

**Jerry Russo, Deputy Sheriff**  
**Washtenaw County Sheriff's Office**  
**1965 to 1967**

Born on January 22<sup>nd</sup> 1935 to Jewish parents who immigrated to America to avoid persecution, Jerry grew up and attended school in Brooklyn, New York. While attending the Bedford Stuyvesant School, in one of New York's toughest neighborhoods, Jerry had to cross a bridge to get there. This left him with two options, fight or talk his way across. So, at any early age, he learned how to get along and operate "on-the-street"; an early life experience that prepared him for his eventual work as a Deputy Sheriff.

Observing the NYPD "Beat Cops" in his neighborhood, Jerry was impressed with how they patrolled on foot and appeared to know everyone on their beats, those in trouble, those about to get in trouble, and those in need of help. He watched them intervene at the right time to prevent or solve problems. He was so impressed that he and his best friend applied to the New York City Police Department. Unable to attend the police academy, he found another way to serve, as a soldier in the U.S. Army. Jerry loved baseball, faithfully following his Brooklyn Dodgers, and played third base on his camp baseball team until his discharge in 1956.

In 1964 Jerry and his wife Peggy moved to Michigan and took up residence in Washtenaw County. Still harboring the ambition to be a police officer, he applied for a Deputy Sheriff position with the Washtenaw County Sheriff's Office and was hired by Sheriff Douglas Harvey in 1965. Jerry enjoyed his tenure as a Road Patrol Deputy during which time he served as a member of the Underwater Search and Recovery Team. Enjoying letting his hair grow deepened his relationship with Sheriff Harvey, who equally enjoyed reminding him to get a haircut. Jerry would dutifully agree and then, logically, attempt to avoid the Sheriff while he let his hair grow. Sheriff Harvey addressed the problem by deciding that Jerry should work undercover for a while, which he did. However, upon completion of his assignment, it was a shave, a haircut and back to patrol duties. Known for his sense of humor and witty responses, Jerry once remarked, "*I have never been physical with a woman before, but she tried to turn me into Vincent Van Gogh,*" after a woman produced a knife and sliced his ear during a traffic stop.

A loving father, Jerry enjoyed caring for his infant son Daniel. He loved his wife Peggy and worked hard to help her obtain her college degree, who is now a Professor of Literature at Pennsylvania State University. Deputies referred to Peggy Russo as a fabulous cook, a benefit of working with Jerry was a home cooked meal at lunch time. The family would socialize with the other members of the Sheriff's Office and hosted an agency-wide picnic at their home on Sugar Loaf Lake.

Eventually Jerry decided that he would pursue a career in social work as it closely resembled the philosophy of the "Beat Cops" in New York, allowing him an even closer interaction with the public and more opportunities to help people. He had a personality that others wanted to emulate, always calm in crisis with the ability to bring people together and diffuse their differences through tolerance and respect, while keeping his partners safe. Deputies remarked they felt safe with Jerry Russo as their partner.

On January 14<sup>th</sup> 1967, Jerry Russo put on his uniform for the last time and left home to report for duty. While on his way to the station, a car crash occurred which took his life. He was the second Washtenaw County Sheriff's Deputy to lose his life in the line of duty.

Today law enforcement again promotes community engagement and interaction through foot patrol, bicycle patrol, and community oriented policing initiatives. If Jerry Russo were with us today he would probably have a witticism to remind us that he knew that all along.