

## Ernesto 'Tito' Whittington, kind-hearted detective, 51

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By Gloria Negri, Globe Staff | July 14, 2006

Ernesto "Tito" Whittington was a police officer respected by even the people he arrested. If they were youngsters, he would probably help them find a job, prod them to finish school, become their friend, and put them on track to becoming good citizens.

"We all got into policing because of the public-service piece of it. Tito epitomized public service," said Boston police Deputy Superintendent Paul Fitzgerald. "People who didn't even know Tito miss him for what he did for the city. As a detective, he worked in a bunch of capacities -- in the community disorders unit, in the sexual assault unit, in the gang units, and, in the last six years, with the department's School Police Unit. Tito prevented countless acts of violence by his mediation."

Detective Whittington, a much-decorated member of the Boston Police Department for 22 years, first as patrolman, then as detective since 1992, died Saturday at Massachusetts General Hospital of complications following a second liver transplant. He was 51.

Detective Whittington, who lived in Roxbury, had his first transplant last November, his family said, and had returned to work briefly, only to be hospitalized again.

Fitzgerald said Detective Whittington knew nearly everyone on a first-name basis, "from the mayor of Boston to the guy sweeping the corner, and he treated everyone the same."

Yesterday, Mayor Thomas M. Menino lauded Detective Whittington for "starting the department's school police program and its summer program for kids. He was what community policing was all about," the mayor said. "Tito was one of the best detectives on the street."

In his low-key way, Menino said, "Tito was determined to help the kids."

It was Detective Whittington's even temper, Fitzgerald said, that gave him "a great capacity for dealing with a lot of stress. He would often take on the stress of the people he was dealing with and he really gave himself to the department and the city. . . . He would spend countless hours after work with kids who were on the fence to get them jobs or take them to a ballgame."

Detective Whittington "played a significant role" in the so-called Boston Miracle, a time in the mid-1990s when the department "had great success in getting crime down," Fitzgerald said. "As a member of the Youth Violence Strike Force, he targeted and arrested the most violent offenders. At the same time, he identified kids who weren't the worst and helped them get off that road. That really epitomizes what Tito's career was. He was willing to do the hard enforcement work, but he really enjoyed doing the other part, which was saving kids."

John Sisco, chief of the School Department's police unit, worked with Detective Whittington in the schools. Whenever there was an issue that extended beyond Sisco's jurisdiction, "Tito was always the person asked for by the school and community," Sisco said. "He never hesitated to assist and always followed through."

Detective Whittington's work in other units was also highly regarded. He worked on the department's housing units team, in the citywide anticrime unit, and on the Youth Violence Strike Force.

Patrolwoman Lisa Clark-Morgan worked with him in the gang unit for six years. "It helped," she said, "that Tito was bilingual in Spanish and English. So did his approach. Where some officers might have strong-armed a situation, Tito was all about finesse and being a true friend. Tito never had kids, but he was everybody's uncle. He listened as if everything they said was important and had a point to it. He never brushed anyone off and didn't lecture. There wasn't a kid who didn't like him."

He was born in Panama, one of five sons of James and Gladys (Wattley) Whittington. When he was 5, the family moved to the Bedford Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn, N.Y., where he attended school. ``Tito was very sharp," said his brother Rogelio of Roxbury. ``At the age of 5 he was reading the encyclopedia for fun. When he was in kindergarten, the teacher told the class how George Washington had cut down the cherry tree. Tito told her that was a myth and brought in the encyclopedia the next day to prove it. The teacher apologized to the class."

In 1973, Detective Whittington came to Boston to attend college and studied at Northeastern University before graduating from Boston State College in 1977. For a time, he worked at a day-care center in Jamaica Plain and then as an operating room assistant. In 1982, his oldest brother, James Jr., a Brooklyn police detective, was fatally shot in front of a public housing development in Brooklyn. ``Tito had thought of becoming a policeman, and Jimmy's death had a profound effect on him," Rogelio said.

Among his many citations from his department and other groups, Detective Whittington and his partners received the department's Medal of Honor for saving the life of a stabbing victim in a housing development in Roslindale. He was also the 1994 recipient of the Boston Neighborhood Fellows Program's ``Unsung Hero" award, which is run by the Philanthropic Initiatives Inc. The citation for the \$15,000 prize stated that Detective Whittington `` goes beyond the call of duty and does not just leave when his shift is over. His contribution to community life is immeasurable ."

In his lighter moments, he played solo cornet in the Roxbury Salvation Army Corps brass band.

Besides his mother and his brother, Detective Whittington leaves another brother, Erroll of New York.

Funeral services will be held at 10 a.m. today in the Prince Hall Masonic Lodge in Dorchester. Burial will be in Forest Hills Cemetery in Jamaica Plain. ■

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