

Suzanne



When I started in law enforcement, the idea of a female wearing a gun and being out on the street was unknown. People are afraid of the unknown. That's what makes people angry and reactionary – they're afraid.

I'm a licensed private investigator. I've been with the state of California since 1992. The focus of my business is indigent criminal defense. Prior to that, a thousand years ago back in the 70s and early 80s, I was in municipal law enforcement. So, I've always been in careers that are labeled as male. And that's been an interesting journey.

I was brought up in the fifties and the sixties in a very traditional middle-class White family. Your options were, "Well honey, did you want to major in home economics, do you want to go to nursing school, or did you want to be a teacher?" That was just the reality back then.

Through a series of accidents, I wound up becoming a dispatcher for a police department. The dispatchers were all women, because dispatching was a woman's job. There were also women who were sworn officers, but they were all "matrons" who dealt only with female bookings and babysitting any children taken out of a home. Women were not allowed on patrol, and they were never given

the title "detective." If you weren't White Anglo-Saxon Protestant male, you couldn't put on a uniform, period.

Then Affirmative Action came about, and if your city or county was made up of so many women, so many people of color, your public safety officers had to match that. If it didn't, you lost your matching federal funds. So there was a huge push to get all the departments up to that level, and I was asked to go to the Academy.

I went to the Academy, and I did become an officer. But, breaking into the all White boys' club there was still a lot of judgment within the organizations. And what I didn't understand at first was that, with Affirmative Action, if they found a "legitimate" reason to get rid of you they could fire you and then put in anyone. So there were some individuals who were out to get rid of the minority officers with any excuse.

I worked for one agency that actually wrote me up for not complying with their uniform rules. My violations were



"I'm still the black sheep of the family and I've always kind of been kept at arms-distance. 'Well, that's just Suzanne.' You know? ... There's a new generation coming up now, and I'm like their heroine. I'm so thrilled."

Suzanne's "power pig" is meant to "help us to break through fear, to take on things we never would believe possible, and to make them come true."

that I wasn't wearing a cup, and that my hair didn't meet the standards because it was too long. Those standards were, of course, written for men. My first badge actually said "police man" rather than "police officer," if you can believe it.

The city of Beaumont was the most blatant about trying to get us fired – me and the other minority officers. When any of us called for backup, officers wouldn't be dispatched. It was actually a sergeant in Banning who would send backup because he was sympathetic to our demonized group. We ended up doing an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission – EEOC – complaint, and we won.

I got out of law enforcement, and a friend suggested that I start doing investigations. One thing led to another, and I've kept with it ever since. Working as a Private Investigator – or PI – I've noticed that clients expect me to look like Magnum, or Iron Sides. They don't expect a fat, White woman.

Now that I am older, it has been interesting to be described not as "your investigator," but "that older woman over there." I think at this point in my life I actually find

more judgment because of my age than anything else. But gender still plays a role. If you put a sixty-something-year-old male up against me in a courtroom, he's automatically going to be considered as having wisdom and experience. I'm just an old woman in a pantsuit.

In my younger days, I would want to jump up and down and scream and yell and say, "Treat me the same!" Now I just sit back and wait for the phone call to come in and say, "Oh, God, I really need you! I need your expertise!" You know, "We made a mistake!"

It's not that I don't care. It's that, now that I am older, I've seen that the universe has a way of evening things out and letting the chips fall into place. And sometimes if you let things eat at your soul you can't do your job, because you would be physically and emotionally ill, all the time.

It's the same with working in the criminal justice system. I have worked with people who have committed horrific, senseless crimes. But I defend them. I do the best that I can with the evidence and the resources that I have, because I understand the way the system works, and how it targets especially young men of color, and everyone deserves equal rights and a fair chance.