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A LETHAL DISTRACTION

A foot pursuit of hit-and-run suspects turns into an exchange of fire with an armed resident



For PoliceIssues by Julius (Jay) Wachtel. We clipped this image from an [extensive video compilation](#) that LAPD released one day after its officers exchanged gunfire with (and, fortunately, only lightly wounded) a well-known local resident. We'll get to the details shortly. But that encounter instantly brought to mind a similar and ultimately far more tragic confrontation. It took place in Hemet, a city of about 90,000 about ninety miles southeast of Los Angeles, about two years ago. In that episode, which we examined in "[When Worlds Collide](#)," a police officer shot and killed a homeowner who was also in their own yard, and also carrying a gun. And no, he never fired it.

Back to Eagle Rock. That's the prosperous Northeast Los Angeles neighborhood where [novelist Jillian Lauren](#) resides with her husband, musician Scott Shriner and their two small children. About three in the afternoon on Tuesday, April 8 she and (reportedly) her kids and a babysitter were in the family's detached, single-family residence when a police helicopter [began hovering overhead](#). It was helping LAPD and California Highway Patrol officers scour the neighborhood for three male adults who had just fled the scene of a traffic accident. Here's a sequence of stills we clipped from the video:



A fixed surveillance camera depicts an absconder coursing through the perimeter of one of the upscale homes that line the street. Directed by residents, officers chase after the man. The cops wind up in the home's elaborate rear patio, their quarry nowhere in sight. A tall, tightly constructed fence lines the back of the property. As it turns out, it abuts the rear yard of Ms. Lauren's home. While the chopper's rotor blades noisily whirl overhead, the officers peer over the fence. But instead of the bad guy (he's soon caught nearby) they spot Ms. Lauren walking around. She's gripping a gun.



Yelling over the fence, the officers identify themselves and order Ms. Lauren to drop the gun (the video uses her husband's last name, "Shriner.") But she doesn't. And as the cops train their guns on



Ms. Lauren (left image), she fires a single shot (second image). Their return fire wounds her in the arm. It also kicks up a cloud of dust (third image). (Click [here](#) for a brief video clip of the shooting.) Ms. Lauren promptly retreats into her home. Check out those time captions: from initial warnings to "shots fired" took all of two minutes. Nearly an hour would pass before Ms. Lauren came out and surrendered.

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LAPD's official take on things, set out in its [April 10 news release](#), is that "officers ordered Shriner (again, her husband's name) to drop the handgun numerous times; however, she refused." Ms. Lauren was arrested for attempted murder of a peace officer and released on bond. Her 9mm. pistol was recovered, along with a spent cartridge. Her next court date is May 13. That's when prosecutors are expected to proffer formal charges.



That will undoubtedly present a challenge. Clearly, Ms. Lauren *did* shoot at the cops. But *why* is far from settled. While the officers' commandments are audible on bodycam footage, Ms. Lauren wasn't carrying a police radio, and helicopter noise may have kept her from understanding what was being yelled. That tall fence that got in the cops' way (see images) obstructed her view as well. Given Ms. Lauren's rattled outlook, she likely assumed that the men who were pointing guns and barking orders were the bad guys who got chased into her neighborhood.



That's not just idle speculation. Listen to the 911 call that closes out LAPD's video compilation. According to the narrator, LAPD Capt. Alex Chogyoji, the call came in shortly after the shooting. It features three voices: the dispatcher's, a female caller (whom we assume is Ms. Lauren's babysitter), and a woman with the caller (most likely, Ms. Lauren.) Here's our transcript:

- Caller: Oh, there were three men, she says, there were three men, and one of them shot her and the cops are looking for him right now. They have their guns out. And like, I don't know if they found him yet or not, but they told me to not look out the window so, I'm not looking out.
- 911: Okay. So, he's not in your yard? You don't know that he's there?
- Caller: Well, he was in my yard because that's where he shot her.
- 911: Oh, okay.
- Caller: He shot from the other side...he shot from the other side of the gate.
- 911: Okay.

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- Caller's companion: Other side. He was...I had my gun...And he said put down that gun, put down that gun. I said put down your fucking gun...And then he shot me.
- Caller: Okay. That's what happened I guess.
- Caller's companion: I had a gun...
- 911: So, you guys don't know where he went?
- Caller (to companion): Okay babe, just please breathe, okay?
- Caller (to 911): Okay, how long do you think until someone can be here?
- 911: Well, the officers are looking for this man. That's why I'm asking if you...do you know where he went?
- Caller: I have no idea where he went...
- Caller (to companion): Where was he when you...when you got shot?
- Caller's companion: He was out. There are three men out at the other side of this fence here...

Upper-crust neighborhoods such as Ms. Lauren's are festooned with security cameras. That's where much of LAPD's video compilation originated. When cops arrived, Eagle Rock residents quickly pointed them in the direction where a bad guy fled. Officers shouldn't have been surprised to find citizens patrolling their yards. Yet Ms. Lauren *was* packing a gun. That might have been a bit discomfiting.

Switch perspectives. Ms. Lauren knew that hoodlums were on the loose. Strangers were now peering over her fence, waving pistols. Might they be cops? That's unlikely. Why would police be after *her*?

Given the officers' lack of visibility and the whap-whap-whap of the helicopter rotors, verbal commands might not have sufficed. Our related posts (see below) are replete with examples of the tragic officer-citizen misunderstandings that can accompany the chaos of the streets. In Hemet ("[When Worlds Collide](#)") a resident called police to report a theft from his home. Officers looked in his backyard, but the thief was gone. So two cops went around the block to check the yard of the opposing home. But its resident, Christian Drye, a father of five, said he'd do it himself, thank you. And when he grabbed a gun and stepped outside (shadows of Ms. Lauren), an officer who remained at the original caller's home took him for being the bad guy. And shot an impulsive but well-meaning homeowner dead.

Keeping one's distance may seem to run counter to the police mission. But there is sometimes no alternative. That's not just our opinion. Former Grand Rapids, Michigan police officer Christopher Schurr was recently tried for murdering Patrick Lyoya, whom he had stopped for a traffic violation ("[Tenacity is Great – Until it's Not](#)"). Lyoya, who

was unlicensed, drunk and had a domestic violence warrant, bolted. Schurr caught up, and during a violent struggle Lyoya grabbed the officer's Taser. So the cop shot him dead. Use-of-force experts [lined up on both sides](#). While defense experts called the shooting justified, Schurr had already discharged both of his Taser's cartridges. Squeezing its trigger would presumably have no effect. According to prosecution expert Seth Stoughton, the "imminent threat of death or great bodily harm" that justifies deadly force was accordingly absent. In his opinion, Mr. Lyola should have been let go, and arrested later.

That case [just ended in a mistrial](#). So back to "square one." *Is there* a solution? As we recently suggested in "[Putting Things Off](#)," there are good reasons why cops prefer not to delay arrests. On the other hand, as "[Backing Off](#)" points out, sometimes the only realistic preventive may be to *not* intervene. We'll soon see how the criminal justice system handles Ms. Lauren's problematic situation. Stay tuned!