

TICKET ARRESTS HALTED

Unpaid tickets bring reporter evening in jail

By Susan Saiter

It had been an average day: Trying to call my 12-year-old to remind her of her piano lesson, getting no answer, starting to worry. The landlord threatening to evict us; no money to pay the rent. I'd worked late and I was tired.

All I wanted was to get home and take off my shoes.

But first, I was to be jailed, although briefly, for a non-jailable offense.

As of yesterday I would not have been given this opportunity to visit jail. Judicial officials here, acting under a Supreme Court decision, ordered a moratorium on serving 300,000 arrest warrants for scofflaws and others accused of non-jailable offenses.

The night I was arrested, however, while I was driving up Sheridan Road through Rogers Park, a police car pulled up and flashed its lights. It couldn't be me, I thought. I was doing 25 m.p.h.

But it was me. "Eleven unpaid parking tickets," the officer sneered. "You're under arrest. Follow me."

I followed to the Rogers Park station. Looking me over in my business suit,

the woman officer said in a matter-of-fact, drugstore-clerk voice that I could pay the \$400 cash bond and leave.

I didn't have the \$400. In those days as a free-lance writer, I didn't have the rent. I didn't have even the \$10 for one of the parking tickets I'd run up, most of them while working.

I also didn't think I would have any friends left if I asked someone to try to get \$400 together at 8 at night to bail me out.

The police told me my daughter would be put in a juvenile home for the evening. Then, two large police officers helped me into the paddy wagon—telling me to be careful not to catch my heel—and drove me to the Belmont lockup.

The matron searched my purse, took my jewelry and counted out the money—a few dollars and enough pennies to make her groan.

I used my one phone call to ask a friend to take my daughter for the night. She told me I was crazy, and said she'd bail me out. Nothing doing, I said, this was an experience I wouldn't miss any more than I'd miss an episode of "Hill Street Blues."

Because it was my first



Parking meters and 11 unpaid parking tickets have been a source of trouble for Sun-Times reporter Susan Saiter. (Sun-Times Photo by Kathleen Reeve)

offense, I got my own cell. I watched the hookers come in, chatting with the police. A lot of camaraderie among the regulars.

I thought about serving detention in junior high and how they can predict a life of crime from early on. I got depressed, then mad. I rolled up my coat for a

pillow, lay down and spent about a half hour thinking about these things. And then the matron came in and told me my friend was here—I'd been sprung.

And the next time I got a parking ticket, I showed up in Traffic Court and the judge excused me, along with everyone else.

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office and the Chicago Police Department met yesterday to map plans for the moratorium.

Among those on hand for the meeting called by Comerford were Chief Traffic Court Judge Daniel J. White, who signs many Chicago arrest warrants, and Richard Lefevour, presiding judge of the Circuit Court's Municipal Division.

The warrants usually are issued for scofflaws who have accumulated 10 or more unpaid traffic tickets, but they also are issued for people with fewer offenses, including those who don't show up in court for a moving violation ticket.

It is not unusual for scores of people to be held in police lockups here for failing to make bond or settle parking ticket payments.

The moratorium in no way affects the issuing of traffic tickets, and no moratorium is planned on arrests of people accused of such jailable offenses as hit-and-run driving or drunken driving.

The Supreme Court's 5-4 ruling, written by Justice Harry A. Blackmun, held against Magistrate Gladys Pulliam of Culpeper, Va., a veteran of 34 years of judicial experience who hears cases in her home.

The case involved her jailing of two defendants charged with public drunkenness and "cursing and abusing," both non-jailable misdemeanors, according to an aide of Virginia Attorney General Gerald L. Bailes.

The defendants were

awarded lawyers' fees under a 1976 federal civil rights law providing that winners of civil rights suits can recover attorneys' fees from the losers.

In a sharply worded dissent, written by Justice Lewis F. Powell, the majority opinion was assailed on the ground that it "in effect eviscerates the doctrine of judicial immunity." The dissent also said that subjecting judges to the "ever-present threat of burdensome litigation" would imperil judicial independence.

The defense attorney, Deborah C. Wyatt, 35, of Charlottesville, Va., said that while walking the streets drunk or swearing in public may not result in arrests in Chicago, they are considered serious offenses in Culpeper.

She also said she had to battle attorneys general from virtually every state.

Labor's Lee improves

The condition of Chicago Federation of Labor leader William A. Lee was upgraded today from critical to good at Loyola University Medical Center in Maywood.

A spokesman said Lee, 89, who had a brain tumor removed on May 9, was "responding well, is conscious, alert and doctors are pleased with his progress."