

# New York's Guyanese Unite to Honor Slain Officer

By LIZ ROBBINS

After the candles started dripping and a police commander wiped his tears, Randolph Holder walked from the clutch of his extended family and addressed those standing at the back of the vigil being held for his son, a police officer killed in the line of duty.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I just wanted to give special thanks to all these men in blue," Mr. Holder said Saturday night, his voice booming across the Queens street. "Amazing. Above and beyond. Thanks, thanks, thanks."

Mr. Holder, 61, was once a proud police officer in his native Guyana, and in the days since his son, also named Randolph Holder, was shot, allegedly by a suspect he was chasing in East Harlem on Tuesday, he had been moved to comfort others.

For the 200 or so family members, friends, officers and passers-by who gathered at the triangular intersection off Liberty Avenue and 103rd Avenue in Richmond Hill, a neighborhood known as Little Guyana, the modest vigil underscored a powerful message. "Unity is strength," Mr. Holder said.

The area is predominantly Indo-Guyanese, the majority ethnic group in Guyana. Late in the week, the event's organizers asked State Senator James Sanders Jr., a Democrat who represents the neighborhood, to invite Mr. Holder, whose family is Afro-Guyanese.

Mr. Holder accepted and brought along 50 relatives and friends in several vans accompanied by a police escort. Together, members of the two ethnic groups mourned by candlelight, setting aside the conflicts that have long divided their homeland.

"This has become an opportunity for us to become Guyanese all over again," said Vishnu Mahadeo, president of the Richmond Hill Economic Develop-



SAM HODGSON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Randolph Holder, second from left, at a vigil in Richmond Hill, Queens, on Saturday for his son, a police officer with the same name who was fatally shot in the line of duty last week.

ment Council, which organized the vigil. "One of our own was shot down and we need to be there for each other."

Gloria Jardine, 58, had come from the Bronx to shop for traditional Indo-Guyanese items. She learned of the vigil from a handwritten sign in Sybil's Bakery on Liberty Avenue and stayed, she said, just to shake the elder Mr. Holder's hand.

While Officer Holder's death has resonated in his home country, some diaspora leaders see Guyana's influence in the way people have responded here. Six months ago the country formed a new coalition government led by members of Afro- and Indo-Guyanese parties.

"The country has been coming together. There has been a sense of healing, of reconciliation, of national pride," said Rickford Burke, president of the Caribbean Guyana Institute for Democracy, which is based in Brooklyn. "And that has affected the way people are approaching this tragedy — that period of oneness that has taken hold."

In Guyana, police work has traditionally been a career path for

members of the black community, with sons often following fathers into the department. And yet Mr. Holder, whose own father was also a police officer, played down race.

"My father is part-Indian," he said. "You should love each and every one of us, no matter your race or the color of your skin."

The Guyanese are the fifth-largest immigrant group in New York, with a population of about 140,000. The Holder family lives in Far Rockaway, even as the Afro-Guyanese community is centered in Brooklyn.

On Sunday night at St. Stephen's Lutheran Church hall in the Flatbush section of the borough, a Guyanese "wake night" was held for Officer Holder, with food, games, gospel music and family reflections. One of the three sponsors was a Guyanese police alumni group, which had invited many Indo-Guyanese groups to attend.

It is typical in Guyana, Mr. Burke said, to hold memorials for the dead each night until the funeral is held. Officer Holder's is scheduled for Wednesday, and he is to be buried in Guyana on Sat-

urday.

At the vigil in Richmond Hill, family members took turns praising the police and calling for action to end gun violence.

"We are all human beings on this earth; we should be able to work together," Sheila Johnson, an aunt of Officer Holder's, said. "Like we come here tonight, we have to let Washington and the politicians know that this has to stop. If we do not do anything to curtail these criminals from having access to so many weapons, it will never stop. Do not let Randolph's death be in vain."

In Guyana, showing disrespect for a police officer is considered an offense, Officer Holder's father said.

"You could be arrested for using obscene language with a police officer," he said before the vigil.

He explained how training reinforced respect.

"After you left the house, the second place that disciplines you is the Guyana police force," he said. "You are well trained, well mannered, protecting people, and do all things to make the country a safe place."

Mr. Holder said that when he came to the United States, he had become an auxiliary police officer in the 101st Precinct in Far Rockaway. He was joyful when his son announced five years ago that he would be joining the Police Department. He also understood the risks.

Officer Holder, 33, was assigned to the Housing Bureau, Service Area 5, when he was killed. His commanding officer, Capt. Reymundo Mundo, gave a brief, emotional speech on Saturday about the police staying strong.

Afterward, Officer Holder's father shook hands with officers and strangers, poised and polite. Captain Mundo watched with admiration.

"Ah," he said of the slain officer, "that's where he gets it from."