

The Crime Squads

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It may be about time to add a little information about the structure of the area I was now working in. The Independent Patrol Group worked out of the IOOF building in Russell Street until the Russell Street Bombing. My Chief Superintendent was 'Chippy' Norton. Members either loved him or hated him. I never had an issue with him even though I became his pawn in the battle of the sexes. He was always fair with me. In the same building, one floor above, was Chief Superintendent Walters who was in charge of the Crime Department. At this time 'Chippy' had about six females working at the Independent Patrol Group (IPG). Walters, to my knowledge, had none. It was common practice for the IPG to supply members to the Crime Department for temporary duty or to cover special projects. My arrival at the IPG could not have come at a better time for 'Chippy' or at a worse time for Walters. It became a game they played — Walters would ask for members to do temporary duties and 'Chippy' would send me. Walters was obviously expecting to be given male members so I would be sent straight back to 'Chippy' with — 'we don't have females here'. 'Chippy' would send me straight back again with a report that if he had to have females so did Walters. On some occasions this backwards and forwards would go on for days. So here I was! I actually accepted this, no matter how much it hurt or how embarrassed I was at being used. It was a man's job that I was trying to 'infiltrate' and I just had to accept that fact.

A few months after the Ash Wednesday Bushfires 'Chippy' sent me to the Stolen Car Squad. The Detective Senior Sergeant, David Marks, did not want females in his squad so he sent me back to the IPG. But 'Chippy' sent me back! Due to rising internal pressure, Marks had to take me. I was again the first female to be appointed, even if only temporary, to the Stolen Car Squad.

I had to work twice as hard as the male members to be accepted. When I arrived they had no idea what to do with me. Eventually they found a file they thought worthy of me. A file that had been sitting in the 'to do' tray for who knows how long. German Police had had a spate of Porsche cars stolen which they believed had made their way to Australia. They supplied very little details. My boss suggested that I go to the Road Traffic Authority (RTA) and do some investigating. In those days all the information was stored on little white cards in a filing room out the back of the RTA. As soon as I saw this I realised that the boss had given me the job because he knew it was impossible. I would be here forever. My usual determination set in and I made myself comfortable in my new home — on the floor in the files room of the RTA. Day after day I sat with the limited information from Germany (which consisted mainly of numbers that I did not understand) and my little white cards, and slowly but surely I began matching numbers. I still did not understand what the numbers meant so I made an appointment to attend 'Hamilton's' — the Porsche suppliers for Melbourne, to see if they could explain the numbers to me. We spent hours putting the numbers together. I then went back into the office and sent a telex to Germany. No one asked or cared what I was doing. I waited with baited breath to get my reply which eventually came complete with the information I had hoped for.

I went into the boss's office and explained that I had located numerous stolen Porsche motor cars from Germany which were now in the unsuspecting hands of some fairly prominent Melbourne businessmen. I can still see the look of shock on his face. I explained that the cars had not been bought to Australia as cars but as parts. I had learnt from the staff at Hamilton's that every part of a Porsche had its own identifying numbers. When I had sent these numbers to Germany they had confirmed that these parts did belong to the stolen cars but were now parts of numerous cars here in Australia. They had been shipped as parts and rebuilt in Australia but the different parts were not

necessarily put back together as the original cars so that they were virtually impossible to trace. From this information my three months changed to five months and it became one of the most involved investigations the Car Squad had tackled at the time.

At the conclusion of five months I received a written report from Senior Sergeant Marks:-

‘During her service with this squad, Miss Pethick worked mainly on an inquiry regarding the activities of two offenders who are presently awaiting trial on numerous offences of theft, forgery and uttering, resulting from their importation of suspected Porsche motor cars from Germany. This inquiry, which was very complex and involved numerous changes of vehicle identity, took longer than the three months or so Miss Pethick was supposed to be with us. I was impressed with how quickly she became familiar with the intricacies of this inquiry, quicker in fact than some much more experienced male members. Miss Pethick showed herself to be diligent, intelligent and eager to learn. I was impressed with her potential and admit that she has removed my prejudice against females as detectives. I would be happy to accept her back in this squad in due course as a detective.’

At the time I was so proud of this report that I filed it away in my ‘important papers’ and still have the original report to this day.

Four weeks after the conclusion of my time at the Stolen Car Squad I was again seconded — this time to the Licensing Gaming and Vice Squad.

They were having trouble at St Kilda with offences of prostitution. The squad had no females so it was hard to infiltrate the brothels and street offenders with only male officers. They made a request to my boss to supply a couple of females and I was so lucky to be chosen. My main duty was undercover work. My days consisted of applying for jobs in massage parlours, going for interviews to get enough evidence for an arrest, or standing on street corners in St. Kilda to apprehend ‘gutter-crawlers’ — the men who stopped every female in the street to ask for sex. I worked with two of the best partners I ever had the fortune to work with and I trusted them with my life. Often the work was dangerous but I had total faith in my partners and knew if they thought I was in any danger they would always be through the door to assist me even if it meant blowing our cover.

There were numerous newspaper articles done whilst I was there due to the fact that ‘Billie’s Angels’ were making so many arrests for soliciting females. ‘Billie’s Angels’ referred to myself and two other female members working at the vice squad and Bill Walters was our Superintendent.

It was while I was at the Licensing Gaming and Vice Squad that I had my opportunity to apply for a permanent position at the Criminal Investigation Branch (CIB). Members could apply for the CIB after five years in the police force. The process involved doing an exam, getting references and sitting a selection panel. As I had been performing temporary duties at the CIB since I joined the police force I knew I would have a very good chance of securing a position. As was the usual I knew they would ask the Senior Sergeant at the Licensing Gaming and Vice Squad for a reference.

One morning the Senior Sergeant asked me to drive him up to Russell Street and so while we were alone I asked him if he would provide a reference for me. He replied with ‘if you want me to give you a good reference then I expect you to be on my desk naked when we return to the office’. I was dumbfounded. I knew from the look on his face that he was not joking. As we entered the building I walked straight to one of my Inspectors from the Independent Patrol Group. My whole body was shaking. I felt like I was totally unaware of where I was or who I was. Is this what I had to do to matter in the Police Force? I knew it was a ‘man’s job’ but I wanted to make a difference. Did I need

to have sex with a man I disliked to get anywhere? He could see that something was wrong and took me away while the Senior Sergeant went off to do whatever he had gone there for. After a lot of persuasion, I eventually told him the conversation that I had just had. He told me not to worry about it. He would fix it. I don't know what shocked me more; What had just happened to me or that when I told him he did not seem to be surprised at all. I don't know what he said to the Senior Sergeant but nothing was ever mentioned about the conversation again.

Upon my return to the Licensing Gaming and Vice office I decided that I would have to ask my immediate supervisor – a Sergeant – to supply the reference as I didn't like my chances of a favorable report from the Senior Sergeant.

The following day the Sergeant provided me with his letter of recommendation;-

'During the time Constable Pethick worked on my crew I found her very reliable. She always did her job to the best of her ability. The briefs submitted by her were to a very high standard. Evidence given at the Magistrates Court was always very professional. A total of one hundred and five briefs were submitted by her during her time at the Licensing Gaming and Vice Squad. These briefs consisted of offences for living off the earnings of prostitution, soliciting a female for prostitution, using premises for habitual prostitution and loitering for prostitution. This member is a very dedicated person. She works well without supervision. Constable Pethick has many attributes to make an outstanding investigator. Her performance whilst under my supervision has been of a very high standard and I have little hesitation in recommending her for a position with the Criminal Investigation Branch.'

However, I was found to be 'unsuitable' for the CIB.