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BREAKING THE BRASS CEILING

Women Police Chiefs and Their Paths to the Top

Dorothy Moses Schulz

 **Greenwood**
PUBLISHING GROUP

Breaking the Brass Ceiling

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*Women Police Chiefs and
Their Paths to the Top*

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*To my Dad, Henry Moses, a gentle man who was intensely proud
that I was a journalist, a police captain, and, finally, a college professor.
He was eager to see how this book would combine all those careers
but, very sadly, he died shortly before it was completed.*

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Preface

This book really began in 1979, although I didn't know it. I was a captain in the Conrail Police Department, and I was taking courses that would ultimately result in my receiving a doctorate in American Studies from New York University in 1992. Yes, it took a long time, but that's another story for another book! Through a series of events, I delivered a paper on women in police supervisory ranks at the American Society of Criminology meeting in Philadelphia. The panel was concerned with a number of policing issues, and I was one of the few people there who was actively involved in policing and who did not yet possess a Ph.D. There was quite a bit of interest in my findings about what was then a very small number of women police supervisors, but this did not come close to matching the interest in me personally. It was obvious that most of the people I chatted with had never met a woman police manager—in fact, many had never met a woman police officer.

My career took many turns. By the time I was seriously considering a dissertation topic, the Conrail Police Department had been ordered by federal government mandate to divest itself of all but freight operations, and my colleagues and I who worked in New York City became part of a new agency, the Metro-North Commuter Railroad Police Department (subsequently renamed the MTA Police Department). In addition to my academic pursuits, I became active in the International Association of Women Police (IAWP), where I met many women like myself, who joined policing on an equal basis with our male colleagues. There were also many women who had started their careers as policewomen, with a completely different set of entry requirements and job descriptions, who were thrust

onto patrol late in their careers. Some flourished, while others were not so sure this was an appropriate use of “womanpower” in policing.

I put on a back burner my interest in women police managers to write my dissertation on the history of women in policing, which was published in different form by Praeger in 1995, as *From Social Worker to Crime-fighter: Women in United States Policing*. I also began a new career on the faculty of John Jay College of Criminal Justice, a branch of the City University of New York. John Jay College is the only college in the country that is devoted solely to the study of criminal justice and related fields and it offers the widest possible range of academic achievement, from two-year associate’s degrees to doctorates. I began to attend not only police conferences but also academic meetings. Most of my presentations were on women in policing, and I was struck by a wide gulf between what I heard at the academic meetings and what my women police colleagues and I had experienced. Almost all the discussions about women in policing focused on the problems women faced being accepted in a man’s world. Discussions were overwhelmingly on stress, discriminatory treatment, and harassment.

Yet my friends and I loved being cops. That’s not to say that problems didn’t exist; we certainly weren’t always welcomed with open arms, but when we met at police conferences or at each other’s homes, we were more likely to share adventures than to engage in pity parties. Most of us thought what we did was exciting and adventurous. Most other women we met seemed to envy us. We certainly weren’t cringing in any corners; we were quite pleased with ourselves and would more likely have been accused of swaggering.

When I shared these thoughts with friends who were still in policing, they agreed that it was time for someone to document their successes. *Breaking the Brass Ceiling* is that document. It joins a growing literature on women who are succeeding in fields in which they are a numerical minority but in which they are gaining in numbers and are moving up to visible, decision-making positions.

This work could not have been written without the active support of women in the law enforcement community. No book that relies on information provided by more than 200 women can be a solitary project. Women police chiefs and sheriffs working all across the United States completed surveys on their career paths, gave interviews, suggested other women who had particularly interesting careers, and answered countless e-mails to confirm information on their or other women’s careers. These women are the CEOs of their agencies: chiefs of police and sheriffs who have reached the top of their profession. They are proud of themselves, and they believe it is time for more people to be aware that women can

succeed in law enforcement and can have a voice in setting the national policing agenda.

I particularly want to thank the members of the International Association of Chiefs of Police's (IACP) Police Administration Committee for providing initial financial support. My deep gratitude goes to the members of the National Association of Women Law Enforcement Executives (NAWLEE), not only for financial support but also for acting as "test cases" for the questionnaires, for encouraging me to participate in their meetings, and for reinforcing my belief that theirs was a story that needed to be told. Many NAWLEE board members are among the chiefs quoted here, and my opportunity to interview a number of other chiefs for a column I write for the NAWLEE Website further enriched the material in this book. My NAWLEE column is aptly titled "View from the Top," and that is what I present here.

I have analyzed questionnaires, interviewed at length, spoken to casually, appeared on panels with, and exchanged e-mails and telephone calls with more than half of the women chiefs of police and sheriffs who have held office between 1998 and the completion of this book. That translates into more than 100 women police chiefs and 25 sheriffs. Although it may sound trite, they are the police managers of the twenty-first century and they are making the new—by sometimes breaking the old—rules for those who will follow, whether female or male.

For help in locating these women, I am indebted to many organizations, including the IAWP, NAWLEE, the IACP, the Hispanic American Police Command Officers Association (HAPCOA), the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE), and the National Sheriffs' Association (NSA). The U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs helped locate women who are tribal police chiefs.

I also received financial support and a reduction in my teaching responsibilities from the City University of New York PSC-CUNY Research Award Program. The time was invaluable when it came to transcribing interview tapes and entering and analyzing data from the surveys. The data portion of the project was aided immensely by Robert Panzarella, my John Jay College colleague, who helped me design the questionnaire and analyze the data.

Special thanks are due to each of the chiefs and sheriffs who took time to complete the questionnaires and to be interviewed. They belie the paramilitary proviso that one should never volunteer for extra work. Many of the women are where they are today because they are risk-takers, and they proved it by taking the risk to get involved in this project. Their interest reinforced my belief that the time was right for women in policing to expend greater efforts in looking forward. As a historian, I am

forever reminding women in policing to stop thinking of themselves as new to the field; we've been here for more than 100 years. That being said, the last thirty of those years have been under totally different circumstances than the first seventy. Since the years after 1968, when integration of women onto patrol began quite tentatively, and throughout the 1970s, when it took root, the percentage of women in policing has steadily increased, as has the small but growing percentage of women supervisors and managers. Although it wasn't always easy, there comes a time when looking forward is more fruitful than remembering the bad times. That time is now!

Thanks to Suzanne I. Staszak-Silva at Praeger for taking a risk of her own: that the success stories of women police chiefs and sheriffs would appeal to readers outside the policing profession. She and the other editors at Praeger and the Greenwood Publishing Group understood that despite the many unique aspects of policing, the experiences of women managers in all fields have certain similarities, and need to be explored and documented.

In addition to those who supported the research, those who participated in it, those who listened to reports on its progress, and those who agreed to publish it, there are those who must live with it. Thanks to my Mom, who was certainly going through one of the most difficult periods in her life during the last stages of this book, but managed to have the presence of mind to provide me with the time for it to be completed. Special thanks to my husband, David, who for the second time in his life found his living space invaded by the physical evidence of research about women in policing. I'm sure he thought my first book would never move beyond papers on the living room floor; one can only guess what he thought about the second go-round.

Introduction: A Note on Method and Scope

This portrait of past and current women police chiefs and sheriffs will enhance the reader's knowledge of American policing and provide an understanding of both the pathways and the obstacles for women who seek to reach the top of one of the most quintessentially male professions in America. *Breaking the Brass Ceiling* presents a unique opportunity to hear from women who are challenging the boundaries of a historically male domain. It is a chance to look beyond the problems women face in these areas and to hear from those who have succeeded.

Breaking the Brass Ceiling is based primarily on data collected from questionnaires completed by women police chiefs and sheriffs in the winter of 2001 and on interviews conducted before and after that date. The questions traced the women's entry into policing, their upward mobility in police departments and sheriffs' department, and personal information about them. The responses were enlivened by the interviews and enhanced by documents provided by the women; by transcripts of phone conversations, e-mails, and presentations the women made at police conferences; by official department records; and by a variety of published sources. This portrait represents more than three years of research specifically for this book and more than two decades of research in the areas of policing about which I have taught and written.

The collective portrait of the women who responded to the questionnaire is provided in Chapter 10. The questionnaire was developed specifically for this research with the assistance of women police chiefs. It contained thirty-seven questions, some of which had multiple parts. Some questions (termed close-ended) required checking either yes/no or selecting from specific choices. The women were asked about their assignments, their years on patrol, any significant jobs they held before

entering law enforcement, and about their ages, education, and social status. Each chief or sheriff was asked whether she was the first sworn woman in any agency in which she had worked, and whether she was the first woman supervisor in her current agency. Open-ended questions left space for the chief or sheriff to describe her department or agency, the length of time she had been in her position, the career moves she had made before reaching her present position, and who had assisted or resisted her on the way to the top.

Most of the sheriffs were interviewed in the summer of 2001, and all were in office at the time; those featured in Chapter 8 were still in office in 2004. The chiefs were interviewed between 2000 and 2004; a few have retired and some have moved to other agencies, but this does not change their career paths. The end of 2003 and the early months of 2004 saw the selection of a large number of new women chiefs, particularly in big-city police departments, where they had previously been only in token numbers. These chiefs were contacted even though they had not completed questionnaires; their careers are explored in Chapter 9. Their career paths were strikingly similar to the women in smaller departments.

I conducted and transcribed each of the interviews; all were on the record. No chief or sheriff refused an interview, and none refused to answer any of the questions she was asked. The ease of obtaining interviews may have been based on my own career in policing. I knew many of the women before they were chief or sheriff, and I met many others through a variety of police associations. I knew what to ask, and the women were comfortable speaking to someone who was familiar with the issues. Interviews and questionnaire responses were enriched by tapes of the women's presentations at a variety of police conferences and by press coverage of their careers.

Among the factors that influenced selection for the interviews were size, location, and type of agency; length of time as chief or sheriff; whether a chief or sheriff was in the department in which she began her law enforcement career, or whether she had made strategic moves to position herself for the job of top cop; and whether she held any firsts, including but not limited to first woman in her department, first woman supervisor, or first woman in a nontraditional assignment, such as homicide, canine, motorcycle, or special weapons and tactics (SWAT).

Demographic information included age; race; level of education and major; prior work experience, including military service; years in policing; number of departments employed in before reaching chief or sheriff; marital status and whether the respondent's spouse or partner was in law enforcement; types of assignments; motivation to enter policing and to

seek higher rank; and numbers and types of mentors inside or outside the department.

Each of the women individually and all of them as a group add to the growing literature on women in leadership positions. Being the first is never painless and is often painful. But the more society can learn about pioneering women in all professions, the easier it will be for future generations to move up more quickly. They will have greater confidence that their efforts to reach the top will be successful, and they will gain by their knowledge that they have every right and the privilege to aim for the highest levels of management, a right and a privilege that each of the women profiled in *Breaking the Brass Ceiling* has attained.

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CHAPTER 1

How It All Began: What Is a Nice Girl Like You Doing in a Place Like This?

I was about eight year old. While riding my bike, I found a police badge. I went home and told my mom I wanted to be a policeman. She said I was a girl, so I couldn't be a man, and I certainly couldn't be a policeman.

—Chief Susan Riseling
University of Wisconsin, Madison, Police Department

Being a police officer was my dream.

—Chief Carolyn Hutchison
Carrboro, North Carolina, Police Department

I wanted to do something that was outside the norm for women.

—Chief Doris Conley
Lincoln City, Oregon, Police Department

I was divorced, I had two children, and I needed the money.

—Chief Donna Green
Oakland, Oregon, Police Department

My older sister was a trooper for Alaska and took me on a ride-along. I was hooked.

—Chief Denise Pentony
Shoreline, Washington, Police Department

Why do women become police officers? The answers are as varied as the women. Each of the chiefs arrived at her position from a slightly different background and brought with her different work experiences and different reasons for joining a police department. Although the women

had different reasons for becoming police officers, most of their reasons are the same as the reasons that men become police officers. Some dreamed of being police officers, although many were not sure exactly why and how they came to have what for women was a nontraditional dream. Some had family or friends in law enforcement and received encouragement from them.

Virtually all wanted to help others, and many thought policing was a more exciting helping profession than such traditional women's jobs as teaching, nursing, or social work. Some wanted to enter a field that was overwhelmingly male, not, as some observers believed, to meet a husband, but because they knew it would mean higher salaries and better benefits. And for some, it was a lark, quite literally in response to a dare from a friend, a boss, or even a spouse. For most, it was some combination of these factors.

Why do so many people want to do know why a perfect stranger has selected a particular career? Every woman police officer can recall instances of being asked, either literally or in so many words: What is a nice girl like you doing in a job like this? The question can come from many sources. Sometimes it is someone at a social gathering. Sometimes it is the person to whom the woman gives a traffic summons. Sometimes it is the crime victim who finally figures out what is different about the police officer asking the questions or providing assistance. Sometimes it is another police officer or a supervisor.

For Chief Carolyn Hutchison, of Carrboro, North Carolina, the question came from the two chiefs who interviewed her for her first job: the chief who didn't hire her because he didn't think she'd stay, and the one who hired her reluctantly even though he, too, thought she'd leave quickly. One of the chiefs who started her career to follow a dream, Hutchison had just graduated from Duke University with a double major in sociology and Spanish. She had always wanted to be a police officer, but luckily the chief who hired her wasn't aware that the dream was not based on admiration for the police, but on negative encounters she had had with officers. Despite the chief's initial reluctance, he became her mentor, and although the department wasn't her first choice, "When the chief gave me a chance, I grabbed it, and I haven't been unhappy since."

Annetta Nunn, the first African-American woman to lead the Birmingham, Alabama, Police Department, also was motivated by what she saw and didn't like about the police. While Hutchison had a few personal run-ins with police, Nunn had observed police in her neighborhood who were protecting illegal activity. What both women shared was the belief that policing didn't have to be either insensitive or corrupt—sufficient motivation to form their career decisions.

Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Chief Nannette Hegerty dreamed of being a police officer in the days before women were on patrol. She remembered growing up in the 1960s and 1970s and seeing patrol cars in her neighborhood and thinking what a “neat job” it would be to ride around the city helping people. By 1976, the city was hiring women on an equal basis with men, and Hegerty was able to fulfill her dream.

Susan Riseling’s dream was based on fate. While riding her bicycle, she found a police badge. She returned home with the badge in her pocket and, using the language of the times, told her mother that she wanted to be a policeman. Her mother explained that it was impossible for her to be a man, and therefore equally impossible to be a policeman. Although Riseling didn’t argue, she decided to study criminal justice, but, with her mother’s words in her mind, she opted for a career in college and university policing because she believed it would be more female-friendly. She was correct. Riseling, who was named chief of the University of Wisconsin at Madison’s Police Department in 1991, had previously been the second in command at the State University of New York at Stony Brook’s Police Department.

Some of the women were able to fulfill their dreams through internships or cadet programs that allowed them to work with their local police department in high school or in college. These programs were developed in the 1970s and 1980s primarily as a way to bring minority men into police agencies. In large cities, the programs often were open only to those who lived in specified neighborhoods, which usually assured that the majority of the applicants would be African-American or Hispanic. In smaller cities or in sheriffs’ departments, the programs were sometimes also aimed at college students, providing them with a chance to earn college credits or funds toward their tuition bills. A number of the programs were structured to raise the standards of police applicants, who rarely were college-trained, by enticing college students into law enforcement careers after they graduated.

Many agencies also participated in police reserve programs, where local residents attended a police academy and worked, as volunteers or for pay, a certain number of hours a week or a month. In departments where reserve officers did not attend academies, they did clerical work, took reports, or provided extra eyes and ears for police officers at fairs, parades, or sporting events. In other jurisdictions, reserves were sworn police officers; they carried firearms and had arrest authority, and were really part-time employees, many of whom hoped to become regular, full-time police officers.

Although departments had not anticipated it, by the mid-1970s women began to apply for cadet and reserve officer positions. Many of the

departments were reluctant to hire these young women, and rarely allowed them to do anything but clerical tasks. But even in these limited roles, some women were able to use the programs to establish their credibility and reinforce that they were serious about careers in policing. Particularly in small agencies, where hiring is often outside civil service rules, the women were able to impress the chiefs enough to be offered full-time positions when they became available. Patricia Medina, chief of the Rio Dell, California, Police Department, began her career as a police cadet. She had wanted to be a police officer since high school, and in 1976 the program opened the doors in her original department, where she was the first woman police officer and the first woman supervisor. After nineteen years in policing, Medina, one of only a handful of Hispanic-surnamed chiefs, had worked in four police departments, the last two as the chief.

Gwendolyn Boyd-Savage began her policing career as a public service aide with the Miami, Florida, Police Department, assisting police officers by taking reports from citizens. She used the position as a stepping-stone first to police officer and ultimately to three chiefs' positions, stopping along the way to serve as vice president of administrative services at Florida International University, her alma mater. One of the few African-American women to have led other than a large-city police department, Boyd-Savage had been nicknamed Hot Pants for her undercover arrests on the streets of Miami before becoming the department's first black female major and then its first female assistant chief. Prior to being named chief in North Miami, Florida, in 2002, Boyd-Savage had been chief in Prichard, Alabama, and Miramar, Florida. At the time of her selection in North Miami, Riviera Beach, Florida, was planning to offer her its vacant chief's position. Boyd-Savage was the first Florida police chief—male or female—with a doctorate, and she was the first African-American female police chief in North Miami, the fourth largest city in Miami-Dade County. Had she waited for the Riviera Beach job, she would have become the first black woman to head a police department in Palm Beach County.¹

Vickie Peltzer, whose career with the Albuquerque, New Mexico, Police Department led to her becoming the chief of police at the University of Washington, benefited from a different type of cadet program. Peltzer was able to join the Albuquerque Police Department's Explorer Program in 1972, barely a year after it was opened to women. The program began with the Boy Scouts of America, and was open to Scouts between the ages of fourteen and sixteen. In 1971 the age limit was extended to twenty-one and women became eligible to participate. The program allows young people to assist police officers, to attend lectures on police topics, and to compete for a variety of college scholarships.

Peltzer recalled that she had big dreams and wanted it all, including the pay and benefits of policing. “I wanted a real career, excitement, helping people, interest in law enforcement, pay, benefits—all of it,” she said, ticking the items off on her fingers.

Although she married and left Albuquerque, when she and her family returned in 1979, she was able to join the department as a police officer. During her twenty-year career there, she gained experience in patrol and administrative units, earned a master’s degree in public administration, and received two civil service promotions to the rank of lieutenant. Seeing little opportunity to move higher in rank, she became one of almost seventy applicants for the position of chief at the University of Washington in Seattle, where she led a department of fifty police officers and a number of civilians responsible for public safety on the 640-acre campus. In 2002 she was elected president of the National Association of Women Law Enforcement Executives (NAWLEE), a group of mostly high-ranking women who provide networking and mentoring for women who aspire to become chiefs. Divorced for many years, she remarried in 2004 and has begun using her new name of Stormo.

Heather Fong, who in 2004 was named chief of the San Francisco Police Department, recalled that since the age requirement to be a police officer was twenty-one, she could only serve as a cadet when she joined at age eighteen, and that since women were not allowed on patrol, she had to stay in the office.

Colonel Anne Beers, head of the Minnesota State Patrol, and one of only two women to have led a state police agency, also was attracted by a cadet program that included a pre-entry academy. One of only three women officers at the time she joined the State Patrol, she was drawn to the independence and service aspects of policing. Beers’s career has been history-making. Except for the rank of sergeant, she was the first woman to hold every rank in her agency, including lieutenant, captain, major, deputy chief, and chief.

Shirley Pierini, who in 2004 became the fifth woman president of the 33,000-member American Society of Industrial Security–International in its more than fifty-year history, recalled that before starting a career in private security, she had worked as a communications officer with the San Diego Police Department and as a reserve officer with the Imperial Beach, California, Police Department and then with the Washoe County (Nevada) Sheriff’s Office. Family responsibilities made it difficult for her to remain in one place long enough for a policing career, but proved less of a problem in private industry, which enabled her to hold a number of management positions in corporate security and to take an active role with ASIS–International.²

These programs opened doors for the women, but the women were quick to see that departments viewed them as little more than typists and clerks. While male cadets were permitted to go out in the field with officers or were assigned to help in bureaus that were more active, the women often had to be content with filing reports or typing for middle-ranking officers in administrative jobs. Neither the women nor the men found this unusual, since the vast majority of women who worked in police departments before the 1970s, with the exception of the few sworn police-women, were employed in clerical roles.

A number of the chiefs who weren't cadets began their careers in police departments as clerks or as dispatchers in the communications section, where they answered telephone calls from the public and sent (dispatched) police officers to answer the public's requests for service. These jobs, which often entailed working nights and weekends just as the police officers did, generally paid less and had fewer fringe benefits (sick and vacation leave, pension accrual, or time off for education) than the officers' jobs. In many departments, dispatchers work alongside sworn officers and are supervised by sergeants or other sworn members of the department who also supervise police officers. Chief Barbara Childress, of Richmond Hills, Texas, one of the first women chiefs in the state and one of the few who has been chief for more than twenty years, began her career as a dispatcher. Another Texas chief, Nona Holoman, who was selected to lead the Seabrook Police Department in 2000, also began her career as dispatcher before becoming a police officer and moving up the ranks.

Evelyn Hicks, who in 1995 became the first African-American female chief in Florida, joined the Opa-Locka Police Department as a clerk-typist in 1973. At the time, she recalled, "it was a male-dominated department. There [was] a small percentage of blacks, but there were no female officers at all." It took her twenty years to advance from police officer to corporal, to sergeant, to acting patrol commander, and to commander of the department's criminal investigation and administration. Fiscal problems in Opa-Locka, a financially strapped Dade County community that until the 1950s was home to a U.S. Navy base and that is still trying to change its image from a crime-ridden "Baghdad of the South," resulted in Hicks and other officers being demoted in 1993. She decided to stay, and two years later was named chief, a position she held for approximately three years.³

Shirley Gifford, who in 2003 retired as chief of the Soldatin, Alaska, Police Department, spent most of her career in the Anchorage Police Department. She had recently completed a degree in criminal justice and was hired to type police reports. She realized she could do the job of police

officer and asked to be sent to the police academy. Twenty-one years later, she gave up her Anchorage captain's bars to become a chief. She was one of a number of the chiefs who followed a time-honored career path set by many men: leaving a larger police department at middle management or higher rank to take over as chief in a smaller police department.

Chief Linda Davis began her career in the Winston-Salem, North Carolina, Police Department as a secretary. When she retired in 2004, for the second time, she had spent thirty-four years in the department, eighteen of them on patrol. She had been the department's first female patrol officer, sergeant, lieutenant, captain, assistant chief, and chief. She had originally retired as the assistant chief in 1998, but was soon asked to return as interim chief, and the following year the "acting" was removed from her title. When she retired for the second time, she said she thought it would be for good.

Lori Emmert, who in 2003 became the second female chief in Wyoming when she was selected to lead the Douglas Police Department, began her career in 1980 as a dispatcher and animal control officer. After six years, she was promoted to a records and communications supervisor before finally becoming a police officer in 1992. Things moved more quickly after that. In 2001, she was promoted to sergeant after earning an associate's degree from Eastern Wyoming College. She had been acting chief for less than two months when City Administrator Bobbi Fitzhugh selected her, noting with some understatement that she had "truly worked her way up through the ranks."⁴

Carol Williams of Montclair, New Jersey, who was named chief in 1994, was working in the civilian position of security specialist when her supervisor dared her to become a police officer. Accepting the challenge, she became her department's first woman officer, sergeant, lieutenant, and captain before being named only the second woman chief in the state. When the fifteen-year veteran was named chief, she was still the only woman in the department. Her sole motivation to become a police officer had been her supervisor's challenge. Glassboro's Patricia Kunchynski had become the first woman chief in New Jersey in 1987. She, too, had been the first woman in her department. By the time she retired in 2003, about a dozen women had been chiefs in the state. The overall percentage of women in policing in New Jersey is below the national average. This is because many of the small departments have no or only one or two women, but this has not prevented some of the women from rising to the top of their agency.

Fewer than a dozen women mentioned family or close friends as their motivation for becoming police officers. Of those who did, though, the family member differed; sometimes it was a father or brother, but for Chief

Denise Pentony, of Shoreline, Washington, it was accompanying a sister, an Alaska State Trooper, on a ride-along. Two others also mentioned older sisters who were already police officers. One, a chief in a small village of only 1,200 residents, was her department's only full-time officer. She supervised only three part-time police officers. She indicated that her former husband had also been a small-town chief, but, possibly to maintain some confidentiality in such a small community, she did not specify whether he had been chief of the department she now led.

Elizabeth (Betsy) Watson, who was the only woman to have been chief of two large municipal police departments (Houston from 1990 to 1992 and Austin from 1992 to 1997), was persuaded to try policing by her mother, who had been intrigued by the stories told by relatives who had been in the Philadelphia Police Department. Although Watson wasn't sure she wanted a police career, both she and her sister were pioneers, she as a chief and her sister as the first woman captain in the Harris County (Texas) Sheriff's Department.

Two of the university chiefs described fathers who had been in federal law enforcement, and one also mentioned that her sister, who been able to use funds from a law enforcement grant to complete her education, was a mentor to her. Another chief had actually planned to become an attorney, but the death of her father, a federal law enforcement officer, resulted in her having to put her plans on hold for both emotional and financial reasons. She switched to a criminal justice program, thinking she might go to law school later, but the municipal department in which she was interning gave an exam for police officer, and after taking it "on a whim," she decided to take the job when it was offered to her.

Others mentioned brothers, spouses, boyfriends, or friends, overwhelmingly male. That most of the chiefs referred to male relatives or friends reflected the years in which they entered policing, when the profession was only opening up to women on an equal basis with men. Although few of the chiefs were the first woman in their agency, women were not as prevalent in policing as they are today, so it is not surprising that most of the police officers the women knew were men.

The few mentions of mothers were also a reflection of the times. None of the chiefs had a mother who was a policewoman or police officer, but a few of the mothers were employed as civilians in police departments, mainly as dispatchers. They encouraged their daughters to apply for police positions when they became available in the mid-1970s. Vanessa Wall, chief at Middle Georgia College in Cochran, Georgia, who spent sixteen years in a municipal police department before becoming chief, recalled that her mother worked as a dispatcher and had been fascinated hearing the sheriff's deputies talk about their jobs.

Ivin B. Lee was a dispatcher before becoming the first African-American woman police officer in the Charleston, West Virginia, Police Department. After twenty-one years she retired to become the first female chief in Dunbar, West Virginia. Her mother was her prime motivator. "My mother was a domestic, but she taught me I could be anything I wanted to be if I worked hard enough," she said, calling herself a pathfinder for those who chose to follow. Lee, the divorced mother of five, originally dropped out of high school but later earned a bachelor's degree in criminal justice. She oversaw an all-male, all-white department of between fourteen and twenty officers for two years (1996–1997) before joining state government in the Division of Juvenile Services and then being named director of the West Virginia Human Rights Commission.⁵

A NONTRADITIONAL WAY TO HELP PEOPLE

The desire to help people has always been the most commonly cited reason for becoming a police officer. Particularly for lower-middle-class or working-class men, who have traditionally provided the applicant pool for police officers, policing and firefighting are two of the better-paying and more prestigious jobs where they can combine public service with exciting work that brings with it job security and good benefits, all without a college education. Since the 1970s, when the qualifications for men and women were equalized, women applicants have no longer been required to have college training or experience in jobs with public contact, but many of the women chiefs came to policing either from or instead of careers in more traditionally female helping fields. Many had trained to be teachers or nurses; quite a few were already working in those fields. Although almost all the chiefs said they were attracted to policing as a way to help others, this was often combined with other reasons for their career choice.

The women who brought these earlier career experiences with them into policing differed from their police academy peers, most of whom were likely to have little more than a high school education. Even today, few municipal, county, suburban, or rural police departments expect applicants to have a college degree at the time they enter policing. College degrees are required primarily by the well-known, federal investigative agencies, such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), and the Secret Service. In 1997, 83 percent of nonfederal police departments accepted applicants with high school diplomas only; 3 percent did not even require that. Only 1 percent of departments required that applicants be college graduates. Of the remaining 13 percent, 8 percent required a two-year degree and 5 percent required