

BIO, PART III: 1978 - 1979

Once back in Tucson, I decided I wanted to start college and had to decide what to study at Pima Community College. I knew I needed something that offered the variety that would keep me at a job for 20+ years. I kept going back to becoming a cop like my brother and enrolled in Administration of Justice classes fulltime. My Mom and Dad had divorced in 1973 and Dad remarried a gal in Tucson, so they helped babysit the girls.

I was the walk-on starting second baseman for the women's softball team in 1978, nicknamed 'Grandma' as I was 23 and the other girls were fresh out of high school. We had a pretty good team and played in tournaments against the likes of the University of AZ and other Division 1 schools. During one, the short stop and I both went for a hopper that bounced over the pitcher. I got the ball, but we collided: her face to the side of my head. We both went down and I heard the pitcher calling for the ball. When the short stop turned over, blood was gushing from her nose and she was carted off on a stretcher with a broken nose. At the end of the season, I was named as the 2nd Team All Coaches 2nd baseman (or however you say it).

In May 1978, I had applied to the Tucson Police Department and, over the next five months, went through their various qualifying tests. There was a physical fitness test, ink blots, an interview with a shrink, an oral board and something else I can't remember now. In September, I started my second semester at the college.

I was getting discouraged about the police department, so I went to a physical fitness day for the Pima County Sheriffs Department on a Saturday morning in mid-September. When I got home, Max said the police department had called but I wasn't selected. My shoulders dropped and then he laughed. He said I had made it and was to report to the academy September 25th. My police career was about to start.

During the para-military academy, which started with 60 cadets and ended with 52 graduates, we were involved in a couple of big news events in Tucson. An A10 fighter returning to Davis Monthan AFB crashed near the U of AZ on a street next to a middle school. A call came to the academy wanting us to be sent there to provide point control around the perimeter of the crash scene.

Another incident involved a human head being discovered in the city dump. Homicide Detectives decided they needed a lot of help searching piles of trash for

the rest of the body and called the academy. We went straight there with no protective gear and started wading through the mounds of nasty, smelly trash. The next morning, we could wear old clothes and bring gloves. By the end of the day, we had found most of the body and the search ended.

At the academy, we had started weapons training and were issued .38 revolvers but no bullets. It was like being Barney Fife and having to keep your only bullet in your pocket. Max was working as a foreman in construction and had a job out of town while I was in the academy. One night he had decided to get a motel and not drive home, so I wasn't expecting him. Anyway, I was asleep and woke up to someone coming in the side door of our mobile home. I took the .38 from the

nightstand figuring even without bullets I could at least scare whoever it was. I headed toward the bedroom door and a person came around the corner. I said, "FREEZE!" and Max nearly messed himself saying, "It's me! It's me!". I said, "Oh, it's you," put the gun away and went back to bed. I don't think he got to sleep quite as fast.

On the day we practiced point control, I ended up getting photographed and made the morning paper the next day. I was 23 but looked like a little kid.



Conductor without orchestra — Cathy Gaskins, on her way to becoming one of Tucson's finest, went through the basics of traffic control yesterday morning at East 22nd Street and South Park Avenue. For 15 minutes, with the traffic lights switched off, Gaskins was in control of every vehicle and pedestrian. She was one of 14 police trainees who took turns at the busy intersection. Around the city, 54 of her classmates grimaced as they started, stopped, cautioned and pointed motorists and pedestrians in all directions, while taking an occasional glance to the rear for self-protection. (Star photos by Jack W. Sheaffer)

Other academy training included felony stops, building searches (I got shot in the helmet with a BB gun because I didn't look up), pursuit driving using an old runway on the air base, disarming an armed suspect, crowd control and everything else you can imagine. When we did races in 3-man rescue training (fireman's carry and a couple others), I was the only woman to carry one of the men on my shoulders. The other teams carried the woman or smallest person. By the end of the academy, I took the challenge from an instructor who offered a six pack to any woman who could climb the 20foot rope hand-over-hand using no feet. I got the six pack for Max.

I graduated 9th in my class in January 1979 and was assigned to the eastside of town for Field Training.