

# **MY SHERIFF'S OFFICE YEARS**

**1962-1980**

**Margo Spears**

This book was created as part of *Lifescapes*, a cooperative project of the Washoe County Library System, the University of Nevada English Department, ElderCollege and the Nevada Humanities Committee.

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# **My Sheriff's Office Years**

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## **Acknowledgement**

Margo Spears appreciates ElderCollege Lifescapes for giving her the opportunity to share with friends and family some of the hopefully interesting parts of her very varied life. Her years as a Deputy Sheriff in Santa Clara County, California gave her a “front row seat observing two decades of high drama and heart tugging theater.” She has been fortunate to have a loving family with three daughters and five grandchildren, and a husband for 50 years, with much of the last half spent traveling the world together enjoying the culture, beauty and wonder of many diverse areas of all seven continents. Life is good.

Nearly all names in “My Sheriff’s Office Years” have been changed “to protect the innocent” or the guilty. Any mistakes in dates, descriptions, etc. are completely unintentional and simply due to my faulty memory of times long past.

Margo Spears

## **My Sheriff's Office Years**

### **Part One 1962-1969**

#### **Court Liaison**

“You were What?” was usually the surprised query when I answered the inevitable socializing question, “What did you do before you retired?” Actually I held a position unlike any I was exposed to during my young years. In the days before 100 channels of TV, a question I’d occasionally wondered was “What’s behind those clanging iron doors” of my many mystery novels.

The year was early 1962, we were living in San Jose, California and my husband was thinking of going to college part-time to get his degree—delayed when he joined the Navy while going to Ohio State in 1940. We had three daughters, ages 15 to the youngest 2 ½, so it seemed right for me to go back to work. I’d previously worked 5 years in San Francisco for the Finance Section of the Veterans Administration, then the US Forest Service covering the state of California, first as auditor, then head of Collections. After deciding to get a job, I interviewed for the Bank of America, which fit my qualifications, but it sounded so dull. Spotting an ad in the newspaper, and being curious, I also applied to Santa Clara County for the position of Deputy Sheriff Matron (DSM). I was one of the first group to be hired under that title, since previously women who were hired as Matrons could only work with female inmates. The Matrons were all older, and had a reputation for being tough. Santa Clara County was being quite advanced to allow us into a quasi-military male sanctuary, although still only in selected jobs. Our first group of Deputy Sheriff Matrons was given more law enforcement duties, instead of jail duty only, but practically no training. We rotated through Records, learning reports, filing and transcribing, booking of females, transportation and court work, some detective work and of course jail duty.

After a short time in Records, I was transferred to the midnight shift downstairs in the Main Jail where I was to handle all the Court papers and book any females. Adjoining the Men’s Booking area my tiny room was about 7’ x 10’ plus a very tiny bathroom. The walls were institution gray with one small barred and frosted window, a long desk on one side and files on rollers on the other. A female arrestee would sit on a small chair and answer all the pertinent questions (name, age, address, etc.) necessary for booking. Cozy. The Men’s Booking area did have my “clanging iron doors,” two sets actually, to admit all arrestees. The driveway down to those doors was under part of the building so no sun light ever came in. An arresting officer would bring a suspect to the iron door, ring the bell, direct the suspect into the iron barred cage area, place his weapon in a locker before being buzzed through a side barred door to begin the booking procedure. From my open doorway, I had a fascinating view of all the male “crooks,” famous and nobodies, good and bad, shouting or sullen, scared or belligerent. Some were too drunk to “process” so would be taken directly to the drunk tank while the officer filled out all the forms.

On the midnight shift (really 10:45 pm to 6:45 am and often just referred to as Mids) I was learning all the legal documents to hold and to release people and most importantly

setting up all the papers for court the next day. Rose Ross was the Matron who handled the multitude of court activities on the Day Shift. On Mids I checked inside every Booking Jacket each night to be sure that all the papers were properly noted on the front of the jacket. It was surprising to me how often a new warrant got accidentally put away without any action.

And then came the night I'd dreaded—the midnight Matron called in sick. I had to take that ride in the shared elevator to the third floor area and the Women's Section--scary. I'd been there once for a 15 minute orientation, but that night the swing shift Matron gave me the quick rundown of her shift. We walked briskly through the whole place to do the required headcount—must see skin—through the two misdemeanor dorms, the felony section with six cells holding two inmates each on steel bunk beds, the unoccupied drunk tank, the small sick bay, the empty holding cell, small office, then she handed me the 5' long keys and left!! I was alone in charge of 26 locked-up women. Luckily no women were booked in that night and I spent the long night practicing locking, double locking and unlocking the doors—it felt so strange with the huge keys. I studied the booking roster and papers, checked every drawer and closet and walked around my area. To this day I refuse to wear non-rubber soled shoes—I don't like to make noise when I walk.

At 5:00 am, a small brown woman came knocking on the window of the dorm. I opened the door and GeeGee Weeweela came into my life and rescued me. A full-blooded Indian, she was almost a permanent resident. While on the outside she was an alcoholic, mean drunk. Inside the jail she was an extremely helpful efficient hard worker who gently guided me through all the routines necessary to get everyone up, dressed, and fed to be ready for courts since the first transportation left by 8:00 am. When my daytime replacement came at 6:45 am, I gladly went down the elevator, said my goodbyes and hurried out those double doors to wonderful fresh air.

I compartmentalized my life. The most important part was my family. However, when I got to work, I felt a freedom--strange in a jail--but there, at that time, I was not known as Joe's wife, or the girls' Mom. I was on an adventure, traveling into a space I'd never been in, seeing people I would never have encountered otherwise, hearing stories that could break your heart or disgust you, meeting all the people who would make headlines the next day.

One of the first big cases I remember occurred exactly five months after I started at the department. On August 28, 1962, 20-year-old beautiful Hajna De Kaplany, a former model and showgirl, married for only one month, was tortured with acid by her husband Dr. Geza de Kaplany. He doused sulfuric and nitric acids over 60% of her body, then mutilated her with a knife. Saying she'd been unfaithful, he tried to destroy her beauty. She lived for 33 terrible days and the sensational case got nationwide publicity. At his trial in 1963 he pled not guilty by reason of insanity and tried the multiple-personality defense popular at the time. Although he was convicted of first degree murder, his strange behavior during the trial led the jury to sentence him to only life in prison. The lenient State Parole Board let him out in 1975 and he moved to Taiwan, then

Germany. Life without possibility of parole was not an option at that time, but this case was used to make that change in the law.

For all those months I made the court appointments daily for de Kaplany, making sure he got to court on time with the right paperwork, following the case closely, and sometimes getting details from the court deputies not given to the public. I saw de Kaplany often, a pleasant looking man I deemed a monster and was happy to finally hand that thick incarceration folder to the transportation deputies to take him to State Prison.

A little later my days off were temporarily changed to Tuesday and Wednesday which meant I'd do my Booking work on the Sunday, Monday and Thursday nights and do jail duty on Friday and Saturday nights. Many of us working in law enforcement felt an excitement in seeing the world move in and out of our doors. I booked Joyce (fictitious name, as will be most names used) on drunk driving. She was one of the wealthiest women in the Bay Area, whose family's name was known world wide. It was Saturday night. She was drunk, but polite, tall and lanky, not particularly good looking, and needing a shoulder to cry on. It was a quiet night, so upstairs I spent the time while awaiting her bail listening to how dreadful it was that her family was so disappointed in her, so she drank to forget them. My way of handling my emotions in times like that was to remember "I am not responsible for her getting into jail, nor am I responsible for her trial or the outcome of the occasion—my only responsibility was to keep her safe with proper care, and to get her to court, or released when the time came." The burden of trying to judge the prisoners was not for me. Oh, don't get me wrong—I often disliked what the person had done, especially when children were involved. I did have a strong compassion for many of the women but still I trained myself to have an invisible shield to not get emotionally involved in any of the cases. I have great respect for the court system, and although I have seen where it is not perfect, in general, at least in Santa Clara County, the justice system worked very well.

My first introduction to the drug culture was through Effie Mae, age 48, a large black lady arrested for Sale of Heroin. Her withdrawals from heroin were severe and she was housed in the Observation Cell—a corner cell glassed-in on two sides so we could keep a close eye on problems. When I first went in to see her she was shivering, shaking and perspiring. I sat on the hard bed beside her and after we talked awhile she asked if I had any chocolate? I did, a candy bar in my purse, so gave it to her. She taught me that "Chocolate was the only legal thing to help withdrawals." It did seem to help so I took her a couple Hershey bars the next night and she was really appreciative. Still, sleep was difficult so she spent the wee hours of that morning telling stories of her large family, several grown children, and the sadness she felt knowing she'd be going to prison and miss some of her treasured grandchildren's growing up. I really liked her but could see that heroin had a powerful hold on her, even when she fought it. She did plead guilty soon thereafter and went to Frontera, the California Institute for Women in Chino.

I was the only one of the new DSMs who did not rotate to various positions—I thrived doing the complicated, almost puzzle-like, "figuring time" to give each sentenced person their release date. There were often several sentences for different charges, all needing to

be exact. The time was figured with total time then time was deducted for Good Time, and Work Time, with the understanding being they would be good, and work, once transferred to Elmwood Detention Facility in Milpitas, also called the "Farm." The sentenced men went to the Farm, often actually doing real farming while serving time on Misdemeanor charges, or on Felonies with a sentence of one year or less plus Probation.

I worked the 10:45 pm-6:45 am shift for almost two years. There was a lot of camaraderie, and I found I really enjoyed being the only female in that area of the jail, except a nurse, who seldom came to Booking unless an injured or ill incoming arrestee needed approval to be booked. She'd also come down to dinner, at about 2:00 am. The chef we had was amazing. He'd been a well known restaurant chef who drank too much, but after being sober awhile was hired by the jail, and gave us some excellent gourmet food! Officers only, of course. I still use his recipe for clam chowder. When on Mids I started several statistical reports, including a daily head count list--and we finally had 1000 people in custody—about half at the Main Jail awaiting court procedures and half sentenced in Milpitas at Elmwood.

During those years, a new women's jail was being built on the Milpitas property, and in early 1964 when it opened the Matrons were required to transfer out there. Rose Ross had been the Matron in charge of all the day booking paperwork, and was an icon in the County. A little woman, she was as feisty as possible, and could hold her own with anyone word wise. She was known to probably every police officer in the County who had ever booked someone. She was terrific at the court system and had helped me learn all the ins and outs of the courts during my two years working midnights to her days. When she transferred to Milpitas, I took over Daytime Booking. My style was completely different than hers but I'd become known to Day personnel and the transfer for me was seamless. Poor Rose, however, with all her seniority had requested the quieter midnight shift at the new jail, which was in a distant, separate building from the Men's headquarters. Well, someone higher up decided Rosie could handle the whole jail there by herself since one Matron was enough at night when at the Main Jail. Here she was in this big new jail, not another badge person for several hundred yards and midnights were often filled with cranky drunks. She handled it very well, but finally enough of us complained to the powers-that-be who finally transferred one of the new DSMs so there would be at least two people available in case of trouble. At the Main Jail, all the officers knew help from another officer was just around the corner. At Milpitas, the Correctional Officers were really not readily available.

On Days, the first thing I did each morning was to call each of the seven courts in the county and confirm court appearances and paperwork needed. I had to be especially careful to make sure each inmate got to court within the specified time limit, usually three days, or else he had to be released. The police could come and re-arrest him as he left, but that was seldom necessary. I did have to phone many of the police departments to see if a complaint, thus court appearance, was coming. I, like Rose before me, got acquainted, usually by phone, with most of the court and patrol police officers in the county as well as criminal attorneys and public defenders and probation officers. As the Day Booking deputy, I was in charge of all shifts' paperwork, and I did a lot of double checking. At



times it got very hectic, especially when the morning court papers came back and everyone wanted to be released at the same time. Sometimes I almost felt my telephone was an extension of my head. The male deputies started counting and one day in between “real” work I answered nearly 100 court, bail, and information requests by phone! I had new DSMs to train often just so I’d have help with the paperwork. Lt. Jim Geary in charge of the jail (later Sheriff) even helped with the filing when things got too busy.



**Margo Spears in her Main Jail Booking Office**

At that time the police or courts could easily put a Hold on someone for Immigration for release only to the Feds or an inmate with mental problems so that he would have to be released only to nearby Agnew State Hospital. (Gov. Reagan did away with that,) Anyway, Rose always called that an ASH Hold, so I did too. That sounded much different from her mouth, and out of mine. After the male deputies doubled over with laughter, I discovered what it sounded like I was saying, so never again. At the beginning, drunks were often sentenced to \$15.00 or 3 days in jail. Public Defender Rose Bird felt that was the same as putting people in jail because they were too poor to pay, and that was illegal. Rose Bird was the first female to become a Public Defender in Santa Clara County (after getting her law degree from UC Berkeley and being the first female law clerk in the Supreme Court of Nevada). The drunk sentencing case went to the Supreme Court and Rose Bird won, so judges changed their sentence to just three days, no fine involved. I’d often talked with Rose Bird in the jail—a tallish woman very easy to spot for the mass of ringlets tied at the back of her head with a big bow. She always had an adversarial approach and was known for twisting officer’s words in strange ways. She

later was appointed by Governor Jerry Brown as Chief Justice of the California Supreme Court for ten years until she was voted out of office.

Not being of a very competitive nature, I was happy not to take any of the tests for advancement—except in 1968, I impulsively took a department wide test to see who was computer oriented. I surprisingly came in #1, followed by two male sergeants from the Detective Division. We three all went to San Francisco for a week's training, and then took classes in San Jose. I soon noticed that the two sergeants were getting a lot more training than I was, and when asking, found that I was too hard to replace whereas there were many detectives. I've always been sure it was because I was female but, OK.

The 1960s were a time of civil unrest and drug use. During the massive anti-war demonstrations we had to be prepared for mass bookings, and a few times I left my booking to do regular Deputy duty. One time when dozens of teenagers would not disperse and insisted on being taken into custody, I helped with the arrests, and then accompanied them in big busloads to Juvenile Hall. We worked very hard to contact the parents to come pick up their offspring. Some of those phone calls were frustrating—either from “Good for her—I'll be right there to get her” to “I told him not to do that—let him stay.” I learned there were a lot of dysfunctional families. I much preferred working with adults since I had my own teenager at home, and when working with juveniles I found it hard to keep up the shield I normally used to be impartial and objective.

In the late 1960's we also had bomb scares, along with the rest of the country. A warning phone call would come in to the front desk upstairs that a bomb had been placed in the jail or the courthouse. Of course, we could not evacuate the prisoners, but there was an immediate lockdown, and only selected people stayed. The court houses were a favorite target for these scares, and many an afternoon was spent with all the judges, attorney, defendants and jurors standing around outside while deputies searched—they never did find a bomb.

It was a little after this that my longtime DSM friend Pat Ruch, who then worked in the Detective Bureau, and several other DSMs decided that they were actually doing the same work as the men deputies and being paid much less. We all joined in a Class Action Suit for equal pay for equal work. It took several years but we won, and when we became regular Deputy Sheriffs I gladly turned in my DSM badge #410 to become Deputy Sheriff #536.

In late 1968 I was asked to go on a Jury Lunch for the first time. Usually done by the other DSMs, this time I was the only female deputy available so I grudgingly left my pile of urgent papers. During some felony deliberations, the jury was allowed to go home at night, but at lunchtime would be taken to a nice restaurant by the court bailiff, and a DSM. This procedure had been in effect several years when I was called on to have my first free lunch. What a revelation—there was daylight in the daytime—and people did fun things like have delightful conversations with complete strangers. Of course I was there to be sure no one mentioned the trial in any manner, and that was normally not a problem. On some high profile criminal cases, the jury would be sequestered and put up

overnight at a nearby hotel during all their time between deliberations. I later did some of those overnight duties with juries. One of the things we had to do first was check their suitcases. Many of them brought alcohol for relaxation, and they were not too happy when we deprived them—but they had been warned by the judge against any alcohol. Well, that first day at Jury Lunch made a big impression. I was assigned lunches more often, and found that the Booking Section would do OK without me if I planned ahead. The more lunches I went on, the more I realized my job was getting too big and I was under gigantic pressure—I'd even been getting an ulcer.

The jail population was growing and in late 1969 it was decided my section would be transferred to the first floor Records Section, out of the Main Jail. It was even suggested that my position would be changed to civilian supervisor. I would have clerks working for me and the new fangled computers might be used to do some of my work—the pressure would be much less.

I didn't like it. I really preferred being badge personnel. After that was proposed to me, I telephoned my husband who, after graduating from college had started work at Adult Probation across the street. We met for lunch. I'd felt for so many years that the courts were depending on me, and I didn't want to be a quitter. If I said "no" to the Civilian Supervisor position, I would continue to be a DSM, and would be transferred out to Milpitas to the Women's Detention Facility (WDF) to learn to run the jail and transport female inmates. My husband listened to my back and forth arguments with myself, and said he'd stand by my decision either way. Well, I knew in my heart I did not want to just do Records the rest of my life. I really desired to start seeing for myself the court proceedings I'd instigated all those years. I transferred within a month after training two people to "fill my shoes."



Margo Spears, bottom left, with Sheriff Prelisnik and six other deputies

## **My Sheriff's Office Years Training 1962-1980**

As I mentioned earlier, when I started at the Sheriffs Office (SO) in March 1962, I received NO training—just “thrown to the wolves.” Our training evolved over time as it became evident that women could do law enforcement work as well as men.

My good friend Pat Ruch had started at the SO when I did and was a born leader from the beginning. In 1964 we joined the Women Peace Officers Association of California (WPOA), where at a three day conference I received my first real training. I met the women who were the true pioneers—most of them the single token, but required, female of their departments. They were inspiring. I went to WPOA meetings all over the state for several years, always with excellent training courses, such as Criminal Investigations Techniques in Los Angeles; Public Relations, Evidence, Firearms, Juvenile Procedures, Arrest Techniques, and Assault Cases in Hayward; Explosives Training in San Francisco; and finally in 1970 again in Los Angeles, Celebration of the Growing Role of Women in Society, Organized Crime, Advanced Ethnic Relations, Police and Community Relations, etc. We felt we were finally getting accepted.

Pat ultimately became President of the WPOA for many years, and also worked her way up the ranks in our department to become the first female Captain. (The current Sheriff of Santa Clara County, Laurie Smith, was a female deputy I helped train many years ago.) My priority of family and my lack of competitiveness led me to take all the classes I could, but never to put in for advancement. Mainly, I was finally getting seniority and could usually get day shifts, with weekends off—so very important for me and my family.

In 1964 we received FBI training in Public Relations, Evidence, Firearms, Juvenile Procedures and Arrest Techniques.

1970 was the year our department started serious training for all the deputies. I especially remember our Chemical Agent Training where, in order to pass the course, we had to get sprayed with Mace. It was a terrible experience and my lungs were burning and I was gasping for breath. I swore I'd never use Mace carelessly, or unless absolutely necessary, which was the purpose of the training.

In 1971 the US Bureau of Narcotics took us through a 20 hour course in Dangerous Drugs and Narcotics. Then our department started the classes for male and female deputies to earn the Basic Peace Officers Standards and Training (POST) certificate. We were to become proficient in: Vice Investigation, Auto Theft, Death Causes, Criminal Law and Laws of Arrest, Physical Evidence, Crime Lab, Jail Conditions, Juvenile Laws and Procedures, Alcoholism, Firearms Indoctrination, Drug Abuse, Interrogation and Investigation, Ethics, Burglary, Robbery and Grand Theft, Narcotics Identification, and Jail Operations.

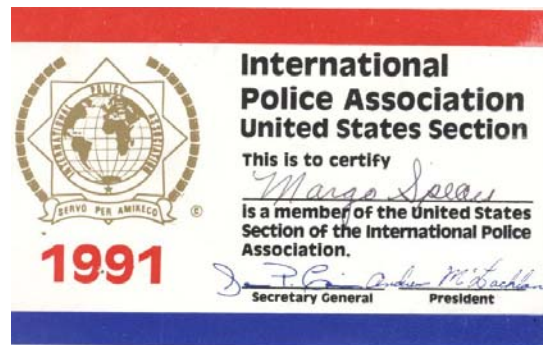
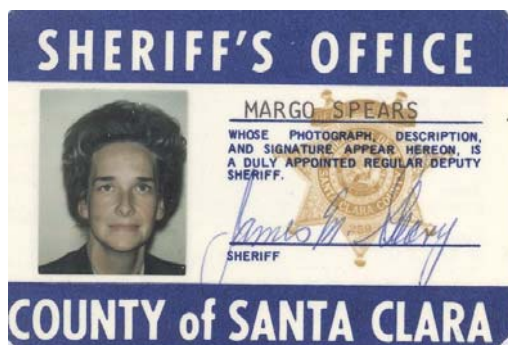
One of the training parts I had trouble with was the physical agility. I was in my 40's and not extremely athletic. We "old timers" were grandfathered in when the new female hires for Deputy were required to pass physical agility tests. Except, for some reason, they wanted us to be able to go over a six foot wooden fence! I tried by myself at the training ground and thought "no way." Then I heard that my friend Pat, at my age, had done it, so asked her the secret. "If you run at the fence sideways, and place your feet just so, on a slant, it can be done," she said. So, with a little practice, I actually did it! Hoorah!

Starting in 1970 we had to be certified by the Red Cross in First Aid and CPR every year. We were also required to qualify at the Firearms Range four times a year. I usually carried a 2 1/2" .357 Smith and Wesson revolver, but sometimes took my 4" .357 instead. I had to qualify with both of them, with the targets at 15', 25', and 50'. Speed was of the essence and we had to shoot six shots, reload with the speed loader and shoot another six within 30 seconds—time after time—and make a tight pattern on the target.

My husband (also a Peace Officer, in the Adult Probation Department and an excellent shot) and I went to the Peace Officers' Range weekend after weekend and practiced with wad cutters, which we bought by the thousand. At first I got blisters and a bloody right hand, but did improve and before I retired I had my Advanced Marksmanship pin. I also had to qualify with the shotgun and at Night Shoots.

By 1975 the thought was that female deputies would be better for the victims in rape cases so we had Rape Investigation Classes and could finally really investigate rapes. That specialty was a favorite of some of the female deputies, so I only did a few cases. It was a wrenching investigation, and trying to get the victim to go to the hospital for the required physical examination was often difficult.

All Peace Officers in California must work toward a Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) Basic Certificate and I received my Basic POST Certificate on June 9, 1972, and my Intermediate POST Certificate on June 26, 1974. Two years of college were required for the coveted (highest) Advanced Certificate, so in the early 1970s I started West Valley College in Administration of Justice in Los Gatos, taking until June 1977 to get my two years of credits. On August 3, 1977 I received my Advanced POST certificate—a very fulfilling accomplishment for me.



**My Sheriff's Office Years**  
**Part Two 1970-1980**  
**Learning to Run an Institution**

When I transferred to WDF in February 1970 I had only visited there once, and again had a huge amount to learn. My good friend Pat Ruch was now the Sergeant in charge of the facility and had encouraged me to make the transfer. We changed shifts every four months, and with my eight years seniority, I was still able to stay on Days with weekends off.

My first assignment was to the Processing Area. The first area an arrestee—we'll call her Janet for this explanation, would see upon entering the glass doors (no bars) was the caged-in Control Area, where the paperwork part of the booking took place with the arresting officer giving the necessary information. Since I had done that part for years, I was seldom assigned there. Janet was booked for being drunk, and a warrant for Failure to Pay a Fine for Drunk Driving was later found. Janet was required to remove all jewelry—wedding and engagement ring removal was, as usual, protested. The arresting officer signed that he had placed the itemized jewelry, money and other valuables with the Sheriff's Department, and then the officer left. I took her to Processing to be fingerprinted and have her picture taken. Fingerprinting was usually a traumatic thing for the scared new inmate and Janet had to be cajoled to "Relax and let me roll your fingers, one at a time"—three cards of prints (County, State and FBI). I had already taken the FBI course about fingerprinting, and knew that the FBI was very particular as to the quality of the prints—no smudges allowed. Janet was drunk, as well as scared. She was shaking and crying, and kept her fingers rigid—couldn't get a good print at all. Then I stood her against the wall for that well known series of mug shots—never complimentary, somehow.

At this time I offered her two phone calls, using our list of bail bondsmen from the telephone book and she called one. She declined the second call since she would be out soon so would not bother her family. Then I led her to the small padded Safety Cell which was named that since it was built for reasons of safety when an out-of-control inmate had to be isolated. It was an 8'x 8' square cell, well-padded on floor and walls, with a drain hole for easy cleanup, bright light in the ceiling, and a small window in the padded door for observation. Ninety-nine percent of the time it was used only to give privacy to the newcomers who were required to change from their own clothing to jail clothing—under the oversight of the deputy. This one thing was probably the most detested part by the arrestee, since very few were happy to be told they had to remove ALL their clothing, and hand them over to be inventoried, checked for drugs and bagged for return upon release. I stood just outside the safety cell and after Janet took off her clothing, I told her to raise her arms and turn slowly around. This was normally extremely embarrassing for the woman—I soon grew used to it, just as nurses become used to people's "skin" and no big deal. Then I handed Janet jail pajamas, and since she was drunk and unsteady on her feet, I led her to the nearby Drunk Tank, with the window wall for observation. The floor was padded, and she was supplied with a blanket. There

was also a wooden bench attached to the wall for sitting. There could be several drunks in the same “tank.” This sounds harsh, but it had been found that drunks often fell off a bed and hurt themselves, so this had become a preventative measure. The bondsman called to say he could not bail Janet because the Judge had specified “Cash Only” on her failure to pay fine warrant. I gave her the second phone call, to her sister who stated she could not get the money until late tomorrow.

Janet slept awhile and then was able to have decent fingerprints taken, and was required to take a shower and wash her hair—another point for arguing since she said she’d just been to the beauty parlor. It seemed every woman who came in had just been to the beauty parlor or had her hair put in braids or some reason not to wash her hair. Drugs had frequently been found during the body and hair searches, especially hidden in bouffant hair so all hairdos were suspect. Janet was then taken around the corner to the Misdemeanor (or Misd. as it was usually written) Section to await bail or court the next day.

Note: If Janet had been suicidal, I would have first called the nurse for evaluation if that had not been done upon booking, and then placed her in the Observation cell, next to the drunk tank, and also with window walls, around the one iron bed fastened to the wall, and a commode. A deputy was required to keep close watch and to note on a special form the condition of the person in Observation every 15 minutes. Since the room was beside the area the deputy always occupied, it was really seen continually.

The Processing Deputy position was also responsible for a small clothing closet, trying to keep good order of the underwear, dresses, jeans, blouses, sweaters and pajamas, sox and tennis shoes given out to the newcomers (as needed) and to the Felony Section inmates twice a week. (The main large clothing room was in the back of Dorm 1.) The Processing Deputy and the Felony Deputy worked closely together, being back up for each other. Knowing I always had a back up in case of emergency, and ready access to a Panic Button to call for even more help, was a very satisfying feeling. Working closely with deputies in those circumstances forged many lifelong friendships.

I preferred working as the Felony Deputy since I had more contact with the inmates. When I first arrived I believe there were just two small felony cellblocks with four cells holding two bunks in each around a small dayroom with table and metal attached chairs. The Felony Deputy took care of her group, getting them up, dressed, breakfast trays delivered and ready for court as necessary, settled any misunderstandings, and lunch trays delivered, and handled mail and phone calls, and dinner served. Food was always the most important part of the day and the one easiest to complain about. The inmates were required to do the mopping and cleaning also. I filled their Commissary lists—candy and cigarettes and writing paper and yarn—crocheting was a main creative and time consuming activity. There was only one TV for each small cellblock so there were many arguments. A few inmates spent many months in the Felony Section awaiting trial.

When working the Felony Section I really became well acquainted with the “bad girls” of the day. From murderesses and drug dealers, armed robbers to embezzlers—all had a

story to tell—and things to teach me. I well remember going in to the cell block and seeing Cynthia, in for Armed Robbery, on her top bunk on her hands and knees, doing leg kicking exercises. Asking how she was doing, she graphically explained Kegel exercises and how she had to maintain her muscles to keep her boyfriend accomplice happy when they got released.

My next rotation was to the Misdemeanor Section, where there were two dorms, each with 20 bunk beds (40 inmates), and each bed with a locker. There were bathrooms for each dorm, but no doors so little privacy. Of course from the Control Room and hallways it was necessary to be able to watch any problems through the window walls of the dorms.

There was also a large dayroom, where all could sit down to eat or play games. Next was the kitchen area. I supervised cooking breakfast some of the time but all the other meals were cooked at a kitchen at the Men's Facility and brought over in large metal carts on wheels for Felony and huge pots for Misdemeanor. The inmates lined up in the kitchen at the cafeteria-like counter, and were served by the inmate kitchen crew. Off the dayroom was the large outdoor exercise yard with cement walls but a mesh wire top—the ladies often spent their days working on suntans there with skirts pulled up and blouses pulled down as much as we'd allow. One day I heard inmates screaming in the kitchen and rushed in to see three of them jumping up and down climbing up on the counters. One of them had seen a mouse run behind the refrigerator and they all got hysterical. I grabbed a broom and it was like a Chinese fire drill—but no luck. Of course the Health Department (who inspected us regularly) would be upset too, so we called for help and men came over from the Men's side to move the refrigerator but that mouse was never found. Because there was a large farm all around the compound, mice were often found on the men's side without excitement.

I even substituted for a nurse at morning pill call for several months. I would arrive at 7:00 am when the Misd. pill call was scheduled but the one nurse for both facilities had to be on the men's side at that time. The nurse had put the pills in envelopes with the name on them, so when the inmates lined up outside the dispensary door, I'd call them in one at a time, put the pills in a tiny paper cup, check their wristband, then watch them swallow all the pills and show me their empty mouth. Some were very good at hiding pills to save in order to take several at a time to get a high. The nurse came over later to take care of the needed insulin and other shots, but I even gave out the methadone. I always felt it might have been illegal but the inmates needed their medication.

One of the upsetting things for the inmates that we had to do was the dorm searches—mainly for drugs, but looking for any contraband. Usually on a slow transportation day (so those deputies could help also), all the Misd. inmates would be taken without notice to the Day Room with one deputy to oversee them while the rest of us systematically “tore” the dorm apart. Each deputy would be assigned a certain group of bunks and lockers. The first thing to do was pull all the bedding off the bed, look underneath the mattress, and then especially undo the knots used to fit the sheets to the corners of the bed—the most usual place to find drugs hidden. If found, we'd take a picture and bag the



evidence so charges might be filed. Pills were sometimes saved from pill call but *verboten* in the dorms. We'd have to leaf through every book and magazine—and take away the excess ones. We checked in every conceivable place and we nearly always found contraband in the dorm—sometimes just food taken from the kitchen and not allowed in the dorm due to ants, which were a constant fight. The funniest thing I ever found was in the locker of a sweet Hispanic lady who never gave us one iota of trouble—except to gently say that there were not enough spices in the food for her. She had a large (12" high) brown grocery bag jammed full of extremely hot green peppers! We had no idea how she could have obtained them and I knew they made her happy but they still had to be confiscated and thrown away. She cried when she returned to find them gone.

Some deputies were very messy as they sorted through all those “private” belongings, poking into the skeins of yarn and opening all cosmetics as required. One of the Sergeants normally instructed us to leave the dorm as tidy as possible, while other times the whole place looked like a hurricane had hit which caused hard feelings between the inmates and the staff for days. Especially in Felony, it was almost a game for the inmates to see what they could hide from us, for of course we had to search there every once in a while also.

We all developed a real “sixth sense” for problems—a feeling in the air sometimes. I well remember one morning when as I stepped in the door for work, I was almost blasted with this “feeling.” I immediately noted that the dorms were in lock down and deputies were congregated in the central control room. It was a real emergency. One of the new deputies I'll call Bertha had been working the midnight Felony section. I'd not felt Bertha was suited to being a deputy because she became much too friendly with the inmates and felt that some of the rules we had were wrong. An hour or so before I arrived, Bertha had actually handed the jail keys to an inmate to unlock the Felony door. When the inmate refused to give the keys back, other inmates came rushing out to attack Bertha. The Processing Deputy pushed the Panic Button, which required immediate lock down of the rest of the facility and quick response by all other deputies. It was a brief free for all, and the ring of keys was rescued, although somehow lacking one key! The felony inmates were all locked in their cells and the Sergeant began an investigation. Bertha was not really injured, but left the facility never to return. There were some new felony charges for inmates, and a complete strip search of all inmates and cells involved. The key was never found and rumor had it that it had been flushed down the toilet to “get rid of the evidence.”

There was a continual need for extra alertness in October of 1970 when Angela Davis was booked in to Santa Clara County jail. She had worldwide notoriety as a Black Panther communist organizer and philosopher. The case started with the murder of Judge Haley during a court hearing in Marin County of three Black Panthers as they tried to escape. Besides the Judge, two of the inmates were killed and the district attorney and one juror were injured. The guns involved were traced back to Angela, and she went into hiding for 18 months and was placed on the FBI Most Wanted List. She was captured in New York City and returned to the west coast where the case was transferred to Santa Clara County to get a fair trial.

Because the case was so high profile, complete new rules were set up, the first being that no deputies with children were to be assigned to the case, so I was not considered. She was housed at the small holding jail in Palo Alto, remade to be more comfortable for her. Two of my good friends spent the next 17 months accompanying Angela as needed. All her requests went through a judge, and she was treated like a VIP. We at WDF were surprised to hear that she was taken to different parks in the area to get her exercise. She occasionally came down to WDF and met with the rest of the inmates in the exercise yard—most of them treated her like a real hero. In January 1971 she was brought down on her birthday. Our kitchen crew had made a big cake, while I was in charge of supervising the party. She was finally bailed out on \$102,000 bail five days before her trial started. The trial made news headlines and was one of the first cases where a psychiatrist helped screen the jurors for the defense. She was acquitted. She became a Professor at UC Berkeley, then UC Santa Cruz as Professor of History of Consciousness.

The only time I was part of a lawsuit occurred when Celeste sued Santa Clara County. The occasion in dispute was when a good looking, young blond, Celeste, was being booked on a small misdemeanor warrant. She objected strenuously to the strip search procedure requiring her to remove her clothing to be searched for drugs, etc. I was elsewhere in the facility when the Panic Button sounded. Of course I hurried to the Processing Area and saw three deputies already wrestling with Celeste. One of the deputies urgently called to me to remove Celeste's white ankle strap shoes since she was viciously kicking the deputies with the stiletto heels. I struggled with her left leg and finally was able to undo the buckle on the ankle strap and remove the shoe while someone else took off the other one. Celeste, without clothes, was locked in the Safety Cell to cool off. I went back to my duties and thought no more about it. Over a year later, I and all the other deputies who worked that shift were subpoenaed to give a deposition as to what had occurred. I went to her attorney's office and waited, and waited before finally being grilled for a fairly short time by three accusatory attorneys—all recorded of course. I knew no other details and was grudgingly sent on my way. Celeste had sued the County for a large amount of money saying she should not have been strip searched for a misdemeanor. For some reason, a few months later we were all required to give a second disposition. Subsequently I heard that Santa Clara County had settled the lawsuit for a few thousand dollars and the Sheriff's Department continued to strip search every arrested person.

I was pleased when after a year I was transferred to Transportation for a good part of the next seven years. However even after I transferred to Transportation I still worked Misd. and Felony periodically. Days on Misdemeanor were often filled with a strange assortment of characters. Delia was a large lady serving a short sentence who was a telephone addict. The two pay phones were in the corridor around the Control Room so the Control Room deputies could keep track of phone problems. Inmates were allowed a small number of dimes to make phone calls, after being able to sign up for two 15 minute time periods each day. Delia became a real problem when she tried to use a phone whenever it was free. She would lurk around the corridor surrounding the control room, just waiting for an inmate not to use her full 15 minutes or forget to use her time, and

Delia would be on that phone. It was never an emergency—she just had this compulsion and was a fanatic about talking to her children, neighbors, friends—anyone who would answer her collect phone calls since she ran out of dimes very quickly. We really had no proper place to lock her away from the phone, and no Good Time to take away since she was only in for ten days on a very minor charge. She really annoyed the other inmates. We were glad when her release date came.

Another strange lady was Miriam, who had been arrested with her husband for preaching on the streets, disturbing the peace. Once booked Miriam insisted on wearing a towel around her head at all times. She also was mostly silent, seldom speaking with the staff or other inmates. But the strangest thing was that she would never open a door! She would stand by the dayroom door, or the dorm door, and when someone else went in or out only then would she go through the door. We had the psychiatrist come try to figure her out, but she would not talk to him. The police department did not want to press charges and we soon transferred her to a mental health facility.

Another lady we had a problem with was an educated, well-to-do Iranian woman serving a short sentence for petty theft. Her sentencing report showed that she was a kleptomaniac, and repeatedly snatched items from stores—any item, any store. She had the money to buy whatever she wanted but the urge to steal was ingrained somehow. I gave her a bed in the front of the dorm so we could keep an eye on her, but she still managed to steal odds and ends from the other inmates. When that was discovered we had to place her alone back in the seldom used Civil Cells for her own safety. Civil inmates were required by law to be separated from criminal inmates. Her attorney was very upset and actually got the Judge to shorten her sentence to time served.

Our nurse worked part time with us and the rest of the time at the men's side. All the deputies were required to pass classes in First Aid and CPR each year. We occasionally had inmates come in with epilepsy. We were careful to make sure they took their meds on time. Usually any seizure was small. Zena, a known epileptic, was serving time for prostitution. She was a streetwise young black gal who was impulsive and cocky, but also good natured. Somehow Zena did not take her meds one morning and suddenly in the Day Room she fell to the floor in a grand mal seizure. We immediately cleared all the inmates and all furniture away, and with three deputies on the floor with Zena, she somehow moved us all at least thirty feet across the room before she started to groggily come around. We had been taught to not restrict the person in any way, just be sure there were no injuries. The nurse arrived in a hurry and Zena was assisted to the infirmary. We had been considering letting Zena go to a training facility on Work Furlough but decided that would be unwise.

Mealtimes were extremely important, and gripes were continuous. The spices, and peppers so many inmates were accustomed to, were not included in the menus. A sample menu, planned by a full time nutritionist for March 30, 1976 was:

| <u>Breakfast</u>   | <u>Lunch</u>        | <u>Dinner</u>         |
|--------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Bananas            | Chicken a la King   | Meat Loaf, Gravy      |
| Cold Cereal        | Rice                | Whipped Potatoes      |
| Hot Cakes          | Frozen carrot coins | Broccoli              |
| Whipped Oleo       | Chilled pear halves | Tossed salad          |
| Warm Syrup         | 2 Bread slices      | Coconut crème pudding |
| Bacon (2 strips)   | Punch               | 2 Bread slices        |
| Coffee Nonfat Milk |                     | Coffee Milk           |

Only once did we almost have a food riot. Lunches and dinners were always cooked on the Men's side and one lunch time, I don't remember what else was on the menu but cauliflower was the vegetable. Somehow the cooks must not have been paying attention for when lunch was served, a dozen different inmates, both in Felony and Misd. found many little dead bugs in the cauliflower. The other inmates then checked their trays, and most decided they could not eat any of the food. Some were screaming and one girl started throwing the cauliflower. I called for reinforcements, calmed the day room down and took back all the food refused. A few hungry people just pushed the cauliflower aside and kept eating—bless their hearts—that helped calm things down too. In Felony all refused the food and our inmate cooks got busy making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches while I called the cooks on the Men's side. The cooks laughed and said it was no big deal, came over and picked up the cauliflower, which was really full of the little critters, and brought over extra fruit and cookies. I thought that was the end of it but one of the inmates called the newspaper and gave them the story. Soon a photographer was out talking to the Lieutenant about the terrible meals we were serving, and of course that made the newspaper. Next the Health Department came out (as they did on a regular basis—we'd always been given an excellent rating) and after checking every little crevice, again cleared us. Actually, inmates who had been in other jails throughout the state all said the food at WDF was the best in the state jail system.

Over the years probably the inmates' favorite activity had been an inmate-instigated one--crocheting! Literally hundreds of women learned from each other and made colorful blankets, exquisite baby clothes and elegant sweaters for their family and friends. It was especially important for them to be able to contribute to their families. There were 35 colors of yarn in our commissary and it was vital for us to keep the yarn inventory up to date. Each inmate's Commissary Account could have up to \$15.00 per week, taken either from the money they had been booked with or money sent by their families.

One job that was not high on my list was the Commissary inventory once a month. The Commissary area was in a small 5'x5' closet with a Dutch door so the top half could be opened while I or the other deputies sat and filled the inmates written lists for them as they stood in the long Commissary line, hoping their color of yarn was available. With the door closed, inventory was claustrophobic while counting how many Marlboros, Snickers, yarns etc. Shelves on three walls contained five kinds of cigarettes, ten kinds of candy and lifesavers, peanuts, cookies, crackers, beef sticks, hot chocolate packs, writing supplies, art supplies, 35 colors of yarn, crochet hooks, knitting needles, playing cards, and many kinds of cosmetics. Money is necessary in jail. People without money were

supplied combs, toothbrushes, TOP (for roll-your-own cigarettes) and limited writing supplies. Commissary sales twice a week took a few hours, and the inventory took a full day. For restocking we made a huge order form each week that the men's side filled, but often not completely. We later hired a clerk to handle commissary and inventories which was much more sensible.

One other chore that I didn't care for even though I only had to do it a couple times was the monthly clothing inventory. The large room in the back of the dorms held most of the extensive clothing needed for the 100+ inmates. No personal clothing was allowed, except sentenced women could have brand new panties brought in. Inventory day meant spending hours alone in the dreary gray clothing room, counting "6 bras size 32 A" graduating up to "10 bras size 44D," etc. Included were all sizes of skirts, jeans, flowered and plain muumuu style dresses, white blouses, striped tank tops, sweatshirts, blue wraparound skirts, pajamas, white sox, blue tennis shoes, and dark blue sweaters. Although the inmates had to turn in their dirty clothes twice a week to get clean ones, it was amazing how many items were "lost" from the inventory, and needed to be reordered. Speaking of the laundry, luckily all our midnight shift had to do was get the laundry together and send it to the men's side Elmwood laundry, then put it away when it was returned all clean and folded.

By the mid 1970s, after a large construction project enlarged the women's jail, there was an abundance of possibilities for recreation or enrichment. Besides the two chaplains, legal aid workers, attorneys, Probation and Parole Officers, etc., the weekly schedule included a GED teacher; volunteers teaching sewing shortcuts; recycling; bibliotherapy: relating reading to life experiences; crafts classes for painting, pottery and collage; sewing classes to make clothes, dolls and pictures; manicurists; creative expression classes; movement and voice expression classes; exercise classes; paths to personal development classes; and guitar classes. There was an ever-changing large library at the facility and librarians would bring nearly any book requested. Despite these possibilities, there was a vast lack of motivation. Each of the fine volunteers and counselors worked hard to motivate the various inmates. Occasionally they succeeded. Many quit out of frustration.

Many sentenced inmates realized they would be in jail for a fairly short time (average five months, maximum county jail sentence was one year) and many used the time to rest and relax, away from the turbulent life they normally led.

Sometime in 1973, when I was doing my turn on the Misdemeanor Section, I heard a buzz about lack of Work Furlough (WF) opportunities for sentenced female inmates, which was true. We really did not have a good setup to allow an inmate to leave and return to WDF. I mulled it over, came up with some possibilities and wrote a memo to the administration with a possible way we could handle a few work furlough people. I was fairly detailed and to my surprise I soon learned the brass took me seriously and put me in charge of setting up Work Furlough on a temporary basis, while they advertised for a Civilian Work Furlough Supervisor. By that time there were two deputies working Misd. and I could take a little time to try to implement my ideas, following the guidelines

already set up by the Men's Work Furlough unit, which had been operating for years. My friend Gloria had started at the Sheriff's Department as a deputy but had transferred to a civilian Rehabilitation position at Elmwood Men's Work Furlough. She really helped me to learn what type of prisoner was appropriate, what jobs or schools were appropriate and some of the pitfalls to look for. I was soon receiving the Adult Probation Reports used by the Judges to guide their sentencing and the rap sheets (list of all arrests and dispositions) for those serving time to use as the basis of a decision. I wrote memos on everything I did and worked with Lt. Stroud. (Since the jail enlargement, we had a Lieutenant in charge and a Sergeant on each shift—our personnel was growing.)

Clara was serving four months for embezzlement and was required to pay many thousands of dollars as restitution. As a first timer she was eligible for Work Furlough in most ways but the only skill she thought she had was as a bookkeeper, which of course we could not approve. Her attorney found her a clerical position in an office that did not handle any money. I changed from my uniform to civies and felt a little strange on my first investigative trip. Clara's new office knew I was coming and the whole interview went well, including the paperwork Clara had already signed that turned all her wages over to the Work Furlough Administrator. A special fund was set up for all WF money and the Sheriff's Office took a small daily fee for administrative purposes. The rest was divided up with a portion going to restitution, some could be distributed to the family, some was used for daily expenses such as gasoline or bus fare, and the rest saved for the inmate's release. We had no separate housing available so I placed her bed in the front of the dorm and had her keep her work clothes in the Processing Area closet. Luckily she was an ideal inmate and everything worked well. The deputies working Processing had to do a search each day when she returned and was signed in.

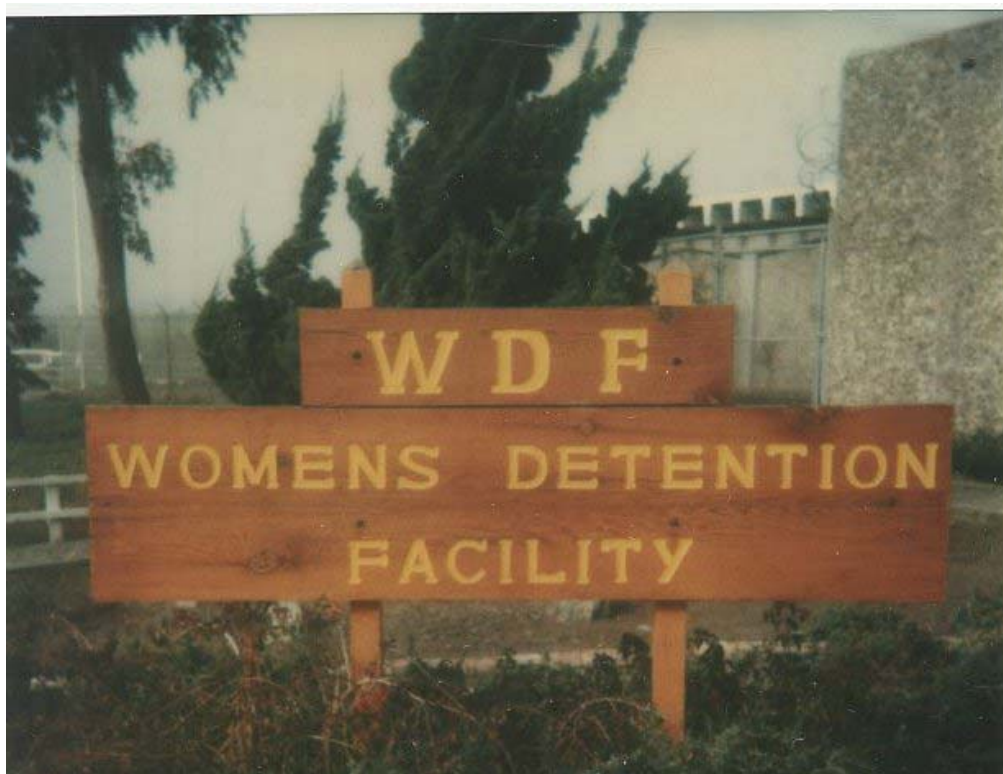
Nearly all the sentenced inmates then started clamoring to go on Work Furlough also. We finally had eight inmates going out to work and job training. Frances came into jail to serve a four month sentence for drunk driving, and the Judge recommended Work Furlough, with the stipulation that she take antabuse each work day. Antabuse makes a person violently ill if the person drinks alcohol. She had several drunk convictions but was an educated woman who already had a good sales job. I had real reservations with her record but we followed the Judge's recommendation. For awhile Frances did well. I was supposed to make surprise visits to each job, and when I did, found that Frances was not there. Although her boss knew and had signed a copy of the rules that Frances was not to go anywhere except work and WDF, I found that Frances had been going home every day and was not really working full-time either. The boss felt sorry for her. I went to her home, picked her up and we went back to WDF with her weeping in the back seat. Frances felt the whole thing was my fault because I required her to take the antabuse pills every day and they gave her a headache so she had to go home. My first failure but not the last.

One girl came back from Work Furlough to WDF high on drugs. Busted. Another tried to smuggle some marijuana into the jail in her clothing, thinking she would not be searched. Busted. One chance we took was with Barbara. She had been a drug addict but had been clean for a couple years. She was sentenced for "high class" prostitution and was

intelligent, friendly and good looking and seemed to sincerely want a change in her life. I had known, and liked her during her several prior arrests, and we felt she had potential. We got her into a training program and she did extremely well, going to a good job when released. A year later I was dismayed to see Barbara being booked in, obviously wasted from drugs. She saw me and called out to me “I really want to go on Work Furlough Mrs. Spears.” I was busy and only waved at her. About an hour later the panic button sounded, and soon I saw the paramedics arrive, then take Barbara out on a gurney. She had hanged herself with a sheet and died soon after. I often wondered if I’d responded and gone to talk with her if I could have recognized her extreme state of mind.

I handled Work Furlough for several months but was relieved when a full-time Work Furlough Supervisor was hired. Soon a small apartment complex was rented and the Women’s Work Furlough was moved there. The supervisor was very rehab-minded and lenient—would not have been possible in a jail setting, but worked with many of our inmates.

We all at WDF felt rewarded when learning of an inmate finally on the road to a better life, whether through Work Furlough or any of the numerous positive avenues available. Recidivism often occurred, but we had many successes.



**My Sheriff's Office Years**  
**Part Two 1971-1977**  
**Transportation—Courts and Trials**

The blue transportation sedans were equipped with nearly all the gadgets of a patrol car and on my first day on Transportation, I accidentally hit the siren button, and did not know how to stop it! Luckily my expert deputy/trainer friend Colleen took me to a large parking area on the property and put me through my paces. It took me awhile to use the radio to talk to Dispatch while driving at the same time. I'd been practicing all my "10" codes—the codes were the reason I liked my 410 badge number—it tickled me to hear Dispatch answer me with "10-4 410". 10-4 meant OK or Message Received, 10-6 was Busy, Stand By, 10-9 was Repeat Message. Luckily I already knew all the 10 codes for crimes, from my days in Booking: 10-187 was Murder, 10-647f was Drunk in Public etc.

Most of our transportation was to court at San Jose Municipal Court, five miles away. One deputy could take up to three inmates shackled together—as long as they were not considered dangerous or escape risks, two if problem inmates. For more than three we took two cars until we finally obtained a small bus to hold 12 people. To drive the bus we had to obtain a bus driver's license. I'd only driven cars with automatic shift, and it took a lot of practicing to learn to double-clutch the big yellow school bus we had to drive well in order to pass the driving test. When looking in the rear view mirror that bus felt a mile long but after awhile it almost became fun. After actually passing the test, I never had to drive a big bus again, thank goodness.

The transportation vehicles were parked directly across from the front door of the facility—maybe 100 feet away. WDF was fairly close to the front entrance to the whole Elmwood Facility. One morning my friend Deputy Laura took a robbery inmate to Superior Court—one of the first to leave that morning. About ten minutes later another deputy on her way to court came running back in shouting that Laura was locked in a car! The Sergeant grabbed the spare keys and raced out to find Laura on her back in the back seat trying to kick out the rear window. Laura when rescued was nearly hysterical, and hurting from twisting her back. Of course the female inmate was gone. It seems that two black men ambushed Laura as she was unlocking the car door, and pushed her in the back seat, locking her in, then ran off to a waiting car escaping with the female inmate. An immediate man hunt was initiated by Dispatch but the three had vanished never to be captured. (Laura went out on disability retirement a few years later due to the continuing back problems she suffered at that time.)

We normally went to San Jose Muni twice a day, and Palo Alto, Gilroy, Morgan Hill, Los Gatos, and Santa Clara Municipal Courts as needed, usually at least twice a week. Another frequent trip was to Superior Court next door to the Main Sheriff's Office/Men's Jail. Besides regular court dates, we also drove to other counties to pick up inmates who were being held with outstanding warrants for Santa Clara County. For Southern California, for awhile, we were part of several counties who chartered a plane that traveled the state transporting prisoners. Once a male deputy and I flew down on the charter to pick up a female and several males from the Los Angeles County Jails. Sybil



Brand Jail for Women in Los Angeles seemed huge and impersonal and I was so glad I did not work there. Just a few months later the plane crashed near Santa Barbara with all aboard killed. After that, long distance pick ups were done by a big bus going all around the state, and I understand it was not a pleasant trip.

I worked transportation for a good part of the next seven years, and really enjoyed the times going to the surrounding counties: San Mateo, Alameda, San Francisco, Monterey, Contra Costa and Santa Cruz for prisoner pick up. I sometimes told myself “I can’t believe I’m really getting paid to drive all over Northern California.” A small part of the enjoyment was that for one half of the trip, with no prisoner, I could actually relax. All of us working with prisoners always, 100% of the time, knew we must be alert—always with our antennas out, listening, feeling for any trouble. This intense need for alertness proved to be the most draining part of the job. I really liked the always changing panorama provided in law enforcement—never a dull day (almost), but never a chance to enjoy the sunshine without a feeling of responsibility. (Thank goodness for my wonderful home life.)

I was always fascinated by the actual court experience. When going to West Valley College I wrote some essays about courts and the following explains the little details involved with a simple Municipal Court hearing:

### **Cause or Effect?**

I used my key to unlock the back entrance of the courthouse. Cindy seemed to shrink even more and stepped closer to me. We hurried up the two flights of gray concrete stairs, through a private corridor, past the hushed Judges’ chambers, into the crowded public hallways near the elevator, and stopped in front of the swinging double doors to San Jose Municipal Courtroom No. 2. A quick look through the small square window of the door showed that we were on time; the Judge was not seated yet.

I grabbed the tiny handcuff key from my Sam Browne belt and quickly unlocked her handcuffs—a turn to the right, then a turn to the left—and slipped them off her wrists. “Turn around,” I said, and unfastened the buckle of the heavy leather belt that had secured the handcuffs. “Do you think the Judge will release me without bail?” she asked hopefully. With the belt coiled around my hand, I gave her an encouraging smile, “I certainly hope so. Many first time offenders do get released on O.R.” She looked so young, and I fleetingly thought of my own teenage daughters at home. I guided Cindy into the courtroom commotion, past the many milling attorneys, to sit all alone, the two of us, in the twelve-seat jury box.

The utilitarian courtroom buzzed with worried undercurrents. All the gray molded chairs in the audience section were filled. Cindy searched the sea of faces, smiled suddenly and gave a discreet wave. “That’s my sister,” she leaned over and whispered. I started to turn when the click of the Judge’s private door opening triggered all the court regulars to stand immediately, like Pavlov’s well trained dogs. As the Judge entered, the bailiff-

deputy lightly banged his gavel, “All rise—be seated please. This court is again in session.”

The balding, thin-faced, black-robed Judge glanced at his seemingly disorganized courtroom, then announced, “No. 1 on the calendar, Cindy N\_\_\_\_\_.”

Beside me Cindy hesitantly stood up. Her curly mouse-brown hair was windblown. Her wire-rimmed glasses slid down on her upturned nose. The blue flowered jail dress and slightly tattered blue sweater hung on her undernourished frame. Out of the crowd of nearly identical, young, eager attorneys in court attire of suit and tie emerged a mustached man in a blue-checked suit. He looked quizzical, then picked up a manila folder from the stack on the counsel table and hurried over to stand in front of us. I was certain he had never seen Cindy before but he quickly scanned the file and smoothly petitioned, “Your Honor, my client would like to be released on her Own Recognizance. She has been in custody now for four days and has no previous arrest record. Her sister is in court today and informs me that Cindy could live at the home of the sister’s boyfriend. The sister is sure Cindy would make all her court appearances and would not be a danger to society.”

The Judge perused his file. “This complaint alleges three felonies, each punishable in State Prison for from one to fourteen years.” He leafed through the pages of the complaint slowly. “Count One states she committed Grand Theft, by stealing her mother’s purse; Count Two charges Forgery, by forging her mother’s name on the stolen checks; and Count Three charges Credit Card Forgery, by unauthorized use of her mother’s stolen credit cards. This is the time set for the motion for release without bail on her promise to appear. Is there an O.R. report?”

The court’s O.R. (Own Recognizance) Officer, a chubby lady in gaudy hostess pajamas and outsize glasses covering half her pudgy face, hoisted herself upright. “Your Honor, my office contacted Cindy’s father who stated he didn’t know where she has been living recently or where she will live. He further stated he did not feel she is reliable. They, the parents, will not allow her to live with them. Based on this report, we cannot recommend her release.”

I felt Cindy quivering beside me, utter despair on her peaked face. The Judge looked objectively at Cindy for several seconds, then glanced down absently noting the piles upon piles of folders for individual cases yet to be heard that day. The Judge seemed to deliberate, then state, “I feel we need more information. This O.R. motion is continued until tomorrow on this calendar at 1:30 for further evaluation of possible living situations for this defendant.” The flowery, fat, O.R. lady answered, “Yes, Your Honor,” and made quick notes in her folder.

Cindy gasped, struggling to control herself. I rushed her from the courtroom. “They’ve always hated me,” she shouted as I hurried her into the ladies’ restroom around the corner. Two women drying their hands glanced at my green deputy’s uniform and quickly left. Cindy leaned against me, shaking with sobs. Unknowingly she hit me, feebly

beating my shoulders, my chest. She sobbed irrationally, “They don’t want me. They’ve never loved me. My sister was the only one they wanted. They hate me. They even gave me to Aunt Mildred to raise for years. They—“ An old woman started to enter, saw us and turned around abruptly. Through the closing door I saw a male deputy watching, concerned, and signaled that we were all right.

Cindy was hitting more slowly now. She struck the seven-pointed star on my jacket, looked startled and suddenly realized what she was doing. She smiled wanly at me. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to do that. You’re so nice to help me.” Feeling terribly inadequate, I could only pat her shoulder.

I fastened the heavy leather belt around her waist, and the handcuffs around her slender wrists, an always required precaution. We started toward the back stairs and my patrol car to begin our long five-mile journey back to jail.

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Inmate population and needs at WDF had been growing and in the early 1970s a big construction project more than doubled the facility. The construction was done with all the jail work trying to continue in spite of the dust, noise and confusion of walls being taken out and workmen everywhere. I was glad I was out transporting at that time but really give credit to the excellent deputies who kept WDF running under really difficult circumstances. When finished the space contained a really needed new Felony wing, which had a large dayroom surrounded by about 20 double cells and a big exercise yard off the dayroom. The lack of exercise yard was one reason the whole construction idea was started since a lawsuit was threatened because the felony females were not able to get the state required exercise time. The extensive project also included a large meeting room, small counseling rooms, new medical section, new visiting room (talking on phone on either side of glass wall), and an outdoor area for contact visiting, as well as a new wing with offices for Administration, at the end of which was a two cell area for Civil Prisoners who, by law, were not supposed to be housed with the regular criminal inmates. We deputies finally got a room of our own with lockers and tables where we could eat and try to relax. The original jail had been lacking in such niceties.

One of my more interesting Transportation days was when I was asked one morning to fly on a commercial airline to Phoenix to pick up Shara, an escapee whose Black Panther husband had been killed in a shoot out with sheriff’s deputies, during her escape. I was given the proper papers, changed to civilian clothes (always kept in my locker) drove myself to the airport and parked in a special parking area. This was my only out of state extradition and I was a little nervous when, at the airport, I had to show my extradition papers to the pilot of the plane, and get his permission to carry my gun on board. It was a pleasant flight to Phoenix and I was impressed with the lovely jagged mountains surrounding the Phoenix area. I was met at the airport by a Maricopa County Sheriff’s deputy and taken to the jail where I had lunch with the officers while Shara was getting ready for release. I was told Shara had been a model prisoner since her arrest there. I had not met her before signing all the papers giving her into my custody. She had just a small

bag of personal effects which she carried after I put the leather belt around her waist and handcuffed her. Her wrists were tiny (I'm sure she slipped out of her handcuffs previously when she escaped) so I really tightened the cuffs. She complained of course. The deputy took us back to the airport and after showing my paperwork we were allowed to board the plane first and went to the back of the plane where no one would hopefully notice us. She was very quiet and the two hour ride was actually very uneventful. Naturally we were the last to leave the plane, and waiting at the gate were two upset male deputies! It seemed that a mistake had been made by someone to send me down to Phoenix by myself, when it should have been two deputies. The transportation section had been in a tizzy ever since I left, but not knowing of the problem, I just had a fine time. A male deputy belatedly went with me back to WDF for my protection! As I was walking out of the airport I even saw my husband waiting there anxiously—he had learned of the unexpected trip and was worried. Shara eventually pleaded guilty and was sent to prison.

One of the least interesting transportation duties was taking inmates to Valley Medical Center (VMC) for medical appointments. We usually ended up sitting in hallways while waiting for the doctors--sometimes for hours. I heard dozens of life stories by these inmates. These were mostly sentenced inmates who were in custody for long periods and little escape risks although we even took murder suspects when necessary. We also went to dentists and other medical places when ordered by the court.

I occasionally went with the Psych Unit to pick up females who needed to be taken out to Agnew State Hospital for psychiatric evaluation. One sad case I remember was of a mentally retarded teenager who was living in the dilapidated house, sleeping in the corner of a room on a reeking mat. She seemed to have been sexually abused by every male around, in return for food and a "place to live." She really did not understand her situation and wasn't sure if she should go with us. Sgt. Arnerich had been head of the Psych unit for years, had a most soothing, encouraging manner and persuaded her to go with us. I rode in back with her and almost gagged since her smell was so foul. People like her often slip through the cracks of society and it is heartbreaking to see. I don't know what happened to her, as was the case with so many whose path touched mine.

One of the first inmates I took to Superior Court was Betty Lansdowne, who in 1969, with her second husband had abandoned her four year old daughter Jody by a chain link fence beside busy Highway 99 near Bakersfield. The child had been taught to say she was Jody Smith. Jody was rescued and Betty and her husband were found a couple months later along with two of Betty's other children. Betty and her husband were taken to Los Angeles and questions arose as to where Jody's older brother Jeffery was. Investigation uncovered the fact that in 1966 Betty's husband had repeatedly jumped on Jeffery's stomach for 30 seconds, then sat down with a beer to watch him die. Betty watched this, and then helped dispose of Jeffery's body, putting him in a suitcase and helping to throw him over a cliff. Betty testified at her husband's trial and he was convicted of murder and child abandonment.

Then with a change of venue required, Betty was sent to Santa Clara County for her own murder trial. I was working Felony when she first came in and I found it hard to have my usual “shield” with her. She was a slender person, and extremely flexible— her tiny wrist made putting handcuffs on her difficult because she could slip out of everything we tried. Finally we resorted to plastic ties and cut them off each time. She was no problem, and seemed to immediately “get religion” as many do while in jail. I felt she was using her “born again” persona to manipulate people, and to some degree it worked for the many church people who visited her. I was doing transportation when her murder trial started and often took her to court. She claimed to be an abused wife whose husband was insanely jealous, taping the phone so she could not call out when he had gone to work. She stated that she had agreed to leave Jody on the freeway because she felt her husband was going to kill Jody the way he did Jeffery. She was convicted of child abandonment and of her part in disposal of Jeffery, but her supposed regret and religion allowed her to be given the minimum prison sentence. My thoughts were that she fooled a lot of people with her pretend innocence, which she put on like a glove when needed. I saw her many times without the “glove” and felt she had a cruel unsavory side to her.

Betty was one of the many examples I observed where a woman was given a much lighter sentence than a man would be in the same circumstances. Supposedly the law treats everyone equally but many judges seem to dislike sending women to prison, whereas their male accomplice, even when much less involved, would certainly go to prison. In some ways this made our Women’s Detention Facility a more dangerous place since we had sentenced women who sometimes really belonged in a higher security.

The following is an elaboration of a college essay, plus a partial addition of my many notes, about a long murder trial.

### **Murder-For-Hire**

One of my most convoluted and interesting court experiences started when I was happily assigned to a “Murder-for Hire” trial. Muriel had been arrested in June 1974 for the August 1973 stabbing murder, by conspiracy, of her estranged husband Dan. Held in custody in lieu of \$250,000 bail for many months, Muriel interested me. She was a little older, heavier, taller and blonder than I. A native of Santa Clara Valley, she was proud of her heritage, from cutting apricots as a child at the huge family orchard to her present prestigious position as President of a Santa Clara Valley Women’s Club. She definitely was not the usual recidivist inmate.

As a Deputy Sheriff, I had occasionally supervised Muriel’s activities in the Felony Section of the Women’s Detention Facility. Then in February of 1975, I was given the choice assignment of transporting/guarding Muriel for the duration of her trial, which turned out to be the longest criminal trial in Santa Clara County history. For those five months, I walked the fine line between always being a professional, in complete charge of an alleged murderess, and an interested human being.

The trial was extremely complicated because Muriel had four co-defendants: her lazy, boasting 20-year-old son Johnny, her calculating entrepreneur lover, Simon, and the two “hit men,” one, a small, swaggering Nuestra Familia gang member, Pinto and the other a poor, frightened black man, Rikki. Also, each of the male defendants had his own attorney, while Muriel had two, her private attorney and high-powered well-known Angelo Pestarino.

The jury room in Superior #3 became our home away from home for those five months, daily between 9:00 am and 5:00 pm we spent more time there than in the courtroom. The windowless walls were pale yellow and the floor was a cheap white tile. I kept a coffeepot perking in the coat closet, along with other goodies. There was a huge, old, scarred oak table, surrounded by the usual twelve wooden juror’s chairs. The only spark of civilization was the decrepit three legged chocolate brown sofa in the corner, where Muriel usually sat.

We spent hundreds of hours in that jury room together. She would write letters, and read while I struggled with my Spanish lessons. Rikki and Pinto were in holding cells nearby. At lunchtime some of the male deputies assigned to the case would join us, and play cards together and discuss other criminal cases. They talked about the man who had killed his wife and two children, about the woman just arrested for trying to poison her husband with arsenic, about the latest jail escape attempt—each day had a new and violent anecdote. When they were not present, Muriel would tell me of her childhood, first marriage, two children and remarriage. She was cautious to never mention anything closely connected with the trial; we were both keenly aware that I was an officer of the court. She seemed especially satisfied that even after she had lost her love for Dan, she had stayed with him for two years to nurse him through a long, undiagnosed illness. She had cooked special foods, and driven him to different doctors, since Dan had no faith in regular medical doctors. Then she had fallen in love, and left Dan, who was stabbed to death six months later, at the front door of their apartment when he answered a ring of the doorbell, leaving her \$200,000 in insurance.

Jury selection began February 17, 1975 and lasted six weeks! I surreptitiously took voluminous notes on green 3x5 cards. At the beginning, each prospective juror was interrogated for two or three hours, if not dismissed quickly. One prospective juror was a SJSU professor who stated: “Courts are inefficient. It involves destiny of people’s lives.” “I am not their peer!” “If they are looking at me as their peer, no, I would not want myself.” He was dismissed.

Another prospective juror was a homemaker, nice smiling black lady who didn’t understand the questions—finally said “I’m really not that smart.” She too was dismissed. The dismissals kept coming. The interrogation by each of the five acting attorneys (only one of Muriel’s two attorneys could participate in questioning) got shorter as the weeks passed. Finally the first 12 juror were selected, but then five more still had to be selected as alternates. By the end of the six weeks, an attorney would ask very few questions, the rest of the attorneys would just agree. Quite a process!! The very last juror accepted only

answered one question, seemed OK and with sheer exhaustion, the jurors were impaneled.

The final jurors were seated on April 8, 1975, with five housewives, two from the medical field, a chemist, a welder, two from the telephone company and one from Hewlett Packard. There were five alternates.

On April 8, 1975 Ivan, the court clerk started reading the indictment, with several discussions at the bench. Finally at 10:25 am District Attorney Davies started his opening arguments which continued (with time outs for recesses and lunch) until 3:30 pm. At 4:30 pm court was over. For some reason, Pinto was really swaggering. Rikki was scared to death—had been in the hospital over the weekend, passing blood. His attorney had telephoned him last week to have him tell his wife in Los Angeles to “get lost” because Pinto had a contract out on her and the baby. Rikki was in bad shape at noon, and by 4:45 pm I wondered if he could finish the trial. Muriel was always very controlled, almost haughty.

April 11 The real trial started with six witnesses, first being the apartment manager where the murder took place. The prosecution presented 82 witnesses and over 200 pieces of evidence in seven weeks. Witness #21 was a young man who testified about the two men who asked him directions to Apt. 75. Muriel’s Attorney tried to get on the record that it was stupid for two men going to murder someone to ask directions—DA objected—Judge sustained.

April 18 From my notes: “No jury. Rikki had refused to get dressed, then to go into the court room. His attorney S. talked him into it. The court deputies say he is normally a softie but when he gets mad he really gets violent. He sat in court, quietly crying, looking at the floor scared. Rikki came apart at lunch, ripped off his coat and shirt and sobbed loudly. He wants to fire his attorney S. because he has consistently wanted a black attorney—thinks everyone is after him because he is black. Attorney S. is actually doing a great job.”

After explaining the problem to the Judge, the deputy finally persuaded Rikki to go into the courtroom and we started again. Muriel and I, and her two attorneys sat on one side of the judge’s bench and witness box, while the male defendants and their attorneys sat on the other, which, with the court clerk, bailiff and court reporter filled up most of the space outside the jury box, and spectator area.

It was not a straight case of murder-for-hire since there was a tangle of a few arsons thrown in, some drugs, different real estate deals, strange bank accounts, hair samples and fingernail dirt sent to crime labs, toxicology and blood alcohol samples and insurance fraud. There were many days the jury was not needed at all and other days when they were kept waiting for just a little evidence. It took days for the attorneys, defendants and court personnel to sit and listen to many of the 116 audio tapes the investigators had amassed. On these all day sessions I would squirm and then try to keep alert as I kept writing in my notes “I’m so sleepy.” One “entertainment” was to watch Pinto, who kept

combing his hair with a small blue plastic brush and comb. It seemed as if he would comb it 30 minutes of each hour.

Often the tapes' quality was terrible, sometimes with a loud background hum, and I doubted if the jury would be able to understand or give much credence to them. Transcripts of the tapes were to be handed to the jurors to help also. Without the jury present the attorneys argued over every bit of evidence, and what would impeach a witness, and which attorney was "baiting" a witness, etc. In the courtroom each attorney did more maneuvering to try to get from a witness something beneficial to his client, or by the DA for the People. It was fascinating to watch, but also confusing. It was really an intense procedure.

Watching the drama of the courtroom it often seemed to me that the attorneys were really gladiators, in a Roman arena, with the Jury as the Roman spectators to declare the winners. Other times it seemed as if the attorneys were jumping up and down in a rather stylized dance. Definitely different art forms. The judge gave all the procedures, leading of course to attorney objections, finally all agreed to the rules. It's quite an adversary "game"—but, oh so serious.

My notes: "On May 30, 1975 the prosecution finished. Pestarino asked for acquittal for Muriel. The D.A. admitted the evidence against Muriel was circumstantial. The Judge debated, saying he thought her problem, from the evidence was more of association. He put on his glasses and read some papers. He then dismissed Count 9, and said the rest is up to the jury to make the decision. More arguments. The Judge said that in totality, she could be involved."

Defense by all the five attorneys and all their posturing only took three weeks. On June 4 Pinto's attorney called a psychologist from Stanford. My note: "He had lovely, heavy eye makeup. He'd worked at Yale, Harvard and Stanford in Child Psych. He gave a long and boring monologue on impairment by alcohol from .02 up, and various mental functions. He had only listened to Pinto's tape and never even met him! Finally it was over at 5:10 pm. Worst witness we had. Court Reporter said it was terribly hard to take down since he never finished any thought—terribly disjointed."

June 5 More notes: "In the afternoon session Pinto was wearing the tee shirt he had on the night of the murder. Pinto wanted to talk to Judge—his attorney had hard time shushing him. He sat down grudgingly. On stand Sgt. Vasquez testified what a "snitch jacket" is: that physical harm could come in the jail. Pinto shouted "These people had nothing to do with it. I was drunk and don't remember." The DA wanted him removed from the court. Jury was admonished not to pay attention. Pinto wanted to go back to the "Joint" (prison) as a "big man" who didn't squeal—he'd be at the top of Nuestra Familia then with his murder conviction."

Later my notes fume: "What a mixed up case—way too much thrown in—distracts from the murder case. Now they are talking about theft of sheep and insurance policies!" and



“I’m just writing to stay awake. Should have had some coffee at lunch. I look at the Judge and he has his hand on his head, writing and appears to be having trouble staying awake also—courtroom must be too warm.”

June 11 9:30 am More Notes: “We start on time—no jury. Attorneys arguing testimony again—they’ve said the same words, phrases, objections time after time. One attorney almost sounds like a record—round and round—and Pinto keeps combing his hair.”

On June 13 Muriel took the witness stand, but only for about five minutes, telling about her Hawaiian trip with Simon. There was no cross examination.

June 16 Note: “Pinto changed his hair style about a week ago—started combing it down over his forehead in kind of bangs to hide a scar. This morning he called me over to see if I’d noticed—glad I had. He wanted to know which way I liked it—I said this “bang” way and he agreed—said the guys at the jail wouldn’t tell him.”

June 17 “No jury. Now arguing about rebuttals. Arguing can be both fascinating and dull all at the same time.”

June 18 11:05 am “We heard more tapes without jury and now we’re to hear the tapes with the jury. During the recess when I gave Rikki coffee he asked me to tell Mrs. Jones that he did not kill her husband—that all he did was give Pinto a ride. I told him I believed him—it really doesn’t sound like he was present when Pinto actually did it since one witness saw Rikki leave five minutes before the fight noise.”

2:00 pm District Attorney Davies rested his case.

3:05 pm “All six attorneys say no rebuttal. Jury sent home until Tuesday. Attorneys will spend next two days getting instructions and verdict in right order. Muriel and I have been sniffing for two days—smells like something musty she says. I just figured out we’re downwind of Rikki—they only get two showers a week and I think he’s wearing a musty coat.”

June 24 9:30 am “Started promptly and DA Davies immediately began his Summation. 10:15 am Davies finally gets around to the murder and Pinto—I think Davies is going to mention each witness. After short recess, we’re back to really hearing DA mention each of the 82 witnesses. I’m so sleepy—we’ll be here for years at this rate.”

June 30 After much attorney-Judge discussion on the proper items to give the jury, the complicated case was handed to the jury. As usual, I drove Muriel on a different route going the five miles back to the jail. Back in February when assigned the trial, there seemed a possibility of Black Panther or Nuestra Familia interference, so I was instructed to drive different routes each time.

Nine days later, on July 11, 1975, I found the reading of the verdicts, as usual, one of life’s most impressive moments. Every courtroom has drama, and the moment when a Jury files back into a courtroom and hands the Judge their verdict, or according to the courtroom, reads the verdict to the Judge—that is a moment of high suspense and thrill.

I've always tried to guess from the expression on the Jurors' faces what the verdict is but many try to be poker faced. Watching their eyes is sometimes telltale. It had been most interesting to watch these Jurors all during the trial. Without ever speaking to them, I felt as if I knew them after spending five months of our lives together.

Muriel and I made the front page of the San Jose Mercury-News when she cried on my shoulder after the jury found her "Not Guilty." The other four were found guilty of first degree murder and various conspiracies. Three weeks later the four men were sentenced to life in prison. I returned Muriel to the jail, driving straight there this time, and upon her release, shook her hand and wished her well as she walked out to freedom.

About a year later I met Attorney Pestarino at a function, and he wanted me to know that Muriel still had not paid him for his hard work in getting her acquittal!



## **My Sheriff's Office Years**

### **Part Two 1978-1980**

#### **Classification**

My last three years with the Sheriff's Office were spent as WDF's Classification Officer. A new section called Classification had been ordered by the State to help regulate and separate the burgeoning gang problems, especially in the Men's Prisons. The four major gangs were the Nuestra Familia, Mexican Mafia, Aryan Brotherhood and Black Guerilla Family.

Our Classification Unit consisted of a Sergeant and Deputy on the Men's side and I was to handle all the women. We began with no set of rules, so decided to visit the State and Federal prisons nearby since they had been classifying inmates for several years. We first drove about 65 miles south to Soledad State Prison in Salinas Valley. The Classification Officer was new but showed us through the entire facility, and described how they did their segregation—the gang issue was a major determinate. Armed guards were in watch towers around the facility and the atmosphere was much different than in our jail system. These were Medium Security men who might not get out for many, many years, and most were hard core. There was not a feeling of “hope” there.

A few days later we went to an old prison that made a much deeper impression on me: famous San Quentin, 55 miles north in Marin County. The cement walls felt formidable as we walked in the gate. The Classification Officer who gave us the tour really knew his job—he was the one who supplied us with a copy of the Nuestra Familia Constitution. We went through every floor and wing of the facility. I admit I was uncomfortable being the only female walking those corridors and hearing crude remarks addressed to me. We even went into the pale greenish execution chamber and learned all the details involved there. The sight of that chair with the straps hanging down is embedded in my memory. Our last stop was in the office where the officer showed us all the homemade weapons found recently during searches of San Quentin cells—a long table of sharp metal or plastic or wire weapons. Considering the really tight security, it was amazing how the inmates had been able to create that arsenal. I knew I would never want to work in any capacity in any prison setting. And personally I did not, and still do not, really approve of the fact that female guards have begun working in the male prisons—the testosterone is heavy in the air, really making females the “weakest link” in security.

Our last visit was to the Federal Prison for both men and women at Pleasanton, in Alameda County about 40 miles north of Milpitas. I had been there before and had thought if ever I had to be in prison that was the place to be. It has been compared to a college campus with nice dorm buildings, no fences, and spacious green lawns. It works somewhat on the honor system. While we were there a young woman inmate I'd seen before at the Redwood City Jail came up and for a moment spoke quietly to the Classification Officer we were with—it was Federal inmate Patty Hearst. It was a pleasant place to visit but had little relevance to how we classified our county inmates.

Some background information about gangs would be helpful. In 1968 at San Quentin, two Santa Clara Valley Mexican inmates, Arnulfo Pena and Philip Neri, were seriously assaulted by the Mexican Mafia (mostly inmates from the Los Angeles area) because they had been involved in prison drug traffic. The Nuestra Familia (NF) was formed after those assaults for “self-protection.” The war between the two gangs started in earnest late in 1968 when, returning from prison movies in Soledad Prison, a fight ensued during which 17 men were stabbed and one died. As of March 1978, there were 192 murders attributed to the Nuestra Familia, with over half those murders being outside the prison system—30 deaths in 1977/1978 alone.

Nuestra Familia had a lengthy, very detailed Constitution and here are brief excerpts exactly as written:

“Article I. The Nuestro General is the supreme power...his power shall have no limits.

Article II. The primary purpose of this organization will be for the betterment of its members and building up of the organization on the outside. All members will make solely for that objective and will put all personal goals and feelings aside until said fulfillment is accomplished.... A Familiano will remain a Familia member until death...He will put the interest of the organization first and always above everything else in prison or out.... An automatic death sentence will be put on a Familiano that turns Traitor, Coward, or Deserter...to spill the blood of a fellow brother Familiano will be considered an act of treason.

Article III. The ten capitans next in line of authority: No familiano soldado shall question the orders set forth by the capitan...to question is a treasonal act.

Article IV. A Lieutenant is third in the power ladder...He should be responsible for the building of the Familia arsenal, and shall have “no” less that two (2) weapons per soldado in the regiment. It shall be the duty of the Lieutenant to keep a record of all known names and numbers of the enemies.

Article V. The Familiano Soldado...membership of this organization shall be restricted only to those of “Latin Extraction.” A soldado rises in rank by acquiring efficient battle stars. A “hit” (assault on an enemy) but not necessarily a kill, he will gain the title of warrior. It takes three stars (killings) to become a Lieutenant. Five stars (killings) are required to be a Capitan provided there is an opening in the ten...If a Soldado kills one of the Familia’s top ten enemies, he can gain three stars and automatically become a Lieutenant.

Article VI. No member of this said organization, shall put material things, “whether it is drugs, money, women” before the best interest of La Nuestra Familia or a Brother Familiano.”

Back in Elmwood we designed the forms to keep complete information on each inmate, and the requirements for our decision making. We were hooked up by computer with the new Criminal Justice Information Center (CJIC) system, so I was able to get Rap Sheets and history in my office which was in the new wing next door to the Lieutenant. One thing about my new position that was very strange for me—for nearly the first time in 17 years I was out of uniform. I’d grown to enjoy knowing exactly what to wear each day with no hassle. But it had been decided we would be more effective in interviewing each new inmate in civilian clothes so shopping I went. I still wore my badge and always

introduced myself right away as a Deputy Sheriff, but I do think my collection of information was helped by my wearing civilian clothing.

First thing each morning I'd check in the Control Room for the paperwork on all inmates who'd come in overnight (or over the weekend) and then run my CJIC check. Next I'd interview each inmate, trying to find any problems that might make them a danger, either to themselves or others while in our custody.



**Margo Spears in her office patio with Classification Sergeant**

While gangs were the main interest for the men, I had the latitude to also try to solve other problems. For instance, Ann was brought from court to serve ten days—she'd expected to only have to pay a fine and was frantic about her four cats left in her apartment. She lived alone and had no one to call. Well, I had someone to call. For years, one of the finest help the inmates and WDF had was from Friends Outside, a wonderful volunteer organization that existed to make life easier for inmates. A volunteer came to WDF, Ann signed a release for her keys, and an authorization for her landlady to allow our Friends Outside person to go daily and feed the cats. Friends Outside maintained a "Clothes Closet" where inmates going on Work Furlough could get suitable clothing to allow them to get or keep a job. The Clothes Closet often was used to outfit some of the derelict and homeless people we'd release. Friends Outside was authorized to buy (and were paid from the inmate's jail money account) underwear and leotards for the sentenced inmates to have their private underwear. Those were the only personal clothing allowed but it made a huge difference to the dignity of the inmate. Friends Outside helped in innumerable ways to ease the worries of the inmates and I felt very fortunate to have them in Santa Clara County.

Protective housing was a most important part of my new job in Classification. Nellie was arrested for child abuse, almost the only charge for which I automatically required protective custody housing. Nellie was a housewife, never in trouble before, with a husband and 14-month old son. She explained to me that she was very tired one evening, the baby had a cold, and her husband had stopped for a couple drinks on his way home. While waiting for him, her anger grew as she felt trapped at home. When her husband finally arrived, she threw a kettle of boiling water at him, almost missing him but directly hitting her son whom she had not even noticed wandering behind her husband. The boy was taken to Stanford Hospital with second degree burns over 95% of his body, but doctors said he would recover. Nellie told me she cannot understand her actions for she truly loved her husband. Later the husband scraped together the money for her bail and seemed protective and loving as they walked away from the jail.

One day while in my office I got a strange call from a Control Room deputy who was just finishing booking someone on an outstanding warrant. The arrestee seemed very nervous and had whispered to them that she needed to talk to someone right now. Well that's what I did, so I took her in to the Observation Cell to talk privately. Willa was flustered and finally admitted that she was a man, and had been undergoing treatment for the past two years and was just about ready for her sex change operation. I'd never had that problem before but had learned about transgender inmates other places. Willa offered to prove to me that what she told me was true, but I took her word for it—who would make that up? I called my Classification Sergeant at Men's and after discussion, it was decided that we'd have to follow the few other cases we'd heard of. Willa definitely did not want to go to the men's jail, fearing rightly for her/his safety. The other cases stated that if the male genitalia were intact, that person would be booked as a male, but if the operation had been completed, the person would be booked as a female. We called male deputies who transported Willa downtown for booking. I found out later that Willa had been able to make bail and had not gone into the general population at the Main Jail.

One day I was sitting in the infirmary interviewing Louise, one of our familiar drunks. She was recovering from DT's but really disliked being alone in the sickbay. She was begging to go to the dorms when I said that the nurse had to make that decision. She glared at me and stated: "Mrs. Spears, you have a seven-pointed star for a heart!" I broke out laughing—first time I'd been accused of that.

One of the housing problems I was supposed to solve was where to put our lesbians. Of course that had always been taken into consideration before Classification ever arrived. While I had been on the Transportation Unit, I had met Sandy, a very tall, masculine looking inmate, short black hair, deep voice who when booked always wore men's black pants and vest, and a man's white shirt. She was a heroin addict who had been in jail before, but I was able to really get to know her on trips to the doctor at VMC and to courts when she went to trial in San Jose Muni Court. With her low voice she could easily pass as a man. She was also pleasant, intelligent and talkative, at least to me. She was in a monogamous long-term relationship with Meg, also an addict who had not been in jail. It was good that we no longer required all female inmates to wear dresses to court since Sandy was much more comfortable in our blue jeans. We had many hours

together doing the necessary waiting, waiting, waiting in hallways and back court rooms. She really described the whole drug scene to me, vividly—quite an education. I never knew for sure if sometimes she was exaggerating, but she did tell me exactly how to heat urine to gather the last bits of heroin to reuse when really desperate.

The day came while Sandy was serving a year's sentence that Meg also came in to jail for a three month sentence. I'd heard so much about Meg from Sandy I was surprised to find her such a quiet, passive, plain, pudgy lady. I seldom got a lively spark from her, not even when I explained why I would be putting her in a separate dorm from Sandy. The jail had strict homosexual behavior rules and I insured that Meg and Sandy understood.

All went well until Skip was booked on Sale of Heroin. When I interviewed Skip, I first thought she looked like a young Sandy--tall and masculine and butch. Well, Skip let me know she had planned this arrest just so she could be with Meg! I was surprised and wondered if Sandy had heard she had a rival. Skip seemed to be really hostile to Sandy and the threesome shaped up to be a real problem. Since Skip was housed in Felony, I recommended that she not ever be allowed in any other section. Meg had been on the kitchen crew that would bring the food cart to Felony, so I moved Meg's job assignment and wrote an Alert memo to staff that neither Sandy or Meg was to be anywhere near Felony or transported with Skip. Sandy had been deeply hurt and Meg seemed to be playing them against each other. One day when Skip was in Processing waiting to go to court, Sandy managed to get over there. They had a vicious fight which of course caused a deputy to push the Panic Button, and the whole place got locked down. Probably Skip was the winner being younger and stronger, but they both looked battered. Luckily the judge allowed Skip (a first timer) to be released on bail—and Sandy lost 20 days of Good Time, meaning her release date actually was changed to almost the day Meg was released. Skip skipped bail and I never saw them again—I often wondered what happened in their lives.

One of the questions I always asked when interviewing a new inmate was: “Are you a member of a gang or do you have any enemies that would concern you here?” It turned out that some of the Latino women coming in were indirectly afraid of some gang affiliation and were grateful to talk to me about that since it had been the scariest part of their coming to jail! The following is one section of an essay I wrote in 1978. I know it is very confusing but it will explain how the Nuestra Familia affected many lives.

### **Tangled Maze of Terror**

When a Nuestra Familia (NF) was released from prison, most strived toward honor within the organization; however some turn “traitor” by trying to get out of its web. Those were called “hermit,” and in the case of George Tenorio, called “dead”—executed on January 3, 1976. Daniel Ramos and Jose Cobos were arrested for Tenorio's murder and at their Preliminary hearing a 25-year old Capitan and a Lieutenant turned state's evidence and testified under immunity about receiving orders from the NF General, Robert “Babo” Sosa, imprisoned in Soledad. The Capitan, under oath, told about the

murder and also described in detail the NF execution orders, code of conduct and organizational rankings.

Immediately after the Capitan's testimony, the houses of both his mother and his sister were firebombed, virtually destroying everything the families owned. Next, the Capitan's nephew was ambushed and shot several times, subsequently dying a slow death. Then the Capitan's niece was forced to plead guilty to sale of heroin, a charge on which she had previously adamantly declared her innocence (I placed her in Protective Custody at WDF). The jail grapevine had let her know that if she did not take the "rap" for her Nuestra Familia co-defendant, she would be killed within the next few weeks. After her brother's horrible death, she had no reason to doubt the claim. She was sentenced to Frontera Women's Prison.

Daniel Contreras was arrested in the fire bombings. Then Contreras decided to quit the NF. On April 15, 1976 at 4:30 pm, while taking a shower in the Santa Clara County Jail Maximum Security Section, he was savagely assaulted. He was uncooperative with the authorities and would not identify his attackers. However, Flavio Garza, in custody for murder and a known member of Nuestra Familia, was tentatively identified by the first Deputy Sheriff on the scene as possibly striking Contreras on the head. Garza was freed on his murder charge because other witnesses refused to testify.

Many witnesses refused to testify against NF members. In Salinas, Gloria Rocha Rice was stabbed to death with 105 knife wounds after she had been a key witness at the trial of the NF murderer of her husband, a narcotics dealer. The Monterey County D.A., in an understatement said, "We have trouble with witnesses, people are afraid to talk to cops."

When Flavio Garza (the fellow who was freed on the jail murder) was released from jail he moved to Gilroy. Then he refused to obey an NF order and became another hermit, hiding from his former friends. He was executed gangland style by blasts from a shotgun in 1977. At the time of his murder, his wife Juanita Garza and her friend Rosie were both serving one year at WDF for Sale of Heroin. Rosie happened to be the niece of another NF Capitan. They served their time and I was especially on guard the whole time they were in our custody. I did not have any trouble with them but I really scrutinized every Latina lady who came in—sorry to do racial profiling, but it was necessary. Two months later Rosie was rearrested for another narcotics charge. A month after Rosie's arrest, Juanita purposely provoked the police by breaking windows until they arrested her. Juanita had heard that Rosie wanted to turn "snitch" and planned to warn her what a dangerous thing that was to do.

Juanita was too late. On April 13, 1978, I interviewed Rosie when she came in and she begged me for help. I contacted Dave Byers of the San Jose Organized Crime Unit. He and Les Boese of the District Attorney's Office came out to see her and she co-operated. She was truly terrified. She had told me of her Capitan uncle's plans to have her killed because, just before her arrest, while at her mother's home, she saw a murder. She accidentally walked into a bedroom where her uncle and several other familianos were kicking a man in the head. Rosie could not see his face since it was covered with a



bloody burlap sack. Then, just to be sure, she saw her uncle inject the man with an overdose of heroin. She backed out of the room but was threatened with death if she said one word. She became near the top of the NF hit list when the NF grapevine heard she had squealed. In exchange for her testimony on the witness stand, she was promised that her present charges would be dropped. Then under the “Secret Witness” program, she was given a complete new identity, moved to a different state with a small amount of money, and helped with a job. I had explained to her how this had been done previously for secret witnesses (including the NF Capitan who testified in the George Tenorio murder trial). Rosie’s mother’s house was torched just after Rosie testified.

The Nuestra Familia and other prison gangs have continued growing, making California prisons extremely dangerous places for inmates and staff. The NF Pinto who was convicted of first degree murder in the long trial I attended with Muriel (Murder-for-Hire), has been enjoying his time at Soledad, I have been told, since that murder made him a Lieutenant.

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I first met Lila when I was working Felony several years prior to my Classification assignment. She had been booked in for Arson and Murder. Lila was in her late 30’s, about five feet tall, squat, with lovely long black hair. She had the IQ of about a 7-year-old, and could be charming or wheedling, or fly off the handle in an instant. I learned the whole story when I was transferred to Transportation and spent some of my time taking Lila to court. Her trial told the story: Lila had become furious with her sister who would not let her go to a movie, and in a snit, set her sister’s house on fire. Her sister’s four year old daughter, Lila’s niece, died in the fire. Lila would be part of my duties off and on until I retired. The Superior court found her guilty, and considering her mental capacity felt she could not handle prison, so gave her lifetime probation and two years in County Jail, one for the murder and one for the arson, consecutive.

She did all right when transferred over to Misd. while I spent my next four month shift trying to smooth the way for her by treating her like a 7-year-old and explaining and cajoling sometimes. She actually was a willing worker when she wanted to be. Some of the deputies found her difficult. She did start fights and yelled and pouted, but we learned to make allowances and surprisingly the other inmates gave her a lot of slack too.

When Lila served her sentence in about 18 months, she went to a half way house, under the supervision of a Probation Officer—who happened to be my husband. My husband was a very compassionate, gentle person, an excellent listener who was well liked by nearly every one of his probationers. Lila lived on the Eastside, just a few blocks away from the Eastside Probation Office. She walked to her weekly appointment with my husband, always stopping in someone’s yard, breaking off a flower, often a rose, and taking it to him.

One evening at home my husband got an urgent phone call that Lila had lost her temper and had a fight with another of the half way house clients. We jumped in our car, an old

Mercedes, and went across town and picked up Lila who by then had calmed down. I went along because male Probation Officers were not allowed to transport a female by themselves. He had no alternative but to take her to jail while figuring out what to do with her next. When I got to work in the morning I found that Lila had been proudly telling everyone how “Mr. and Mrs. Spears brought me to jail in their Rolls Royce!”

That incident was a violation of probation, and Lila was given another six months in jail. My husband found that she was very difficult to place with her record and temper. One other problem with her and her family was that her brothers were in the Nuestra Familia, a prison gang that exerted rules on the members’ family also. One of Lila’s brothers was killed in a shoot out between two rival gangs and Sheriff’s Deputies. It was unknown at that time who had actually killed him. It was a ticklish proposition when the Superior Court Judge ordered that Lila be allowed to go to her brother’s funeral. I was assigned and told to wear my uniform. Another brother who was in custody was also allowed to attend. There must have been at least eight male deputies stationed all around the Catholic Church, not knowing if the rival gang would show up or if Lila’s family would hold the Sheriff’s deputies responsible for the death. I just sat quietly with Lila, feeling as if I stuck out like a sore thumb in my Sheriff’s uniform. But no problems. I couldn’t allow Lila to visit with her family, but that also turned out to be no problem.

After Lila served her time, my husband found a very good care home for her where she stayed until we retired. Then my husband’s caseload was transferred to an excellent female Probation Officer, who did not handle Lila in the same way. On Lila’s next explosion, she was sent to State Prison.

My last three years went quickly, with always a story unfolding before my eyes, and sometimes with my intervention. I certainly was a small player on a stage I could never have even imagined if I had taken that Bank of America job I’d been offered. Instead I daringly answered the newspaper ad for the Sheriff’s Department 19 years before. I was fortunate enough to find variety, excitement, pathos and optimism in all my many assignments with seldom a dull day, thus giving me something to write about when that socializing question “What did you do before you retired?” was asked. I can now reply: “I had a front row seat observing two decades of high drama and heart tugging theater and occasionally I had a small part in the play. I was extremely fortunate.”



**Margo and Joseph Spears with Rod Diridon, Chairman of the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors, each receiving a Retirement Commendation and Appreciation, 1980.**



**Figure 1 Margo Spears with Sheriff Winters at her retirement party**

## Epilogue

The Santa Clara County Jails were placed under a separate Department of Corrections, taken away from the Sheriff's Department in 1987, due to a continuing conflict between the Board of Supervisors and the Sheriff. Most of my friends opted to stay with the Sheriff. A new two story addition was built for WDF in the 1990s. On my first shift in 1962, there were only 26 female inmates in custody. In March 1976 there were 108 women at WDF. According to the 2003 Santa Clara County Grand Jury figures, the 2002 average daily in custody female inmate count was 459! The figures for the Men's Jail increases were amazing also. In the 1960s I know we finally reached 1000 men in custody. In the 2002 Santa Clara County Grand Jury report there were 3809 men in custody, and annual bookings of 65,000 with a total of 5,300,000 meals served! Santa Clara County Jail System is now the 5<sup>th</sup> largest in California and the 14<sup>th</sup> largest in the United States. Today, February 21, 2007, I have just read that the governor lamented that the 33 prisons in California were built to hold 100,000 prisoners, but now are jammed with 170,000 inmates! A truly dangerous situation.

I feel I was so lucky to be in law enforcement when the numbers were small and one officer could make a difference. I tried to be compassionate and ease women through one of the difficult times in their lives. I thoroughly enjoyed the close camaraderie with the other deputies and officers on whom I depended so fully.

As we had planned for months, I took an early retirement at age 50 so that my husband and I could retire the same day, December 30, 1980. Besides each having big retirement parties, we were invited to the Board of Supervisors where the Chairman gave us each a special Certificate of Appreciation. We felt we had done our respective jobs as well as possible, and now, with our daughters through college, it was time to see the world—and we did!