

Leading by Example: Policewomen in Tasmania



by Angela Bradford, Assistant Secretary

and Miss Jana at school care, Mum hits the office running at about 7.55am. Her shift, as a Detective Senior Constable in CIB starts at 8am.

Coffee is always the first thing on the agenda. The day is pretty full, an interview with a child who has been sexually abused, and an appointment with someone who would rather not have an appointment with her. But all that is put on hold with a suspicious death. Next thing it's 11pm. They've done all they could that day and everyone has to be back at six am the next morning. Mum goes home and the first thing she sees is the Weetbix triumphantly and permanently fixed to the wall. She has missed her daughter's assembly and her husband's business dinner. She creeps into their bedrooms to kiss her children goodnight and falls into bed exhausted.

That was me nine years ago and while it wasn't a typical day, it wasn't out of the ordinary either. I suppose some could say that women do that every day and manage well, and they do, but police officers never know what their unpredictable day will bring.

To successfully combine a police career and your personal life so that both are rewarding is at times a juggle and is dependant upon your own expectations, as well as support from those close to you and your peers.

I loved that time; it was challenging and exciting. I was able to have time with my kids during the day when I was on afternoons and I was young enough to do it with ease. In fact, now that Miss Jana is 14, I think life back then was quite uncomplicated!

I honestly thought I was doing pretty well 15 years ago. It was 1985 and I was the first officer to fall pregnant while attached to CIB, (in Darwin). I proved that I was able to keep working in my position (without being put into a hidey-hole somewhere) and with the support of my Superintendent, my position was there waiting for me when I returned from maternity leave. This was an achievement at the time, because it was a first, but there had been so many accomplishments by policewomen before and after, that mine seems to pale in comparison.

Picture this – it's 6.30am, the kids are up. Two-year-old David is sitting at the table and should be eating his Weetbix. Of course, it's much better using it to paint the Bananas in Pyjamas place mat. Mum looks over and thinks to herself, I really must wipe that Weetbix off the wall otherwise it'll set like concrete.

That thought, along with 20 others that go through her head in a matter of seconds is gone as Miss Jana, aged five breezes into the kitchen all ready for school in her very best dress with mummy's Estee Lauder lipstick on (her lips and the dress). She announces it's OK because her class is performing at assembly today and reminds Mum not to forget to be there. Mum sighs and thinks that Jana's beautiful dress would never be the same again. But there's no time to persuade one determined five-year-old to consider changing, there's still lunches, crèche bags and a change of clothes to be organised as David's Weetbix had just made it's way onto Mum's shirt.

Dad cruises in, gets Mum a coffee, helps with bags and lunches and says on his way out the door, not to forget the business dinner that night. Mum is out the door at 7.15am. With David deposited at crèche

Women police officers are forging ahead in their achievements and are leaving a rich legacy in their wake for future female officers. Policewomen have evolved from being employed solely to tend to the needs of women and girls who found themselves the victims of social evils or who were morally errant in their judgements, to the present day where they work on an equal footing with their male colleagues.

Mrs Kate Campbell was employed on the 20 October 1917 and was the first of these "right kind of women" to be appointed by Tasmania Police. Although she was discharged less than three months later, it was the beginning of policewomen in Tasmania.

In the early days women could not be appointed as Constables until they had attained the age of 25 years and their wage was at one time as much as 25 per cent lower than that of their male counterparts. If they married they were required to resign.

As the years passed, women police slowly made inroads into the male officers' domain taking on licensing and traffic duties, although their role remained largely focused on females and children until the 1970's when the transition to full operational status began to emerge. In 1976 male and female police officers were fully integrated, women were no longer listed separately in the Gazette and no differentiation was made between male and female constables on appointment. By the mid 1980's women police officers were serving in most areas of policing.

It cannot be ignored that the policewomen of yesteryear were the ones who paved the way for policewomen today. They were the ones who did the hard yards, striving and achieving. Vera Webberley was the first policewoman to be promoted to the rank of sergeant in Tasmania in 1960, (a gender barrier which was only broken in New York in 1964). And it was Beth Ashlin who first attained a Commissioned Officer rank by being appointed an Inspector on 11 May 1978. She was also the first policewoman to receive the National Medal in 1977. Elizabeth Hughes was the first woman to serve in CIB, when she transferred in 1973. She was also the first woman member of a police rifle club team, representing Tasmania in 1968.

Today, our women are still achieving and breaking new ground. I spoke to three policewomen who, through their own motivation and enthusiasm have

realised their ambitions, and in doing so have set an example for others to follow.

Constable Darlene Petterwood only graduated from the Police Academy last year. She is 36 years old and married with four children. Her story of fulfilling her ambition to become a police officer is inspiring. Constable Gillian Dayton is the first woman to be attached to Marine & Rescue and is doing an outstanding job in what was arguably a man's domain. Inspector Lyn Jones is Tasmania's only female Commissioned officer, and I, as much as I hate to say it, think this is an achievement in itself with such low numbers of women reaching the Commissioned ranks. Lyn is also a strong advocate of womens' issues and is the Commissioner's representative on the Australasian Women in Policing Advisory Committee. Lyn was awarded the Australian Police Medal on Australia Day this year.

Darlene Petterwood was 19 years of age when she first tried to join the Tasmanian Police Service. It was something she had always wanted to do. She dressed up for the big occasion, presented herself to the police station only to be told to come back when she had grown another one and half inches. Darlene was, and still is, 5'2".

There was little she could do, so Darlene trained to be a childcare worker. She married her husband David and they started what was to become a family with four children. When Darlene was 30 years old she met Lisa Hazelwood, a police officer. Lisa had just recently joined the service and Darlene was surprised, as Lisa was older than what she expected a recruit to be, but even more surprised when she realised Lisa was shorter than she was.

It was soon understood that height restrictions had become a thing of the past. Darlene, however, was very busy with brand new baby number three, but it was enough to pique her interest once again. Lisa encouraged her friend and when baby Luke was a year old, Darlene applied to join the Service but

unfortunately failed the entrance exam. So resolute was she, that Darlene went to adult education and engaged a private tutor, and, while raising three children and holding down a full-time job she acquired the necessary skills.

She was all set to sit the exam again; when one of those little accidents of nature occur and along came baby number four, Rhys. Darlene says no one was



Beth Ashlin



Elizabeth Hughes



Vera Webberley

more surprised than she was. Not one to be deterred, Darlene sat the entrance exam when Rhys was a year old, she did the bronze medallion again and the first aid course. She had everything ready should she be accepted, and she was.



Constable Darlene Petterwood with her children Kurt 14, Lara 12, Rhys 4 and Luke 6

Her course commenced in August 1999. It was a frantic time, her husband was in the process of taking over the business from his father, they were moving into a new house, (all on the Friday) and Darlene was due at the academy on the Sunday. (I should point out that Darlene lives in Launceston). Darlene took on a nanny to help care for the children. Darlene said that the first five to six weeks were difficult, there were tears on the phone every night, children missing her and being the organiser of the house, it was a worry whether everything was getting done that needed to get done. Darlene says that she ended up having to back away from it all and let it be. She needed to focus on the Academy and study.

Things settled down and into a routine, which included Darlene travelling home every Friday night

for the weekend before returning to the Academy on Sunday night. Study on the weekends was extremely difficult and her peers on the course wondered how on earth she and others in the same situation survived.

The course itself was a challenge, but Darlene says the pressure of it all was largely brought about by her own expectations. She says that she did receive attention from the media and her peers because she was an 'older' recruit with a family of four children, and because of that she was doggedly determined to do well.

She says that she expected to pass everything well and thought that being older would be an advantage, however, sometimes it didn't work out that way. There were tears when she wasn't doing as well as she hoped and Darlene says that she had too high an expectation of herself, adding that a lot of people think that of her.

She said she had been working full-time for 17 years and had just expected to be able to do it well. Of course, what Darlene fails to acknowledge is the very high standards that are set by the police academy and the fact that she was still there at the end of the course some eight months later.

The cadet course is 32 weeks in length and for all that time Darlene lived at the Academy apart from the four-week stint at out-stations, which is part of the course. For all that time her husband David supported Darlene and much to David's credit, left her in peace without worrying her over the little hiccups that occur in day to day family life.

Now graduated and working in Launceston uniform, Darlene is loving every minute of her job. She says that her work environment is great and her colleagues are terrific. She has no firm ambitions as yet, saying that every aspect of police work that she has come across has been interesting.

Darlene says that the highlight for her is being back home and finally doing it, doing the job. She has slotted into police work very comfortably, saying that it feels like she has been doing it for years. Her children, Kurt (14), Lara (12), Luke (6) and Rhys (4), think it's pretty good that mum is a police officer, they still get a kick out of seeing mum in uniform. Hubby David, is bemused by it all, he always knew of Darlene's determination, if anything, he thinks Darlene is more outspoken than she ever was and Darlene agrees that she has more confidence than before.

In closing, Darlene says that no one can prepare you for the emotional roller-coaster of the cadet course and that the course-directors will laugh when they read that comment thinking, 'bloody woman, she was always in tears'. But then, she was not alone and attributes it to people's expectations of themselves and the pressure of relationships and living away from home. Darlene says that they were forewarned and everything they said would happen did happen, but no one can prepare you for the emotional side of it.

Having said that, Darlene also says that the support from everyone at the Academy, from the course-directors to staff, cooks and cleaners was fantastic

and she doesn't know how she would have survived without it. But Darlene had the last laugh. One of her course-directors commented that she had caused "nothing but bloody trouble, we've got all these married mummies coming in, one after the other, all wanting to join after hearing about you."

Darlene Petterwood has certainly generated a lot of media interest with her story and she has spoken to lots of women with families wanting to know what it's like and how she did it. Darlene encourages it and thinks it's great. So do I, especially if we get more women like Darlene Petterwood.

Constable Gillian Dayton, (30), has been 'in the job' since April 1992. She has worked in various areas, two years in uniform, two years in traffic and four years in CIB. However, in March/April last year, Gill was the first woman to successfully apply for, and attain a position in Marine & Rescue Services. Gill says that she applied because this area offered something completely different, she loved being outdoors and spending time on boats, and also she could utilise all the skills she had already acquired in investigation work. It was the first time she had applied for the position, but she had done a limited Coxswains course, which required some 'sea' days before being able to do the course. She followed up her application by visiting the Inspector in the area, as much to reassure him of her commitment as to support her application and as we know Gill was appointed to the position.

Gill's first job in Marine and Rescue is the subject of much mirth among her male colleagues. In fact, the story won the annual 'Tugboat' award last Christmas. (An Award, exclusive to the section, whose meaning is not really clear, but I think there has to be a sense of the ridiculous somewhere)!

It occurred on Gill's first day in the section, she was working with Constables Pearson and Dunn and they were called to an upturned dinghy at White Rock. They took off and when approaching they could see that it was in fact a cow that had fallen off the cliff. The (very dead) cow was bloated and its four legs were sticking up in the air, definitely a boating hazard. A few shotgun rounds later and the cow was still floating and the stench was unbelievable. Gill said you could actually see the gas escaping from the cow. Such was the smell that Gill and Dunn locked themselves in the cabin with all the doors and windows shut. More shotgun rounds and still the cow floated.

So a decision was made to run over it. This done, they looked everywhere and couldn't see the cow anywhere, only to realise it had become stuck under the boat. The boat had only just been re-painted and washed and it now had this stinking cow stuck to it. The skills of a clever boatman can never be underestimated and the cow was freed. A good introduction to Marine & Rescue Services!

Gill has found the area a real challenge, it is so different from any other area in policing. The legislation is not taught at the Academy and it is not covered in any of the other areas you work at, so it is all new to her. She has done a couple of seven night

"The boat had only just been re-painted and washed and it now had this stinking cow stuck to it."

boating trips, one up to Flinders Island and one down the south-west and absolutely loved it. It doesn't faze Gill at all, working in an all male environment. She says there hasn't been any problems at all, the guys have been great, there's a fair bit of ribbing that goes on and she has slotted in really well.

Since Gill's arrival in Marine & Rescue, there has been another woman come into the section on a



Gillian Dayton

secondment. Gill says that more women have shown an interest in the area since she started and that any doubts or frights the men had about women going in there have been dispelled. The highlight for Gill has been the boat trips, zipping around in the tenders checking on fishermen. She says hopping on and off the tenders onto large fishing boats in a swell wasn't easy at first but she's mastered it. The reaction from fishermen has been really good,

although there was one that took himself off to the police station to complain about a 'bloody woman' doing a man's job. (Touch of the sun, perhaps?)

Gill plans to stay at Marine & Rescue for a good few years yet and gain more boat handling experience. She says that there are those that think it's all beer and skittles at Marine, but in fact it's hard work. Most of the rescues don't occur when the weather's perfect, it'll be lousy weather, rough seas and freezing cold, so a lot of the work isn't pleasant and it's

believed that the police service offered variety and opportunities. Joining at the age of 30 was a bit unusual at the time; Lyn recalls the cut-off age being about 32 years for females. These were the days of age and height restrictions.

Lyn started her career on the Hobart watch and after two years applied to go into the Hobart Drug Bureau. Lyn was successful in her application, but didn't enjoy dealing with clients from that environment. She says she was raised by very strict parents who had Victorian values and she went to an all girls private school. In fact, her father opposed her desire to join Tasmania Police as he believed it was a job for unskilled workers. She had never had anything whatsoever to do with drugs and found working in that environment quite uncomfortable. However, she stayed there for 18 months and doesn't regret that time because it gave her the valuable grounding required for Detective work.

She transferred to CIB in early '83 and Lyn says this was her very first experience of discrimination. The discrimination, however, was caused by the partners/spouses of several male colleagues she worked with. Some partners/spouses were not comfortable with Lyn working with their husbands. Lyn had a lot of difficulty with that, it rankled and she found it offensive. It made her angry and she felt that it reflected on her reputation and character. It did go as far as Lyn not being able to work with one of her male peers because it just caused too much trouble at home for that person.

Lyn says her role in those early days in CIB was one of support. It was the policewoman's role to take the statements in rape cases and the men's role to interview the offender. Lyn found this very disconcerting when so many hours were spent taking statements and gathering information only to have someone take over without the intimate knowledge gained from having spent so much time with a victim of crime. Thankfully, time has changed that mode of investigation and generally speaking Detectives now have ownership of their investigations from start to finish.

Lyn spent about 10 years in CIB and whilst there, received her nominations for both the Senior Constable rank and Sergeant rank. She says she was thrilled with her nomination for Senior Constable only to have it shattered by the negative feedback. The nomination was appealed by a junior officer who was also in CIB in another District. Lyn feels that it was appealed purely because she was female. It caused a lot of ill feeling and anger between some members of the two CIB stations. There were comments that she probably used her sexuality to her advantage, which she found very offensive – it was a nasty and unsettling experience for her. Lyn recalls during the appeal hearing that she was talking informally to the appellant and asked him what he was alluding to when he referred to the frequency of sick leave in his appeal documents. It was well recorded that she was not a regular user of sick leave. He replied that he was going to raise the issue of a woman's menstrual cycle which, in his opinion caused women to take frequent sick leave. Lyn was



Inspector Lyn Jones

often dangerous and risky. Asked whether she had any advice for women thinking of a job in marine and rescue, Gill says you definitely cannot be prone to sea sickness, you've got to be able stand the smell of rotting fish and be prepared to get out there and have a go.

Inspector Lyn Jones has been a police officer for 22 years. She joined Tasmania Police in February 1979, aged 30 years. It was a job that she had been interested in for some time. She was seeking a career and

astounded. The officer didn't raise it in the appeal, but he had considered it and certainly alluded to it in his appeal documents. The appeal was dismissed.

Lyn's promotion to Sergeant was much better accepted by her colleagues, although clouded by written comments made during the interview with the Board members. Lyn admits that she has suffered at times from a lack of confidence, but, for the occasion of her Sergeants Board, she was well-prepared and felt very confident going into it. She was subsequently nominated and promoted. Some time later she read the notes of the Board members and was interested that one of them said that she could appear to be arrogant. Lyn thought that was astonishing because she was confident but believed herself never to be arrogant. She wondered whether the same description would have been said of a male who presented confidently.

Lyn says that during her latter time in CIB, she was given every opportunity to further develop herself, especially in the early 1990's. However, gender harassment was an issue and in fact was what prompted her to leave the section. The harassment took the form of hostility from several male colleagues who, she believes, just didn't like a woman being in charge. The harassment was such that it undermined at least one investigation. Lyn points out that she had support from the majority of her colleagues, but it only needed one or two to undermine her decisions.

Lyn didn't make a complaint at the time, she felt that she couldn't because it would ruin her career and she didn't feel as though there was the support. She chose to just get on with her life and career.

Her next posting was with the Internal Investigation Unit as a Sergeant where she stayed for a couple of years. Then, realising she had to go back to uniform in order to further her promotional prospects, she went to Bellerive uniform for 18 months before transferring to Human Resources for 18 months. While she was in Human Resources Lyn was promoted to Inspector in August 1997 and shortly thereafter was appointed Staff Officer to Assistant Commissioner Bennett.

Lyn says that it was difficult not having a female mentor or role model, although she has only realised that in recent years after talking to other female members. Lyn always thought she was unique in her fears and self doubts about herself, but many female members also have expressed the same doubts to her. She now realises that she is no different from anybody else and had she had a female mentor in addition to the wonderful male mentors who have assisted her with her career, she says she wouldn't have been so hard on herself.

Lyn firmly believes that there must be an increased representation of women not only across the ranks but also in the various areas. She cites Gill Dayton's transfer to Marine as an example and says that at the time there was concern from some of the male applicants when Gill was appointed to the position. It was only in the early 1990's that women were actively discouraged from applying for such positions. The reasons given were 'there were no 'female'

toilets on the boats and that living in close quarters with the men would cause all sorts of conflicts with their home lives'.

Lyn says that since then the police service has come a long way and family friendly work practices have helped support the primary carers, be they men or women. She doesn't believe in providing change for women to make it easier for them to gain promotion, but the organisation must continue to provide the training opportunities and development that enables women to be competitive without reverting to 'fast tracking' of employees. Lyn accepts that affirmative action is a contentious issue and the subject of frequent debate as to its fairness, however, she believes that it is a rightful correction of inequalities in any organisation.

Lyn considers it vital to have women at management level; otherwise decision making is made based on male values and doesn't take into account the female perspective. Also, the absence of women managers as role models acts as a subconscious reinforcement to women of their 'unsuitability' for particular roles in the service. It is important that women are promoted into these areas – women

“... there must be the training opportunities and development that enables women to be competitive without 'fast tracking'.”

must be able to regard this as a realistic career option rather than conforming to the stereotypical roles which at times is still expected of them.

Although, there are a number of women who have reached the rank of Sergeant, she is concerned that some of the women do not seek further promotion. She accepts that most women with family responsibilities wish to balance their career with their life style. Lyn admits that she would never have been able to study, sit the exams, attend numerous recalls and be so available for work if she had chosen to have a family. She admires women that have successfully combined both a career and family.

The highlight of Lyn's career has been her promotion to a Commissioned Rank because she never thought it was possible. Second to that is the award of the Australian Police Medal this year. She has no ambitions for further promotion – she simply wishes to continue to contribute in a worthwhile capacity to the organisation which she is deeply committed to, until her retirement.

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