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Tonis, Ex-Police Chief, Enjoys His Retirement

By LILLIAN C. JEN, October 23, 1976

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Robert Tonis, former chief of University Police, used to be called the "Renaissance cop."

Before his retirement in 1975, Tonis kept a radio on his desk so he could listen to the Boston Symphony as he worked. He was well-known for his varied roles in the University, which included serving as a freshman advisor and auditing courses every semester.

Tonis is now enjoying his retirement, and has not lost touch with Harvard. He still eats in Adams House every Wednesday, and has four new sophomore advisees this year. He keeps up with his old advisees as well, entertaining them with stories from his FBI days, news about beehives he keeps at home, and anecdotes about life as a senior citizen.

It's great, he says, to drop in a dime for the subway and see if they try to stop you for being under 65.

As police chief, Tonis was a popular figure among students, respected for his move to integrate the previously all-white force in 1962, and for his reluctance to obey President Pusey's order to clear protesters from University Hall in 1969.

He says he undertook to provide maximum security to the University as unobtrusively as possible, and to integrate the police and the Harvard community, emphasizing friendliness and accessibility in his department.

His successor, David L. Gorski, says he has altered the department to meet the changing demands of the University in response to a rising crime rate.

Meanwhile, Tonis highly recommends retirement, and says he doesn't miss Harvard because "it's like I never left."

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