

## The Sydney Morning Herald

### Smiling sergeant saved from tip

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Sergeant Geoffrey Little was dubbed The Smiling Policeman by the press in 1977 when his boss busted him for smiling too much during traffic duties.

Yesterday, a strange twist of fate brought the policeman face to face with his past. A portrait painted of him for the 1977 Archibald Prize by artist Phillip Cooper was found at Nowra Waste Depot on Monday, destined for landfill.

"I was sitting here in my office and I got a phone call," enthused Sergeant Little. "The boys from Nowra were coming up to pick up some locks, some new pistols, and the painting was in the back of the car."

Mr Steve Foord, a retired ranger with the Shoalhaven Council and retired special constable with the NSW police, was at the tip on the South Coast when he saw the painting.

"I was having a little look around when I saw it," he said. "The artist was throwing out these paintings he had. There were probably up to 200 paintings in the pile."

"I just noticed the portrait with the police badge number and I thought obviously the Police Department would be able to trace who it was. I thought it was a very nice painting."

Sergeant Little, now at North Sydney, made headlines in 1977 when he was told by a senior officer to stop being so happy. The then constable would direct traffic on the corner of Bent and Young streets for two mornings a week, before choir practice. "He told me I had a problem," recalled Little.

"He said, 'Geoffrey, you go around loving people and smiling too much. You should be more like a policeman'".

Sergeant Little has never shyed away from the profile created by the furore. He has appeared on Romper Room and travelled the world promoting smiles as a United Nations Ambassador of Goodwill. There have even been media events in America, where he directed traffic for the local constabulary.

Argyle Centre artist Phillip Cooper asked him to sit for an Archibald portrait. The painting never made it to the finals, but was hung at The Rocks mall for about five years.

"I used to go back quite a lot to see how it was going but then Phillip moved to Nowra," Sergeant Little said.

"He asked me if I would like to buy it and he put a price tag on it of about \$300. In those days I didn't have \$300 so I had to sadly wave goodbye to a part of me."

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