

Summer of '73

Judy Hails 11/8/2018

June 1973 saw me back at my old desk at L.A. Sheriff's Department Research and Development Bureau. There had been a few transfers in and out, but it was mostly a reunion with my colleagues, catching up during lunches at our old favorite restaurants that bordered Pershing Square. It was good to be home, but events that summer ultimately decided my fate with the department.

Summer school at Southwestern was drudgery. Three-hour classes, four nights a week after working 8-hour days, left me exhausted. My social life consisted of talking to fellow law students while waiting in line for coffee. Grades were out. I was unprepared for the fact that, unlike undergrad programs where grade inflation had been underway since academic deferments saved men from death in Viet Nam if they kept a solid GPA, grade deflation hit law schools striving to maintain ABA accreditation in 1973. Numeric grading replaced the traditional A to F. The numbers brutally pinpointed the results of hundreds of hours spent pouring over the books. I had studied harder than any time in my life, but my GPA for my first 2 semesters was 82.0. A mere 12 months after finishing my masters with a 4.0, I had an anemic B- average. It felt like all my efforts had produced nothing. I was depressed, considering dropping out, when class standings were released: I was in the top 10%. I went into a manic phase, working harder toward achieving my J.D.

On my way to work on July 5, I stopped for breakfast with a friend who was getting off the night shift at the East L.A. Station. Surface streets were the fastest way downtown at that hour. I had timed it carefully to I would not be late to work, so I was muttering to myself about the car in front of me stopping for a pedestrian who was crossing on a red light. Pow! A green VW bug rear-ended my red Datsun 1200. I stomped on my brakes but was helpless as the VW shoved me into the large gray sedan in front of me. My lap belt did nothing to prevent the dual impacts from inflicting a double whiplash. I wore a cervical collar for six months. You can't imagine the comments a law student gets wearing one of those. It would be five years before I was completely healed.

Summer school was finally over. I was enjoying a few weeks of merely working 8-hour days. No long-term projects were assigned because I would be leaving for CSULB

soon. And then the news hit. Howard, my former Chief who was now Assistant Sheriff, had been fired. The press release, repeated by all the local news agencies, stated that he was fired for misuse of department helicopters. Rumors flew about "the real reason." The only thing that was ever verified was that he was gone. It became clear that those who hated Howard were after his staff, too. Within days people were being transferred to undesirable assignments. Rosemary, my friend at R & D who had been Howard's primary writer, suddenly became the Watch Commander on the graveyard shift at Sybil Brand Institute (SBI), the women's jail. I was sure my name was on someone's list.

What do you do when your "guardian angel" dies? I had worked hard, but Howard had guided my promotion to sergeant and granting my leaves of absence. Many thought that I, like "most women," could only advance our careers by "sleeping our way to the top." Thanks to civil service rules, they could not demote me, but other tricks, like "suitcase transfers" (frequent transfers to inconvenient locations) could wipe out law school. Compounding the situation, "affirmative action" had resulted in elimination of "male" and "female" positions in the department. The only female captain, the commander of SBI, retired. Now SBI had a male captain, and there were no women above the rank of Lieutenant. That left the possibility of one promotion in the next 20 years – if I ever outlived the stigma of having Howard as my guardian angel.

After a heated debate with myself, I decided to resign. Having made my decision, I enjoyed my last few days downtown. Then, two days before I was set to depart, I got a phone call from Rick, aide to the Chief of Civil Division. He offered me a job. I'd be the sergeant in charge of bailiffs in the Superior Court at First and Hill. What possibilities! Working with judges. Constant interaction with litigators. A dream job for a law student. Then Rick said, "We've been ordered to have a female sergeant in the Division. I called Bob, the Lieutenant you will report to, and told him 'Won't it be great having Judy working under you?'" I hung up. It might have been a gigantic step in my legal career, but being a token female, hired to fill a quota, and the butt of sexist jokes? NEVER!

September found me teaching at Cal State Long Beach. Three years later I returned to the Superior Court on First and Hill as a lawyer.