme: they have the same uniforms and they carry baseball bats. They go out onto the field and they do it in an organized way. Do we consider them 'paramilitary'? If you follow this line of reasoning, then the American Legion is 'paramilitary' and Boy Scouts are 'paramilitary'. The only reason we wear the red beret and the shirt is because if we didn't wear them, you'd be half terrified of us because you'd be wondering if we were going to rip you off.

To be quite honest, crime in the City has a racially stereotyped breakdown. A lot of citizens look at a young Hispanic male, for instance, who might be dressed with a shirt and tie and immediately begin covering up. Now is it right or isn't it? I'm not going to get into that aspect of it, but one must say that young people are the ones committing crimes. Some people have a racial perspective; a racial prejudice, yet you put that same person in the shirt and beret and all of a sudden it's like the sun broke out in the middle of a rainstorm and they're your friend. They want to invite us home and introduce us to their families.

The Angels' emblems cut across all racial barriers. I've seen the most prejudiced of people suddenly embrace somebody that they would never in their life get near and it's not because they're in love with the person: they're in love with the concept. But in the long-haul approach, I think the group can do more to heal and rectify racial injustice and racial prejudice than any other organization I've seen because it's clearly indicated that here are people who come from different backgrounds; racial backgrounds and religious backgrounds, and they work together on a volunteer basis in probably the hardest thing to do voluntarily in the area of crime control -- and yet, they are effective. It shows how different peoples can work together.

Auxiliary Police

What we've done is, we've moved ahead with the City even though we've objected to their initial proposals of making us auxiliary police. We've attempted to work out a way in which we could exist, maintain our independent stature and not be considered a police volunteer organization. And there is a big difference.

Number one; the auxiliary police, as stated in the Police Manual, are the "eyes and ears" of the Police Department and it states -- top line -- they are not to get physically involved in any situation. Nowadays, a criminal commits an act; O.K., you pull out a radio, call it in and you wait fifteen or twenty minutes for the police to arrive. What good is that? The person is in bed at home sleeping and laughing at you while you're there playing with the radio.

Now I think there are people who are suited to be auxiliary police and I think there are those people who are capable of embodying what the Guardian Angels do. And I think there is room for Guardian Angels in our society. If you're willing to take upon yourself a legal liability³⁶ and the physical implications of what you're doing, I can't see why it should be stopped, especially when your 'track record' has virtually been untouchable.

I mean the authorities -- when they look for arguments to argue against the Guardian Angels -- use clichés like, "You want mom, apple pie and the flag defending you on the train or do you want a trained police officer?", and when you have to reach to those levels, it clearly indicates that you are trying to compare the Guardian Angels to what -- God? I mean, really, 'mom', 'apple pie', 'the flag'? You think that highly of the Guardian Angels and yet you still put them down? I'd like to know what their factual reason is for trying to obliterate the Angels.

SECTION II

Different Standards

The Angels have continued since November, 1980 and they grow and flourish. Some of the kinds of resistances they had met among the members of city 'officialdom' either has relaxed or is so unpopular that it is not politically wise to raise 'anti-Angel' issues on the media. Slowly, they are becoming a part of the New York scene. More women are involved with the group. Lisa Evers has been a key figure in the general development of the Guardian Angels and her success in the organization has encouraged other women to join. Evers' organizational ability, her dedication and her superb control over herself on patrols (and, subsequently, of patrols) soon meant that her activities released valuable time for Sliwa to respond to the many requests for chapters of Guardian Angels in other cities. As the development of these new groups progressed, Evers became the National Coordinator of the Angels, the "number one female Angel" and second in command.

Evers first heard of the Angels in 1979 from her karate instructor (himself an Angel) and it was through him that she met Curtis Sliwa and started to become involved in patrols. At the time, she was one of a