

Christine Silverberg: public relations officer

Peel Bug
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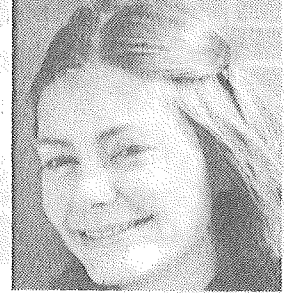
a v.i.p. and me

(very interesting person)

By KATHLEEN A. HICKS



"For years and years and years Police have been misunderstood, misunderstood strictly because not enough information possibly was available to the public about the operation of the police force. We are now trying to make the public aware of our operation and the policies that we have. I think this is very necessary. We like to say that the police are the citizens of the community and what we do is of public interest."



**CHRISTINE SILVERBERG: Police Woman
Public Relations Officer:
Peel Regional Police Department**

ME: Your position here with the Peel Regional Police is head of public relations. Explain your work in detail in promoting the department.

P. W. SILVERBERG: Well, I wouldn't say that it is really promoting the department so much as it is informing the public of the things that the police force do, the policies that we have and the changing in-
cies that we have, in establishing a press liaison, because this was one thing that was lacking. Of course, when the departments were small it was very easy to know the individual reporters on the various papers. When it became regional, we had so many papers and two radio stations, as well as all the Toronto news media, so it was necessary to establish somebody who could stay in contact with the media, and if they had questions or problems, they could contact me and I could get them an answer right away on it. Any special features and so on that are done go through the public relations branch, so that is one important part of it. And by that liaison, it does inform the public of the different types of branches that we have and the things we are trying to do. I think probably I say that it is not promoting the police force so much as it is informing the public because an informed public brings a public awareness of the type of job that we are trying to do. With more awareness there is more understanding. This is a mutual thing; if I can understand the feelings of certain segments of the population and they can understand what we are trying to do, then it brings about a better feeling. Because we recognize the fact that we can't operate effectively without the support of the public and unless we get feedback from the public, how are we going to change or institute new policies? We have to have that constant feedback. The other thing that the job actually involves is co-ordinating speakers for various groups. And again, when the police forces were smaller, before they were amalgamated, this was easily done by the chief himself or one of the staff superintendents, but now it is very difficult to do that. We have many, many requests coming in from all types of citizen groups, so it is necessary to co-ordinate all that; and that takes quite a bit of time. I am responsible for setting up displays and projects of that nature. We have a display going into the International Building later this month for the International Coin Show. This sort of thing has

to be co-ordinated and organized and that is an interesting part of my job.

ME: Are you finding the challenge of your job stimulating?

P. W. SILVERBERG: Very stimulating. The main reason I say that is because there is a great scope to the position, because the position had never been instituted before. Because I started the branch, I had a great deal of latitude, the more ideas that I got, the more I was able to institute these ideas — so it is creative that way as well. It is also challenging because new projects and ideas come up, and starting to see them work is very rewarding.

ME: Your first duty as public relations officer was to organize Police Week, May 12-18. Were you pleased with the outcome of this project?

P. W. SILVERBERG: Yes, I was. It was organized within two months, and I wouldn't have been able to

do it at all if it hadn't been for the co-operation of all the officers on the police force. Many of the officers spent their own time making a lot of the things that we did have on display. They helped with the carpentry work, they did all the photographs, did my printing for me, they spent some of their own hours manning the display, and without them it would never have come off at all. The Gordon Graydon Secondary School students assisted the safety branch with The Talking Car. The students did a tremendous job on that and our safety officers worked a lot of hard hours on the car in order to get it ready for police week. That was one thing that went over well with the children, and we were pleased with that. We had some very favorable comments about the display. May only one regret was that it could have been bigger. I was disappointed in the safe driving clinics; they were not very well attended. Otherwise, I feel the week was successful, and we hope to expand it next year.

ME: You were the second policewoman to join the Mississauga Police Department, and now there are 20 P.W.s on the Peel Regional Force. How were you first accepted by your male peers?

P. W. SILVERBERG: I don't feel personally that there was a problem of acceptance in that way for me — I just never felt it. I was doing a job where I felt it was a very important job. As far as I was concerned I could do just as good a job as the men were able to do. There were officers, of course, who were not used to having women as police officers, and you

run into this in any profession where women have not been involved. But I really did not feel I was not accepted. I think your attitude makes a lot of difference, and I found the officers were very co-operative in helping me out with any problems I had, and they accepted me for the work I was doing, not because I was a male or female. I quite enjoy being a female, so I really didn't feel I had any particular problem.

ME: Are there extra things you have to learn to be on the police force because you are a woman?

P. W. SILVERBERG: No, we learn the same thing that the men do. Our training at the police college is the same. Now, the women who are being hired are going through some extra self-defense practices, only in relation to their size. The women wanted this extra self-defense, otherwise the training is the same.

ME: Having been with the M.P.D.'s Youth Bureau when you first joined the department two years ago must have brought you many interesting experiences. Can you relate one that stands out in your mind?

P. W. SILVERBERG: They were all so interesting and many of them were so rewarding, too, that it is difficult to just take one thing out of a lot. But there was one that I really feel personally I was very happy with because we were able to help a young girl who was 13 years old. We would never have been able to do that without the co-operation of outside agencies and the co-operation of Juvenile Court Judge Durham and so on. She had been in trouble for about a year. It was very necessary to help the girl; in fact she wanted help. She was a delightful girl, but she desperately needed some assistance because she was going from doing minor things to doing very serious crimes. We were able to get her some help, and after a year and a half, we did finally see some results. I was checking up not too long ago and I understand she is doing extremely well and hasn't been involved in any trouble. I only relate that one as being particularly interesting because I think the most rewarding thing is to see the final outcome.

ME: Have you ever had any danger involved with your job?

P. W. SILVERBERG: No, not really. I would say there was never any danger as such. I have only carried a firearm in cases where I was working with the criminal investigation branch on a particular detail. With there only being two police women then, myself and Maureen Grant, when the criminal investigation branch required a female to be with them then we would go. These were things that were very exciting and very different from Youth Bureau work. I would never say that any of those situations were really dangerous because there was always a lot of people involved. There was one situation that was kind of interesting. You will recall when Neda Novak went missing from home and there was a great deal of concern and searching, well, I would hitchhike on Erin Mills Parkway. This was very interesting in many ways, because I would not only get a lot of people to stop to pick me up, but I found it rather amusing in instances because there would be high school teachers or principals or local people who would stop and give me a lecture about hitchhiking. I never thought of it as being dangerous — it was something I was doing in the line of duty, but, of course, they didn't know this. I had never hitchhiked in my life and to get out there and stick out my thumb was quite an interesting experience.

ME: Prior to working with the M.P.D., you were working at the Brampton Vanier Centre for Women. Did this experience help you to have more compassion for people?

P. W. SILVERBERG: Yes, I believe it really did. When I came out of university, I suppose I was very naive in many senses. Being my first job and working with all the people there was very challenging and very rewarding and led to a greater understanding of the needs that people have. It is a Provincial correctional centre for women; the women are sent there for two years less a day. I worked with the women who were unmotivated to change and it was my responsibility, with other members of staff, to try and modify their attitudes which hopefully would lead to some change in behavior for some of them. That was very interesting. The reason I left there was not because I didn't like it, but because I thought if I worked with people, a little younger perhaps they wouldn't end up in this position. So I applied for a job with the Youth Bureau.

ME: Do you feel it takes a certain type of individual to be a police woman?

P. W. SILVERBERG: I think it takes a certain type of individual to be a police officer, whether that is a man or a woman. A person has to be able to exercise good judgment, has to show initiative, has to not be overly aggressive, yet not too passive. There are a lot of qualities that come into being a police officer; the compassion you must have, the understanding, willingness not to make rash judgments and rash decisions, must be intelligent and so on. I don't think this is any different for a man than it would be for a woman. One of the big concerns for a woman, and I think it is for a man too, is how the job would affect their family life. A woman of course, if she is married, has to think how her husband is going to accept all this, and the same with a man for his wife.

ME: Did you have a deep desire to get into police work?

P. W. SILVERBERG: No, not originally. I'll tell you what I really had intended doing. I wanted to be involved in public affairs, which in effect is really similar to what I am doing now. That is what I intended to do all the way through university. I had not thought of police at that time, but I have a brother who is on the morality squad of this police force and I knew about police possibly more than other people might know. Then when I finished university and went to Vanier and found that very interesting that led to my joining the police force so I could work with younger people. When I got into the police work, the more interesting it became, the more I enjoyed it. I wouldn't change for the world now.

ME: Is this type of work broadening your viewpoint on life and reality?

P. W. SILVERBERG: Oh, yes, very definitely. There are a lot of lonely people in the world, a lot of depressed and sad people, a lot of people who can't cope with their daily lives. There are quite a number of very sordid and sad conditions you run into. Many people would not normally think about that sort of thing. It really requires you to have a great deal of compassion and understanding, because perhaps you feel yourself that you are a happy person and that you are able to cope with your life, doesn't mean to say that you can be judgmental of other people who possibly can't. So you try everything that you can to assist those people, not make judgments about them. You certainly do become more realistic about things, there is no doubt about that. You see a lot of things that a normal working person might not see, and it brings that awareness.