

POLICEWOMAN PAT HAYS, 74.

Pat Hays: When I was a kid, I was very, very shy. My dad used to come home drunk and just hit me. So I taught myself to read when I was four, because I was the quietest when I was reading and less likely to get hit that way. And so I read *a lot*—my whole life was the books that I read.

I left home at seventeen, and I married my high school sweetheart—well, my *sort-of* sweetheart. My mother loved him. Every time I wanted to break up with him and date other guys just to see if there were any interesting ones out there, my mother would lay on this guilt-trip: “Oh, he loves you so much.” I went, “Oh, all right, Mom.” I dropped out of high school to marry him, and I got pregnant within the month. So I went from my father’s home to my husband’s home, and I had my daughter ten months later.

My husband wasn’t working, so I went out and got a job working the switchboard at a hospital. And when I brought home my check, he was like, “Give me the money!” I was like,

"It's my money; I earned it!" Unfortunately, he felt that it was OK for him to conclude arguments by hitting me, so, of course, he did. But I was not going to repeat my mother's life, and told him, "I'm not going to take this." I called the police, and that was it.

I worked the switchboard for a few more years. Then one day, when I was about twenty-four, my friend told me she was going to take the Chicago policewoman's exam. They were revamping the department, and as a consequence of that, they had formed a new unit for policewomen. And so I said, "Well, I'll go with you and take it, too."

Over a thousand women took that test, and from that, 219 names were posted—and we got the call to show up.

I just barely passed the physical requirements of height and weight. You had to be five foot three, and you had to be over 110 pounds. But I was only about five foot one; I had a crick in my neck the whole day from looking up to make conversation with people. I mean, these women were *huge*! But the guy who was measuring us just told me, "Stand on your toes." And he passed me. I had no experience whatsoever, and I never really wanted to be a policewoman, but I guess I'm stubborn. I was just like, "I'm going to finish this academy if it kills me!"

I was in the class of thirty-five women who came on the job in 1966. Our uniform was a navy skirt with a little box jacket and this ridiculous hat that was shaped like a sugar scoop. It didn't matter how many bobby pins you used; the

damn hat would lift up in the wind and go trailing down the street. So you get a choice of losing your prisoner or losing your hat. Well, the hats were a one-of-a-kind deal—you couldn't find one to replace the hat that belonged to you. So of course we held on to the hat. We could always get the prisoner later. *[Laughs.]*

As policewomen, our duties were mostly in youth division: family investigations of abuse or neglect. Or, with a woman victim or offender, homicides and sex crimes. We would do on-the-street arrests of truants and school absentees and curfew violators. If they found a lost child, then they would call the women in, because the men really didn't want to deal with the children anyway.

I was assigned to what was believed to be the worst area, which was Maxwell Street. We would get runaways every day with allegations of neglect or abuse. And of course, when we found them, we would have to do a certain amount of counseling. That was an interest of mine, especially coming from a dysfunctional family. I wanted to be somebody who was warm and who you could sit and feel comfortable talking to.

You know, I was dressed for the role as an authority figure: you're wearing the uniform, you've got that big star on your chest, and you've got the gun on. And there's a certain power that comes along with that costume. But I also had to find a way to get past the star and the uniform and all of that, to communicate, "What can we do here?"

And so my background came in really handy, because I could say, “You know, I didn’t just read this in a textbook. I lived it. I had a father like yours. So right now is the time when you should be saving your birthday money and your babysitting money, so that you’ll be able to get out on your own.” If I could do it, they could do it.

But there were a lot of situations where you don’t know what to say. I had a rape victim once, and she really did not want to talk to anybody. But they knew I was good at talking to victims, so they called me. It was tough going. I felt so bad for her, and I wished there was something I could do.

And then I went to run my fingers through my hair, and as I did it, the shirt of my uniform ripped and my whole elbow popped out. And we just both started laughing. Then that turned into tears. And I just held her, and she cried, and she cried, and she cried.

A little bit of care and concern—that’s about all you had to offer. Whatever they were confronting, the fact that you were willing to listen and try to offer them some comfort—even if it’s saying, “I really admire the strength of character you need to be able to deal with this situation”—they felt better.

I bounced around to different assignments, and I was a detective twice—first in vice, then in the rape unit. And there was always this implicit, “You must be screwing *somebody* to get a good job like this.” But that wasn’t true. It never was true.

I didn’t want my daughters to join the force, because I didn’t want them to have to put up with the things that I did or see the things that I saw. And I *really* didn’t want them to see the world from that point of view. You know, this job has got a really high divorce rate. By the time the thirty-five of us policewomen were on the job ten years, I would say that probably every single one of us had divorced. It’s very hard on marriages, because saying “I’m going to put you in prison for ten years for rape,” then going home and telling my husband “What would you like for dinner, dear?”—it just doesn’t go well.

I retired in 2001, but in the thirty-four years I was on the force, it wasn’t all adversity or I would have been really stupid to have kept that job. It’s kind of a calling. I *really* enjoyed helping people. I would have done it forever.

I used to always work New Year’s Eve, because I don’t like New Year’s Eve. My birthday’s on January 2, so I get a year older and I lose a year all at the same time. Well, I was working it one year and I got a call, and this woman’s voice said, “Miss Hays, you probably don’t remember me, but you talked to me years ago, and I just wanted you to know that I straightened my life out. And I now have a two-year-old daughter, and I’m so glad that I talked to you.” And I thought, *Boy, that’s really God’s blessing*. Because most cops are cops forever and nobody ever tells them things like that.

The police department is not big on telling you that you

CALLINGS

did a job well. Your sergeants are not going to tell you how great you are—it's just not the nature of the job. So you have to be able to go home knowing you helped somebody along



the way, even if sometimes you can't change the outcome. It may not have been all that I would like for it to be, but I think I did some good.

RECORDED IN CHICAGO, ILLINOIS,
ON FEBRUARY 4, 2015.