



As Post photographer Arthur Pomansky was preparing to take this picture of the area reporter Grant's direction, he saw two men preparing to break into a parked car. When the men saw the camera pointed their way, they fled.

## MUGGED: A Victim's Story

POST FEB 6, 1971

By ROBERTA BRANDES SZATZ

"You have now had the prototypical New York City experience. You've totally committed yourselves to remaining here and raising your children here. You've resented a bourgeoisie and now you're being snuffed."

—A FRIEND.

IT IS THE ultimate fear we all live with. In this city, the fear of being mugged. It is the nightmare that all New Yorkers share but until it happens to you, it remains just an abstraction, something you've heard about or read about, something that happened to someone else.

Then it happens to you and you discover that the reality is more brutal, more degradingly devastating than you imagined. You know it could have been anyone. You know you could have been killed. But you can't imagine how anything could go for your psyche more.

It happened to me. I know. It was a weekday evening. My husband and I had just come out of an apartment house on 86th St. between Amsterdam and Columbus Aves. The hour was 11:30. We had only a three-minute walk to our home around the corner on 87th. It was snowing slightly. The ground was slippery. We walked carefully, focusing mostly on the ground.

Eighty-sixth is a major cross-street, rarely deserted, always plenty of cars and buses passing by. Upper West Side residents hardly consider themselves with the major thoroughfares; it is the side streets, like the ones we live on, that we worry about. They are frequently deserted. Anyone with normal city fears would anticipate a mugger lurking in the shadows.

But we were on 86th and there were several pedestrians not far away. We saw two youths walking toward us, one about 5-6, the other about 5-8, both black. The tall one wore sunglasses. I thought of nothing at the sight of them except that I had to turn slightly to pass them and that I should be careful not to slip.

Suddenly they were right in front of us. I don't even remember falling, just landing. I was apparently pushed with such force that there wasn't even time to try to break the fall by instinctively turning to the side.

I landed squarely on my back, with the back of my head and spine hitting hardest. I didn't lose consciousness and as I started to get up, I saw my husband fighting with

our assailant. I screamed like I never thought I knew how, so loud it was heard on the 140th floor of a nearby apartment house.

They hadn't laid a hand on my husband when they pushed me down. In fact, he hardly realized what had happened until he saw the short one pick up the bag I dropped and start running. Instinctively he went for him, yelling the profanities of an outraged husband. They fought. My husband dropped the mugger's jacket, hitting up much of a fight.

Then the eighth youth jumped on my husband and I lay at that point I screamed. I spotted a police car passing in front of us on 86th. The policemen heard the scream, came running and the two muggers fled in opposite directions. The pocketbook was left behind.

So many of us police have stated their needs to catch such people, only to discover that the victims, fearful of reprisal, refuse to press charges. How did they know I would have gone to court? Is the policeman wrong for feeling, "I don't want to get kind either?" Or, to complain that he arrests criminals only to see them back on the street in a short time doing their thing?

What's the use, the argument goes. I have been a reporter for The Post for six years. I have written about victims of all kinds of crimes and their agonies, listened to their complaints and their pleas, been arrested. I have wrestled with my answers, just question.

The whole incident was over in less than five minutes. The police offered to drive us to the hospital. I declined, thinking my injuries were not serious, no more than had fall. All I wanted was to go home and get into bed. They drove us around the corner. I called a doctor friend and inquired what I should do for myself. He advised a hospital for X-rays, just to be sure.

The aches and pains were beginning to surface five minutes. The police didn't offer to me. In the next few hours I was cured to me. In the next few hours I was to discover a fractured skull, badly bruised spine, jaw knocked out to go home and get into bed. They drove us around the corner. I called a doctor friend and inquired what I should do for myself. He advised a hospital for X-rays, just to be sure.

of minor injuries. My husband suffered a few bruises from the fight.

Twice before I have had to go to hospital. Before we went to the hospital, I was already 12:30. We went to Mt. Sinai. It seemed to me to be a slow night. Not many people waiting, no accidents or other mugging victims. I watched the others. A child with a painful earache, nothing in his mother's arm, waited the same hours and a woman had fever. A mother having a hard time attack was accompanied by her young children. All were black or Puerto Rican. I was struck by the thought that the poor rely on the emergency rooms of our hospitals the way the middle class relies on family doctors.

My turn finally came. X-rays were taken, a fracture noted, a neurological check, a decision made to admit me for observation and tests. There was one bed available in the whole hospital. By 4 a.m. I was in it and my husband finally went home.

The head nurse came in, a warm, sympathetic girl who just wanted to assure me they would do their best to make me comfortable. Suddenly, everything finally began to sink in and I broke down, sobbing uncontrollably. She let me talk it out. I felt better but the full reality of what had happened less than five hours earlier was just beginning to register. I had become a statistic, a victim of crime.

I spent the next five days in the hospital and fortunately no blood clotting or other possible effects of a fracture occurred. All the tests indicated there would be no medical after-effects from my injury.

Not for one minute in those five days and for several after I got home did my mind wander from what had happened. I kept seeing that face, that black, cold expression of the man who pushed me. It is now just an impersonal face, just a person. I doubt I could identify either assailant. It's like every B movie crime you've ever seen where there's a police line-up and a witness cries desperately to identify a criminal. It all had happened so quickly there was no chance for a good look.

Everything about the incident ran counter to what we anticipate will happen. I had never worried about walking at night with my husband. It is only women alone who think they must be extra careful. You think if it happens, someone will come up

and rescue you. You presume yourself lucky you turn it over. You presume yourself lucky you're ready to save your neck. I never had the chance.

As I tried desperately to drive the details from my mind, I realized I never really expect this kind of thing to happen to me. The fear of it has become woven into the fabric of my life. We can't even think it will always be the other guy. We refuse to accept the fact that this city can be dangerous. It can happen here. But it can and it does.

The reactions, concerns and questions of friends were interesting. Immediately they asked, "Are you sorry you're still living in the city?" They know what my husband and I went through to renovate our brownstone. They know the agonizing process of deciding to totally commit yourself to your family, your life, your resources to a community still fraught with risk, tension and aggression when problems. They know how desperately we want to be able to live in this city.

We still do. We are not sorry we haven't left. Like so many citydwellers, we love this town in spite of it and, unlike everyone else, we know what we're getting into. We know about suburban life. We have lived both.

Yet I know my children, now only 1 and 3 years of age, will never have the freedom to enjoy this city as I did as a child. And I am sad for them.

I have friends who have made the move out. They called, too. Interestingly enough, only one said, "So when are you moving out?" Others were more honest. One told me of a child in her neighborhood who was mysteriously kidnaped while playing on the lawn but fortunately released a few blocks away. "This was probably every-thing," she said. "Don't let anyone tell you different."

One of my three hospital room-mates was a delightful 16-year-old Italian woman from Queens recuperating from a broken hip. She told me of a man who had been in the hospital for the next four I heard it over again. She told me of a case of jewelry of stolen at one point she told me, "After I was held had her purse snatched and decided she wanted to get away. "This was probably every-thing," she said. "Don't let anyone tell you different."

The genuine concern of my city friends was overwhelming. It was almost as if it had happened to them. In a sense it has. They have brought me one step closer to reality.

Many people reacted by saying we should all walk around with guns in our pockets. Yes, and some people who wanted all firearms banished in the wake of the Kennedy and King assassinations were now telling me I should carry a gun.

To the first such comment, my husband observed: "I would have shot my foot off going for it." What have we been reduced to, to talking about walking around with guns? Even if it were not a frightening solution, it would remain an impractical one. We never would have had the chance to reach for a gun. And would we have wanted to risk shooting a bystander, a relative or even our assailant?

A sick of some kind might have been useful. I could have used it while my husband was fighting off the muggers. I am even thinking of carrying an umbrella, once rain comes in, in the hope that if anything happens again, it might be of some use.

I don't know where it will all lead. I don't know where to suggest we begin to sort out of the problem, being people to roam our streets for victims.

Were our assailants drug addicts? It seems likely. I could have used it while my husband was fighting off the muggers. I am even thinking of carrying an umbrella, once rain comes in, in the hope that if anything happens again, it might be of some use.

Yet I tried to resume my normal routine which kept me traveling around the city a good part of each day. Soon I will be physically fit to be able to walk. I have ventured out of my home a few times, mostly to walk my dog. I know I will not be able to do it if I have died at my side. The fear has not left me. I wonder if it ever will.