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Mike Dyer still wears his New York City Police uniform in the city's St. Patrick's Day Parade.

Dyer's Former Career as a New York Cop Gives Him Unique Perspective as Lawyer

**By Andy Roberts
The Daily Record**

Like so many other members of the Omaha Bar Association, Mike Dyer was born in Brooklyn, N.Y., and lived there until he was 5 years old. He then moved with his eight brothers and sisters to Long Island.

Oh wait, maybe that's not your typical Omaha attorney's background.

Did we mention he's a former New York City police officer, who retired on disability? So, no, he doesn't come from a long line of lawyers.

"My dad was a milkman until home delivery went out of style in the early seventies," Dyer said. "He opened a milk store in Brooklyn and over the next 20 years went on to open seven delicatessens in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens and Long Island."

The future attorney would go to work with his dad a few times a month, mostly during the summer, and do some home deliveries. While still in grade school he'd run up and down 100-year-old apartment steps in NYC where he met a bunch of "near-elderly" folks who couldn't make it to the store.

By the time he was 10 he had his own *Newsday* newspaper route, out on his own for a couple hours a day – of course without a cell phone – and going door-to-door to collect the bill from 60 customers.

"I've just got to remember they were different times," he said.

His first paycheck job was in a Howard Johnson's restaurant when he was 15. Starting as a busboy, he worked up to cook and gave up the newspaper route. "Like the people who have a face for radio, I stayed in the kitchen," he jokes.

Dyer attended St. Anthony's High School, paying his way with his \$2.80-per-hour salary, which he also used to buy a car and pay for any other expenses. An opportunity to take the NYPD test came when he was 18, and with his mother's encouragement he took the written test. A passing grade led to a physical, interview and psychological test.

"When I was 20 and called back for the job, my mom said she didn't want to influence my decision," Dyer said.

"My police career with NYPD lasted three years 11 months and six days before I was retired on a disability pension due to line-of-duty injuries from a riot in Central Park in the summer of 1983," Dyer said. "I was recognized by NYPD on seven occasions for my actions as a police officer and also awarded a citation by the city council."

During that brief career in blue, he was shot at, hit by a bullet fragment, stabbed, hit in the face with a bottle and a treaded pipe that leaves a scar to this day. He wrestled guns away from two people and feels lucky to not have been shot.

To say it wasn't easy is an understatement.

"With all the death and violence I saw, the worst was when two 15-year-old kids were shot in the head in Spanish Harlem over \$10 worth of drugs and I watched the life run out of them," he said. "I read about them the next day in the newspaper in a 2-inch story on page 34."

Dyer made some lifelong friends with the NYPD, and has marched in the St. Patrick's Day Parade up Fifth Ave. with the NYPD Emerald Society every year, with his 30th anniversary of that event coming in March. For the past dozen years he has brought a few police officer friends from Nebraska along for the trip to march with him.

But, retiring at 24 meant he had to be something else when he grew up. He had seen enough people injured to know that medical school was of no interest.

“One of my bosses, who had a kid about my age, suggested that being a lawyer would be a good fit with my background and personality,” Dyer remembers. So he went back to college with a new approach – reading the books and doing the homework – and graduated *cum laude* with a bachelor’s degree from Long Island University where he did work in International Studies.

He headed off to the Creighton School of Law on the recommendation of a contact with a New York head-hunting firm that specialized in lawyers. Dyer was told Creighton was in the top 20 percent of schools he placed.

It was at Creighton where he met his wife, Elizabeth. They met on a Creighton Law School retreat, run by the school’s then-Chaplin, the Rev. Jack Zuercher, S.J.

“Our first date was on Valentine’s Day,” Dyer remembers. “I took a few law school classes at Cambridge University that summer and by that time I knew I was in love.”

The follow spring he graduated at 10:30 a.m. and “Father Z” officiated at their wedding less than three hours later. The couple has three daughters, ranging from eighth grade through freshman year in college.

Now in his 20th year of practicing law, Dyer worked for a couple of firms before he and Elizabeth opened their own offices on April 1, 1992. At the suggestion of Dyer’s father, Elizabeth is the senior partner.

Dyer’s firm handles a range of injury cases, including car crashes, workers’ comp, third-party claims that arise from work comp injuries and some products, plus employment law. “Having been retired on a permanent total disability from a work injury, I have a real passion for helping injured workers and also for helping people hurt by drunks,” he said.

He was encouraged to enter this area of the law after a conversation with one of the teachers from Cambridge, who suggested his police background and ability to size-up people would serve him well in tort law. To his police experience Dyer adds work with Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) and the ability to listen to people, be it a client calling about an injury or someone he’s volunteering to help.

Cutting people off when the attorney should be listening, he says, can do more harm than if they never called.

“My license from New York says ‘Attorney and Counsellor at Law’,” Dyer points out. “We all know how to do the ‘Attorney thing’ but the ‘Counsellor’ part is just as important.”

Dyer believes his life experiences make him a better lawyer, and because it helps him know what people are going through. In addition to volunteering with MADD, he is a member of the Fraternal Order of Police and is still active in some NYPD activities, including the Retirees Mobilization Program, which would allow him to assist the force if NYC is attacked again.

For 15 years, he also was a member of Cosmopolitan International, which is working to find a cure for diabetes, a disease Elizabeth has been dealing with since she was a teenager.

The experiences help him serve clients who have been in car wrecks, like those he saw as a police officer, or the wounded police officer with whom Dyer was able to discuss the sting and burn of his injury.

“Instead of having just sympathy for some of the terrible things my clients go through, I have empathy,” Dyer said. “I’ve had a career taken from me due to a work injury and I’ve been able to help some clients make that same change and realize how much better things can turn out than you might expect.”

Dyer Law has helped a number of families cope with the tragedy of wrongful death, and helped many others injured by drunk drivers and other life-altering results from car crashes and work injuries, he said. “I can approach these situations from a real world experience perspective.”

When asked the biggest challenge facing attorneys today, Dyer quickly responds: “Technology.”

Eighteen years ago he started marketing his practice as: “Mike Dyer – The Attorney Who Answers His Own Phone.”

Cell phones were not common at that time, but technology caught up to him and the phrase lost its meaning and had to be dropped. Today, Dyer could be known as “The Attorney Who Keeps Calling His Clients.”

For 20 years he’s made a point of calling every open-file client he hasn’t talked to in recent weeks, a task Dyer handles himself despite a talented support staff.

“I don’t think this job can be delegated,” he says. Often that can mean working outside regular office hours.

“It means so much to a client to get a call from the actual attorney, but even more when they know you skipped supper to work late just to call them.”

Dyer says insurance companies now present new challenges, again, as a product of technology.

“Insurance companies are able to do more damage more quickly in a car crash case than ever before,” Dyer said. “They can get recorded statements right from the scene before the victim has time to collect their thoughts and when they are not prepared for the questions or the consequences of their answers.”

He feels that insurance companies have successfully marketed lawyers as “greedy bad guys” and show attorneys as being people who want to take some poor kid’s college fund away from him in court.

“I think the answer is to encourage our clients or potential clients who’ve been

tricked or cheated by insurance companies with ridiculous settlement offers to use social networking and get the word out,” Dyer said. “On the flip side, if the lawyer does a good job, that story needs to get out on the net too.”

For Dyer, satisfaction comes from working with a bright, compassionate, hard-working team and knowing his firm is making a difference in someone’s life.

“There’s a satisfaction in knowing that you’ve helped someone in a time of trouble and being told how much you are appreciated by your clients that makes you want to work even harder,” he said.

It is obvious he enjoys his second career, and, as for the future, Mike Dyer says it is now!

“I’ve still got an eighth-grader I need to get through college so I’ll be doing what I like for the foreseeable future,” he said. “Retirement’s not all it’s cracked up to be, at least not yet for me. I’ve got a real good thing going and I don’t want the ride to stop.”

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