

# celebrating the life and career of

# SONNY ARCHER



**At 300 Gold Street in Brooklyn, which houses the NYPD Fugitive Enforcement Division, the Warrant Section, and the Cold Case and Apprehension Squad, a memorial service was held to celebrate the life and career of Fermin S. Archer, Jr., better known as "Sonny." Family, friends, colleagues and police brass honored the first grade Detective who was on duty when he experienced a tear in his aorta, and while in the hospital, suffered a series of strokes. It led to his passing on July 13, 2011. His death was declared combat and in the line-of-duty by the NYPD on March 14, 2012.**

**The DEA, the U.S. Marshal's Service, and others paid tribute to Sonny's career and presented his family and his unit with plaques to commemorate the service of the 26-year law enforcement veteran.**

At 6-foot-three-inches and 240 pounds, Archer was a formidable opponent for any felon, but had, as the *New York Daily News* expressed it, "a big heart to match and a smile that turned him into the City's largest teddy bear." His serious demeanor and often dour expression — which prompted his colleagues to dub him affectionately "Mr. Happy" — belied what lay not very far beneath the surface: a deeply-loving and devoted father, son, and husband, and a caring, world-class colleague.

With family roots from Costa Rica, Sonny Archer was born November 18, 1962 and grew up on the Lower East Side of Manhattan and the rough and tumble, crime-ridden neighborhood of Brownsville, Brooklyn. His father Fermin, Sr., who worked for the Board of Education, was cautious about the bad influences in the community and enrolled Sonny in the New York Military Academy for five years, which clearly helped instill in him a sense of discipline and focus. Sonny eventually transferred to Amityville High School on Long Island and graduated in June 1980.

Archer began his career as a School Safety Officer, where he first met close friend and former partner Det. Wendell Stradford literally in the street. Stradford was a cop on patrol in Brooklyn at the time and Sonny inquired about taking the civil service exam for law enforcement. "He was a skinny guy back then," says Stradford, who told Archer he needed to build up and get bigger. Later, the two would spend countless hours working out, one of Archer's fondest pastimes. "We'd go to Johnny Lat's Gym off of Union Square during all hours of the night," Stradford says. "Det. Tommy Sanabria, Sonny, and I ... before our shift, we'd go to the gym and work out first." Archer remained an avid bodybuilder for the rest of his life.

In July 1985, Archer was appointed to the New York Transit Police Department and assigned to District #2. In 1988, he was re-assigned to the Transit Police Task Force as a decoy, working alongside partner Rafael Diaz, who is now the DEA Delegate from IAB.

"He was the best partner I ever had," says Diaz, who also grew up on the Lower East Side. "Because any assignment that was given to us, we were able to blend into the community and adapt to the environment. We could disguise ourselves in any way, and there wasn't a neighborhood where we couldn't bring our investigation to a successful conclusion." But it was also Archer's protective nature that made him a most trusted and beloved partner.

"One time, we stopped a fare-beater who started acting very disrespectfully to me," Diaz relates with a laugh. "Sonny picked the guy up off the ground, flipped him upside down, and warned, 'Don't you ever talk to my partner that way again!'"

From 1990 to 1994, Archer worked in the Transit Police Central Robbery Unit, the Warrant Squad, and the Police Commissioner's Investigation Squad, teaming up officially with his good pal Stradford, who says he and Archer were "as close as brothers." Sonny and a few others, including Diaz, Det. Vic Denza, and Lt. Vertel Martin, were "protégées" of Transit Lieutenant Jack Maple, who under NYPD Commissioner William Bratton eventually leapt into the Deputy Police Commissioner's spot. They adopted Maple's penchant for dapper clothing and that preference for fine attire and natty dressing remained with Archer throughout his life. Their colleagues, like Stradford, would endlessly rib the dandies about their snappy suits, and when the group went off with Maple to socialize at City hot spots like Kennedy's on West 57th Street or Elaine's on the Upper East Side, they would be referred to as "the Maplettes."

During the Transit merger year of 1995, Archer was promoted to Detective and assigned to the NYPD's Cold Case Squad, along with Stradford, who remains in Cold Case to this day. By the end of '95, Archer was promoted to second grade.



*At the ceremony, from left, Det. Wendell Stradford, Fermin Archer, Sr., Amanda (Abby) De Geneste-Archer, DEA President Michael J. Palladino, and Det. Rafael Diaz. Mrs. Archer is an Investigator with the Kings County District Attorney's Office.*



*Ed McMahon, Supervisory Inspector, Manhattan Division of the RFTF makes a special presentation to the Archer family. Seated from left are Sonny's son Mike, his widow Abby, his step-mother Dammeris, his father Fermin, Sr., and his step-sister Damjocef.*

From 1997 to 2000, Archer was assigned to the Office of the Deputy Commissioner of Operations. Stradford says it was Sonny's intense commitment to his work that made him so well-respected.

"After Sonny left Cold Case," he says, "he still wanted to be involved. We were working a double homicide together in the 76. We were going after two perps who were brothers. Even though Sonny had moved on, he asked permission from the PC's Office to help make the collars. We had worked so hard on the case, approval was granted, and we went down to West Virginia and nabbed the pair. They eventually got convicted." It was that fierce sense of duty that earned Archer first grade in December 2000.

One day, while riding the elevator at One Police Plaza, the PC stepped in, took one look at Sonny's large size and overwhelming presence, and asked where he was assigned. Sonny answered and the PC replied, "Tomorrow, you're with me!" Not a common way to be re-assigned, but as of the next day, Archer was transferred and spent the following year in the Police Commissioner's Office. From 2002 until his untimely death at the age of 48, Archer was assigned to the hard-charging



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Warrant Section. As a member of the Regional U.S. Marshal's Task Force, he specialized in tracking down and apprehending the most violent of fugitives, including the killers of Det. Russel Timoshenko and others attempting to escape justice.

"Sonny was everybody's protector," says Stradford, "He was always the first one through the door. He would pull his colleagues out of the way and say, 'I got this!'"

What made Sonny such an endearing character is that even with his unwavering insistence on being the first one in, he had his peccadilloes: He loved rap music so much that he booked time in a studio to record his own long 45 rpm. It was called "Gas House" and it was so awful, Stradford says, that his friends never stopped teasing him about it. Sonny was also afraid of flying, and despite his intimidating size, he was, to the tremendous amusement of his friends and colleagues, absolutely terrified of dogs, no matter what breed or size.

"Wherever he went," Stradford adds, "investigations, warrants, or just to a friend's house, Sonny's opening lines were always, 'Put the dog away! Put the dog away!'" Recalling his best friend's quirks can still make his closest buddy roar with laughter, especially the incident that wound up in the newspapers and then became a long-running joke on the Howard Stern show.

One afternoon in 1991, Archer was walking with his four-year-old son and three-year-old daughter when an old, crotchety Labrador ran out of an antiques store. Archer stomped his foot at the dog, but it barked and snapped, so he drew his gun and shot the canine. The dog limped back into the store and expired. The story was milked daily by the press into front page news about "Sandy the Lab" who growled at the towering Detective. The dog's owner cried to Stern, "He never gave Sandy a chance!" Stern daily chided the Detective with questions like, "Fermin? What kind of a name is Fermin?" and aired



*Sonny's children, Orlanzo, Mike, and Tiffany, with their grandfather holding some of the commemorative creations.*



*A commemorative award presented by the U.S. Marshal's Service.*

comedy skits riffing the dog's photo re-imagined as a mug shot. His colleagues would purposely keep Stern's show blaring on the car radio and in the Squad room.

But Archer never wavered in his decision to shoot, as he would allow nothing, he said, ever to threaten or harm his children. In defense of Archer, journalist Michael Daly published a November 25, 1991 article in *New York Magazine* pointing out the irony in newspaper headlines about Sonny's fatal encounter with the canine; while the media, Daly noted, had mostly ignored a shoot-out in a rooming house in Brooklyn just weeks prior, when Archer saved the life of his Transit partner, Det. Jawann Olajide-Stuckey. It was only one of the many occasions Archer's heroism was quiet, but omnipresent: he won numerous medals and commendations during his career, including the NYPD Police Combat Cross, the Transit Police Distinguished Duty Medal, and the Police Reserve Association Medal of Valor.



Although he was predeceased by his mentor Jack Maple, who, too, passed away at the age of 48 in August 2001, Archer's death left a gaping hole in the hearts of many of his colleagues. Det. Stradford presented the eulogy at his funeral, which was covered by Daly in the *New York Daily News*, and included a fly-by, bugles and bagpipes, and was attended by Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly as well as former Commissioner Bratton.

In addition to many family members, including his beloved father, Sonny Archer is survived by his wife, Amanda (known as Abby), and his four children: Orlanzo, Tiffany, Angel, and Fermin III, also known as Mike.

"His children were his top priority in life," says Stradford. "He wanted to see to it that they had everything." While his children were his greatest passion, they were not the only beneficiaries of Sonny Archer's generous heart and one-in-a-million personality.

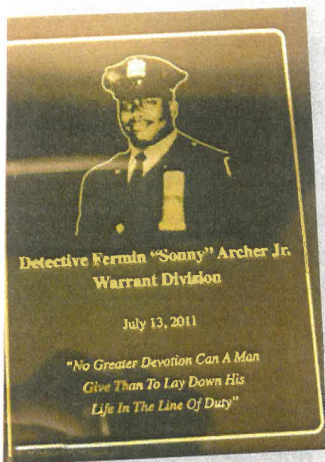
*Dear Commissioner Kelly,*

*I am writing this letter to express my deepest gratitude for all of the support that has been rendered to the Archer family during the past 17 months. My husband, Fermin "Sonny" Archer, Detective 1st Grade of the New York City Police Department, would be none other than proud of all the heartfelt prayers, concern and well wishes that each Institute\* has shown to us! During his time of dedication to, not just the City of New York but to all mankind, the only reward he looked for was continued strength to do what he did, which he referred to as "God's Work." He is greatly missed and I know through the demonstration of everyone's support "He will never be forgotten," and that is very comforting to this whole family. Thank You! & Best Wishes for the Holiday and the New Year!*

*Sincerely,*

*Amanda De Geneste-Archer*

*\*The Detectives' Endowment Association, the United States Marshal's Service, the Federal Criminal Investigators Association, the Guardians Association of the NYPD, the NYPD Death Benefit Counseling Unit, and the NYSE Fallen Heroes Fund*



A photo plaque now hanging in the Regional Task Force office.



Regional Fugitive Task Force Sgt. Cornelius J. Douglas with the popular "Cop and Kid" statue presented to Fermin Archer's family.



Regional Warrant Fugitive Enforcement Lieutenant and former Guardians Association President Victor Swinton with Monsignor Robert Romano, who presided over the memorial.

"Sonny was the guy who would do anything in the world for you," Stradford adds, "even if it came to giving up his life for you. If he respected you enough, he would."

And ultimately, the big guy —Det. Fermin Simon Archer, Jr. — did just that for the entire City of New York.

*On behalf of the Archer family and friends and the RFTE, I would like to extend our heartfelt thanks for all the DEA has done, both publicly and privately, to help all of us throughout this difficult year. I specifically would like to thank Michael Palladino, Paul DiGiacomo, Ken Sparks, Paul E. Morrison, Daniel Rivera, and John McGuire and all the DEA members who were always available and responded immediately to every need.*

*Respectfully,*

*Sgt. Cornelius J. Douglas  
NYPD Regional Fugitive Task Force*