

Interview with Detective Karla Rodriguez
of the
Hartford Police Department

The Hartford Police Department is located at 550 Main Street Hartford, CT 06103. The official Hartford police force was established in 1860. Prior to this Samuel Wakeman was appointed Constable of "Herteford Towne" in 1636. At this time the city was patrolled by citizens who would watch at night for fire and suspicious activity. A year after the formal establishment of the Hartford Police Department a Board of Police Commissioners was appointed to oversee all department matters. One day each week the commission would meet typically headed by the Mayor and included committees assigned to separate department issues. These committees would oversee topics such as rules and discipline, auditing and station house supplies. A separate session was called for matters regarding discipline of officers known as an executive session. In these sessions witnesses and officers would be called to testify and the commissioners would take a vote on the disciplinary action to be taken if found guilty. Notes and minutes for these meetings were kept by a commission clerk and recorded until 1947 when the commission was disassembled.

Hartford is split into 3 districts, Northwest, Northeast and Southeast. Within these districts are a total of 8 zones. With a population of 124,356 there are 409 sworn officers and there are six specialized teams. These teams consist of the Disorder Control Team (DCT), Marine Division, Hostage Negotiator Team, Emergency Response Team (ERT), K9 Police and the Bomb Squad. Current Police Chief is Daryl K. Roberts.

The member of the Hartford Police Department I was able to interview for this assignment was Detective Karla Rodriquez. Detective Rodriquez is a member of the Intelligence Division specializing in gangs at the Hartford Police Department. Unfortunately I was unable to meet Detective Rodriquez in person but exchanged e-mails with her and hope to meet her soon. In all honesty I was a bit intimidated at first and wasn't sure if I should bother a Detective and President of the CAWP (Connecticut Association of Women Police) with my assignment but I held my breath and pressed the send button. The response I received back was both reassuring and inspiring. Her enthusiasm to help me immediately put me at ease and I jumped on the chance to learn as much as a could from her. We agreed that due to the Detective's busy schedule I would send her my questions and we would meet informally at a later time. Below are my questions and her responses.

Q. What made you want to be a police officer? It may sound corny but I wanted to help people in the town that I grew up in and have the authority to deter criminals from preying on innocent victims and ruining the City of Hartford.

Q. How old were you when you joined the force? I turned 21 as I went into the police academy, the youngest in the class. I was at UCONN part-time and working at a law firm at the time.

Q. What was the hardest part of your training? The training jams everything you will need as a police officer into segments and prays that you will remember them when making split second decisions. There is no comparison to on the job training. It is where your training will be the back drop and where you refer back to in critical incidents. It is where you are made or broken.

Q. Can you remember the moment you made the decision to join the force? If so, how old were you and can you explain it to me? I was waiting for the moment when I would hear the words you are hired because I knew that no matter what I was doing, it wouldn't matter. I remember the background investigator saying to me, "If you are hired...." And I told him no sir, "When I am hired". He told me later that I was one of the most impressive people he has ever interviewed.

Q. What were some of the stepping stones that you used to get to your current profession? I think it is important to seek a higher education because it enables you to gain life experiences which help you make more educated decisions in the field, although other life experiences and jobs offer the same potential. Working at a law firm showed me a side of the law I did not want to be on, it made me sure about the side I did want to be on.

Q. What qualities do you feel you bring to your position? Experience - I did over five years in patrol, over five years in Major Crimes (Homicide, robberies, sexual assaults, serious assaults, carjackings, etc) and now I am in the Intelligence division specializing in gangs. My experience has put me in a position to know a lot of the players on the street organize my information, assist other divisions in the police department and outside agencies. The sharing of information I have learned is key in solving crime. Communication is about 80% of this job and the other are the unfortunate times where you must get physical. I believe that knowing yourself and your limits keeps you on your toes. I feel blessed to have such a good combination

Q. What qualities have you developed while in your position? I have learned that sharing your knowledge with others breeds efficiency. I have a wonderful support system in the people that work around me, they believe in my abilities and I believe in theirs, again a good combination. Furthermore, I became a certified instructor in nine different investigative areas in order to pass along what I have learned along the way and what I believe are efficient ways to conduct good police work.

Q. Where do you hope to go now? I am on the list to become a Sergeant. As a sergeant I will supervise a number of police officers and have an opportunity to mentor and be in a position to suggest the implementation of necessary changes to the upper ranks and be able to monitor their progress.

Q. As a woman in law enforcement what do you see as the biggest obstacle for women in the field? It's funny; the biggest obstacle is actually the very thing that makes you stronger, the stereotype that women can't do the job. Although, at times I may have been passed over for a better car assignment or put inside on a nice day versus on the road, it made me stronger. And, the times that I was on the street I made it a point to prove that I was able to handle myself and that I was in fact competent and dependable.

Q. Do you have any family members who are in the law enforcement field or a related profession? I was the first in the field although my mother has always worked within the court system when criminals were referred to her to be monitored in a drug/alcohol program which was used as an alternative to incarceration. Since my tour here started in 1995, my sister has joined the police department as a dispatcher two years ago.

Q. Do you feel women are becoming common and more accepted in law enforcement? Tolerated yes, accepted no. Women will never have that 100% acceptance in any male dominated field although there will be some male officers that will support women wholeheartedly. Some women will achieve a high level of respect but any deficiency (as minor as it may be) will always be chucked up to them being a female. It is absolutely better than 40 years ago when women officers were called matrons, only allowed to give out tickets and made to wear skirts, but the stereotype for some is ingrained. Just recently, I was interviewed for the October issue of the CT Justice Journal in which they discussed that the entry of female recruits is at a low. It was a lengthy article in case you want to grab a copy.

Q. Did you have a mentor that helped you get to where you are now either when you were younger or as an adult? I believe that I grabbed positive experiences or qualities from different people and used them to challenge myself to achieve more in every aspect of my life and more importantly in my career. Quitting at any level has never been an option for me.

Q. What qualities do you feel are the most important for a police officer to obtain? Professionalism, Ethics, being a good communicator, above all, being a human and never forgetting where you came from; where the people you deal with come from and that the people you are encountering today, could be a reflection of you tomorrow.

Q. What has been the highlight of your career so far? The awards are nice because this is the kind of job that you have to learn to pat yourself on the back. Good cases solved, awesome feeling; Catching the bad guy after a foot chase, nice adrenaline rush. But being in a position to solve crime at my fingertips by helping anyone that solicits it, is unbelievable.

Q. What is the most satisfying aspect of your job? There are so many. Chewing out a 15 year old because he stole a car and scaring him into being a straight A student; getting a murderer to confess to killing an 8 month old baby after a 12 hour interview; knowing the answers or having the sources to answer the questions posed to me by my co-workers; being able to handle myself physically; or something as simple as my daughter saying, “mommy puts away the bad guys so that we are all safe, she can do anything!”.

Q. If you could give one piece of advice to a woman who wanted to be an officer what would it be? My advice to woman is a four pointed star. You, Home, Career, Passing the Torch.

You – taking care of yourself, making sure you have stress outlets, that you have fun, that you continue to challenge yourself, learn from others, accept criticism, recognizing your faults, believing in yourself and having faith in a higher being.

Home – making sure that you take care of home, whether it is children, husband, other family members, they are your support system, your backbone and will be there for you when times are tough, (if you are off injured, sick, financially strapped, etc.) Nurturing those relationships will keep you grounded and more effective as humans.

Career – challenging yourself to move forward, make contacts, be resourceful, learn the flow of your job inside and out, be an example to others in all aspects of the job. Be professional and keep your integrity at all times...because whether you like it or not, you are balancing on a different scale.

Passing of the Torch – if you have a gift or gifts, whether it is work related or personal, you have a duty to humankind to pass it on. If you die tomorrow, you must leave a legacy. You want them to remember, how did this woman live?

Bottom line – you can have it all. I am a detective, single mother of a five year old, I teach at the gym Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday nights, at a dance center on Saturdays mornings, train my sisters at the gym on Monday, Wednesday and Friday 530 am, finishing my Master's at Trinity College on Wednesday nights, President of the Association of Women Police, have a small business that is blossoming, etc. I have no pity for, it can't be done.

I have wanted to be a police officer since the moment I saw my grandfather in his uniform when I was eight years old. Over the years I have attempted different paths in my life never feeling anything fit right and knowing my true passion lied in law enforcement. After I read Detective Rodriquez's answers an overwhelming feeling of calm came over me. In answering these questions and in giving the four pointed star as advice to a young women seeking a life in law enforcement, every doubt I had in myself and my abilities disappeared. I look forward to meeting Detective Rodriquez in person and utilizing her knowledge and experience to the best of my ability to make my dream and passion a reality.