

My schedule was hell!

My first class started at 7:30am. I got off work at 7, a permanent 3rd shift clerk with the St. Louis City Police Department. I got out of school at 1:30pm, rushed home to eat, then to bed. Up around 10pm, a bath, a bit of coffee and off to work again.

It was a grind, especially staying awake through those early morning classes – Physical Anthropology followed by Asian History. Worse was the 12:15 to 1:30 class - Experimental Psychology. I embarrassed myself more than once by falling asleep. And that was my major! No disrespect intended but by 1pm, I was exhausted.

That day was no different from the others. Warm, humid, as I remember it. I had to be at the station for shift change at 11pm. It was often crowded then in the area around the booking sergeant's cage with the 2nd shift going off and the 3rd shift coming on.

It might have been a bit more crowded that night. Everyone seemed to be hovering about but it wasn't clear why. That's when the desk sergeant stood on the rung of the booking desk stool and shouted over the din, "King's been killed in Memphis!"

I suppose, in retrospect, the 2nd shift must have known. Likely, us on the 3rd shift hadn't heard. The news was a shock! For a few seconds – it seemed forever – you could hear a pin drop.

Then cheers. Yes, cheers.

A flood of thoughts numbed my mind but, more than anything, I was scared. Cities already had burned. Not St. Louis, but now? Those early morning – 2 to 3am – code 1000 drills just might become real. Districts rolling all on-duty officers to the riot scene. All off-duty and reserved officers called in. Paddy wagons with M60 machine guns mounted in back deployed, a mobile armored force, lethal as hell. Sniper rifles and BARs, some with grenade launchers, issued.

Code 1000 meant war and people were going to die.

I don't know how long the cheering lasted, how long those apocalyptic thoughts paralyzed me, when, suddenly, **BOOM!** A shotgun blast shattered me awake. Shards of plaster, clouds of dust filled the room, all oozing from the hole in the station house ceiling. Our solitary black officer had fired his riot gun into the air and stormed out of the station.

Silence returned. 2nd shift went on their way. 3rd shift, wary now of the long night ahead, got into their patrol cars to begin their night, more tense than any ever before.

[pause]

No one died that night.

At 7am, I got off work and went to school ... just as before ... only, nothing was ever just as before. Nothing ... ever.