

Neighbors and Family Shocked by Santa Cruz Police Shooting

by Becky Johnson

A few blocks from the heart of county services on Emeline Street in Santa Cruz is the Button Street neighborhood. A modern complex of tiny apartments at 200 Button Street now exists where in recent memory some of the most dilapidated housing sections in Santa Cruz stood. Unit after unit was condemned and red-tagged.

Residents seeking affordable rents suffered living with unlivable conditions or reporting the conditions and then being evicted when the place got red-tagged and the owner refused to spend the money to fix it up. The police treated residents differently, less respectfully, than they did the residents of wealthier neighborhoods.

Redevelopment money changed the look but not the feel of 200 Button Street. With thousands of dollars of city money, the new property owners were able to refurbish the grossly substandard housing, put in densely packed, modern housing units, and not spend a dime of their own money. Of course rents went up. But management and, apparently, police attitudes have stayed the same.

Recently, a resident of the neighborhood, Bryan Andrus, had a bad day. He'd gone surfing to work out some tension, but had wound up locking his keys in his car. Then, in a moment of frustration, he'd punched his hand through the window to get his keys. Not only did he break the window, he cut his hand in the process.

When he got home to his Button Street apartment where he lived with his wife, Lorie, and their one-year-old daughter, he drove his car up on the curb. He got out of his car, shouting and yelling, and went into his house. As he went inside, he got some blood on the edge of the front door.



"No abuse should go undocumented."

Art by Bernard Sampson for AFSC ILEMP program

His wife went out and parked the car correctly on the street. She went into the house, calmed Bryan down, and took him upstairs to put hydrogen peroxide on his cut hand. Two neighbors called the police, one using the business line to place the call, not considering it to be a clear emergency. "A police car has been dispatched," the operator assured the caller.

POLICE APPROACH SCENE 'PUMPED UP'

One witness in the crowded, residential neighborhood of Santa Cruz, said, "I saw the first officer get out of his car, put on his gloves, and get out his baton. He was unbelievably pumped up." She became very anxious about getting her eight-year-old son home because of how the police were acting. In police procedures for

answering a suspected domestic violence call, one would expect the police to be agents for mediation, and to act to defuse a potentially violent situation.

Police were observed by witnesses searching the front of the house for a hidden key, and looking through a bag of clothes on the patio. No shouting was heard at this time. Lorie Andrus later said she did not hear the police knock on the door.

When she saw uniformed police officers outside her front window, she went over and Officer Guerrasio talked to Lorie through the front window. She told him she was unharmed, not in danger, and he could see that she had no apparent injuries. He did not request to speak to her husband. She was in a different room from the alleged abuser and on a different floor. Why, at that point, was it still necessary to enter the building by force?

POLICE ASSAULT ALLEGED VICTIM

The blood had been observed on the door frame, perhaps sufficient cause for unauthorized entry into the home, but no domestic violence protocol could justify Officer Guerrasio's actions once he gained entry into the house. According to Lorie Andrus, Guerrasio forced the door

open, grabbed her wrists, pushed her arms up behind her head, forcing her to step back into her living room in a way that was painful to her, causing her to scream.

Her husband Bryan came to the top of the stairs and witnessed his wife being assaulted by a police officer. To what degree did the attack on Bryan Andrus' wife precipitate his response to defend his wife, child, and home?

The April 2, 1998, press release from the Santa Cruz Police Department claims that Guerrasio was met at the door by Bryan Andrus swinging a baseball bat.