

# MURRAY PARK

CAN HEAVEN STILL BE FOUND ON A PLAYGROUND?

PART 7 | AUGUST-EARLY SEPTEMBER

## 'The gang-bangers won't let anything happen to Derrick Rose'

Even for the good people, with so much fear and death, leaving town may be only escape

BY RICK TELANDER  
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There is a young man in handcuffs being led into a side entrance of the 7th District Police Headquarters on Loomis and 63rd. I go through the front door.

As I stand at the counter, so high it is nearly up to my neck, I think about the violence and fear in Englewood. Already I have become re-wired, just from visiting this summer. I do not think about eating in the area, except at drive-throughs on busy streets, such as Arturo's Mexican Fast Food on Ashland, where all the windows are bullet-proof, including the lazy-Susan into which I place my money and from which I collect my food. I do not consider going into any of the corner shops for water or gum, window-less dumps that are covered by bars.

Even the killings on the South Side have become common for me. I only remember the odd, the curious, the unbearable. There was the cook at Alice's Bar-B-Cue killed by a stray bullet while on a break. There was the butcher carrying ice into Margarita's

Meat Market at 10:30 a.m. killed by shots intended for others. There was the 6-year-old killed while sleeping in her living room. The high school wrestler killed while standing on his girlfriend's porch. The 18-year-old killed in gunfire that also wounded an 88-year-old man. The one-year-old shot while being carried by her 15-year-old aunt. The pregnant 17-year-old mother of one shot to death, with her baby delivered from her dead body by C-section.

The police have their casualties, too. It wasn't far from here that officer Alex Valadez, a Brother Rice High School grad, was shot in the head and killed in 2009 by a thug who will be convicted of the murder Thursday.

Oh yeah, it's a war.

People wonder why kids join gangs. There are so many reasons, but as Derrick Rose pal Arsenio Williams puts it, "Once you're in, you're in. You're gonna go to prison or die. The only way out is to leave town."

I am ushered around the



Bucket Boys get in their licks during a quiet time on the corner. Police say gangs use the young kids playing the corners to drum up money. | RICK TELANDER-SUN-TIMES PHOTOS

counter to an office room where I speak with night-shift commander, Capt. Ed Kulbida. He's been here a long time, but other than enforcing the law, he doesn't know what the answers are.

"There are good people here," he says. "But basically when somebody makes it, they move out. I remember reading an article about the 'permanent

underclass,' and I wonder if that's true. So what's left? What's a kid supposed to do? Work at McDonald's and say, 'Super-size you?'"

Kulbida had truly seemed troubled by the endless sinkhole. I asked him what the biggest problem was with the young criminals in Englewood and West Englewood.

"They don't respect the police,"

he answered immediately.

They don't respect anybody, I offered.

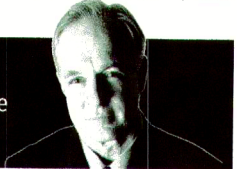
"Oh, they respect the star athletes. The gang-bangers won't let anything happen to Derrick Rose."

■ ■ ■

"Want to walk and talk?" asks

**ABOUT  
THIS  
SERIES**


In the early 1970s, Rick Telander wrote *Heaven Is a Playground*, hailed as one of the best sports books of all time, about the lives and dreams of Brooklyn's ghetto hoops legends. This summer, Telander visited Englewood, the downtrodden community on the South Side where Derrick Rose grew up, to see if hope can still flourish on a neighborhood playground. To read Parts 1-6, go to [suntimes.com](http://suntimes.com).



the mail carrier.

Her name is Nicole Lucas, and she's a slender thing in U.S. Post Office uniform and she's moving fast.

I had asked her what it was like walking the daily route near 62nd Street in West Englewood.

"Once you're here a while, it's not so bad," she had said, folding letters and magazines out of the back of her truck. She had dropped a few of the mags, and as I bent to pick them up for her I was surprised to see "Men's Journal" and "ESPN, the Magazine" in the group. Lucas has braces on her teeth, and I find it amusing that her 20-block daily walk isn't enough exercise for her, and that she often runs on a treadmill at a YMCA, too.

Old people greet her kindly as she brings them their few letters, coming out from their houses to make brief small talk. Many houses look terrifying, even in this bright sunlight. "You can tell which ones are vacant," Lucas says. "You get to know people, who's gone."

The mail service is seemingly going the way of the telegraph, with little-used outposts being the first parts to be closed down, and that will be just one more way Englewood is isolated from the real world. Even though there have been an increasing number of robberies and assaults of mail carriers in bad neighborhoods, Lucas, small and sprightly, says she has never been harmed.

She hands the mail through a door opened just a crack to a man who looks angry. He sees me on the sidewalk. "Why are you walking with her?" he yells.

I tell him to see how the mail is delivered.

He comes down the steps, in bare feet, long pants, undershirt.



**Chicago Police officers Eddie Haynie (left) and Robert Waterstraat patrol Englewood's streets knowing that speedy backup is always at hand.**

assist in the backup for other cops who have cornered an armed robber in his mother's house, scattered a large group of threatening teens and likely gang-bangers who were looking for trouble, and raced through alleys and sidestreets looking for a 6-3, black male in a gray sweat shirt and jeans with a gun.

That view had been surreal: half a dozen cruisers and unmarked cop cars with blue lights flashing, racing for blocks in criss-cross and parallel patterns, like runners through aisles of a supermarket.

Now Haynie and the other cops who appear almost instantly have the young driver up against his car. He has no license, and it's his mother's car, and it's late. Haynie lectures the kid on the many violations he just committed. Is this the start of something for the kid, or could it be a true lesson learned? Judging from the other young people who are out on the street, goofing around, mocking the police, it doesn't look good.

As Haynie continues his lecture, Waterstraat writes up the citations. The cops want to give the mom a ticket, too, but nobody knows where she is. Perfect.

"Hurry up!" says a cop, looking in the window at Waterstraat and grinning. "I can write a homicide faster than that."

There is a bond here among these 7th District guys. They cover each other at lightning

**THIS WOULD BE A BEAUTIFUL PLACE TO LIVE — THE GREEN LINE AND THE BLUE LINE COME HERE, 10 MINUTES FROM THE LOOP. SOME OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL PARKS YOU'LL FIND ANYWHERE. AND THEN . . ."**

ROBERT WATERSTRAAT, Chicago Police officer

He's maybe late-30s.

"You a postal inspector?"

I tell him no, a newspaper writer for the Sun-Times.

"What paper?"

"The Sun-Times, like I said."

"Where's your I.D.?"

I show him my business card. He barely looks. He's getting angrier.

"That ain't an ID."

I show him my driver's license.

"I don't believe you!"

We are now two houses from his. I can't tell if he has a weapon. He might. I can't explain this, but my only emotion is anger. The hell with this guy.

"I don't care if you don't believe me!" I snap.

Lucas is now far ahead of me.

And we wonder why men kill each other.



The squad car races down the street, screaming through nighttime Englewood. Somebody in a late-model SUV up ahead just flew through a red light, drove around the corner and screeched to a halt in front of a vacant house.

From the back seat I can see the two 7th District policemen in the front seat, driver Eddie Haynie and co-pilot Robert Waterstraat, tense up. I can see Waterstraat reach for his gun. Already tonight we have flown down Englewood area streets to

speed. "The back-up here is the best," Haynie said proudly. And even the simplest-looking incidents must be snuffed swiftly. "Dispersal is the big thing," says Haynie. "Dispersing before something happens."

Earlier, the pair had dispersed some little bucket boys on the corner of Racine and 71st.

"See, they use kids to get money," Haynie had said of the gangs.

"I'm just going to the other corner," a bucket boy, maybe eight years old, had said defiantly.

"You'll be going to jail," Haynie replied.

As we cruise the dark and randomly frightening night, Waterstraat says, almost to himself, "This would be a beautiful place to live — the Green Line and the Blue Line come here, 10 minutes from the Loop, some of the most beautiful parks you'll find anywhere. And then . . ."



Arsenio Williams, Rose's best pal who works for Children's Home + Aid, a social welfare group, was standing outside his home on Paulina at nine o'clock last Friday night, talking with some neighborhood guys, trying to defuse a budding feud, when a car had pulled up and people inside started firing.

Williams had dropped low and then, as the car raced off, ran to help those around him who looked to have been shot. In time he started to feel weak, and he looked down. His clothes were turning deep crimson. He lay down on the sidewalk and somebody slapped him on the face. He came back. Then he drifted off.

He had been shot seven times.

**PART 8 | MONDAY**

Visiting Williams in hospital, "Derrick Rose Day" at Murray Park