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A Robbery Victim Cautions Others

By *KHRISTOPHER J. BROOKS*

It was her second night in New York City and Rebecca Burns — still jetlagged by the long plane ride from her native Australia — was walking along 11th Street after midnight with a friend, Emma Marquard. Christopher J. Brooks The intersection where the robbery occurred.

Suddenly a man approached wearing a black bandanna with skeleton designs on it and produced a handgun. “And he says ‘Don’t scream. Give me your bag’ and Bec goes ‘Are you serious?’” Ms. Marquard recalled recently. “You know, we’re from Australia and people there just don’t have guns, so when I saw it, I thought it was fake.”

But within moments, the pair came to a horrible realization: they were being robbed at gunpoint.

The incident underscores a recent uptick in crime in the neighborhood, which has seen robberies in the Ninth Police Precinct increase by about 10 percent when compared to the same time last year.

The police declined to discuss the figures, or the robbery on 11th Street, which occurred July 6. But those who study crime trends note that the typical spikes in crime that occur during the summer months might be exacerbated by the recent run of especially balmy weather.

“Summer months are indeed more dangerous in terms of street crimes as more people hang out till late hours and among the ones who hang out for legitimate reasons are also predators of various sorts and kinds,” said Professor Maria Haberfeld, who studies public law enforcement at John Jay College of Criminal Justice. “It is a documented fact in criminal justice research that weather does influence crime rate.”

On July 6, Ms. Marquard and Ms. Burns were among scores of people taking advantage of the warm temperatures to hang out in the East Village and Lower East Side. Christopher J. Brooks

After dinner and drinks at a restaurant in SoHo, the pair stopped at a bodega to buy some fruit and, as they resumed their journey home, the robber approached them. After demanding their handbags, he flashed a gun.

“He never pointed it at us; he just sort of showed it to us,” she said. “I just thought it was fake.”

Sitting in a French restaurant on Avenue B, Ms. Marquard was calm and unruffled when she told her story. A friend told The Local about the incident later that day. Ms. Marquard, 30, is a native of Melbourne, Australia who moved to New York City in October and works as a dog walker in the East Village. Between July 6 and now, she has spent days consoling Ms. Burns by phone, filing a police report, assuring her parents back home that she is fine and building up the courage to speak

publicly about what happened.

Ms. Marquard agreed to an interview with The Local because she wants other East Villagers to be careful about which streets they walk down in the middle of night.

On July 6, the streets were nearly empty near 11th and B when the robber approached. Ms. Marquard said that she and Ms. Burns started walking away from the man after he produced a gun.

“We started to move away from him and he punched Bec in the face, right under her chin,” she said.

Seconds after the punch Ms. Marquard said a second man approached her and ordered her to hand over her bag. Ms. Marquard said she replied “no way” and the man yanked at her bag. The two had tug of war with Ms. Marquard’s bag and the second man managed to pry it away.

Ms. Marquard said she ran after the man who snatched her bag, but he turned a corner and vanished. She said the man got away with her Lumix brand camera, \$200 in cash and her LG cell phone. Khristopher J. Brooks

Meanwhile, Ms. Marquard said her friend Ms. Burns was still reeling from the punch.

Ms. Burns tightly held her purse in her right hand and the bag of fruit in her left. She tried to run from the masked man, but she tripped over a bag of garbage on the sidewalk. As she fell to the ground, Ms. Burns threw her wallet under a parked car.

The masked man caught up with Ms. Burns, Ms. Marquard said. He stood over Ms. Burns and again demanded her bag. She gave him the bag of fruit, Ms. Marquard said, and then the masked man fled.

Ms. Marquard chuckled when she reiterated, “that guy got away with a couple pieces of fruit.”

She also realizes that the incident could have ended far worse; aside from a few bumps and bruises, neither was physically harmed.

“It became real for me when he hit Bec because he hit her hard; I heard it,” she said. “The cops were saying it happens maybe twice a week and now they’re worried because they know these guys are hitting people.”

Ms. Marquard filed a [police report](#) July 11.

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Detective Enrique Rivera, who is investigating Ms. Marquard’s case, did not wish to comment on the incident. The authorities have not found a suspect, Ms. Marquard said.

When asked if there are increases in robberies and larcenies around Tompkins Square Park in the summer months, Mr. Rivera said officers do not discuss on-going investigations with the media.

Still, the most recent [CompStat](#) numbers from the Ninth Precinct (which covers the East Village) show that robberies have risen from 87 reported incidents around this time last year to 96 incidents today.

It has been two weeks since Ms. Marquard’s incident. Ms. Burns has since left New York City. Ms. Marquard is still here though, and she said she has changed the route she uses to walk home at

night, choosing only streets lined with well-lit restaurants.

Professor Haberfeld said Ms. Marquard new route plan is a good idea and added that she and other East Villagers should purchase a noise device that, “look like key chains, but can generate a very powerful noise that can scare the attacker.”

“Try to stay away from dark alleys late at night,” Mrs. Haberfeld said. “If you happen to live there and are coming home late at night try to do it not alone — always safer in a group.”