

# LIFE LINE

Volume 2 Issue 3

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## Congratulations Chief Cheryl Wilson Class 5



### LIFE

Leadership Inventory for  
Female Executives

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There's a part of Cheryl Wilson that doesn't want to make a big deal out of being the Lancaster Police Department's first female chief. A part that, understandably, just wants to settle her 5-foot-4, 140-pound frame into the chair she earned by spending 24 years with the Dallas County Sheriff's Department, working her way up from jailer to assistant chief.

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## LIFE'S BRAGS

**Jacqueline Fortune** — Harris County S.O. — Class 6  
New Assignment as Supervisor of the Crime Prevention Unit November 2013

**Yadira Estrada** — Houston Police — Class 8  
Getting married January 2014

**Timberly Douglas** — Beaumont ISD — Class 7  
Getting married to Demedtre Battle on July 27, 2014

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and ideas to**  
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You can't look at it like you're a female," said Wilson, who took the reins of Lancaster's 53-strong force last month. "You have to look at it like this: I'm qualified." But then there's another part of Wilson, the daughter of a small-town Louisiana paper mill worker and stay-at-home mom, that feels like she's got more to prove in a field still top heavy with men.

"Female chiefs would appreciate some attention to the matter," said Wilson, 46. "It's not like we can't do it. It's just been a gender thing, a male-dominated environment." She's got company in the Dallas area, with her former boss and mentor, Lupe Valdez, sitting for almost nine years now as the first female sheriff of Dallas County. Debra Walthall, a former deputy chief in Allen, took over the Corinth Police Department in Denton County five years ago. The 56-year-old veteran cop is still going strong. "It's very difficult for women to break into the role," said Walthall. "It's gotten easier in the past 10 years, but it's a male-dominated field and women know that. It's not an easy job."

Joshua had a female chief, Annabeth Robertson, until she resigned two months ago from the small department in Johnson County. "It's still a male-dominated culture, and it's still tough for women to matriculate through the process," said Dallas Police Chief David Brown, the city's second black chief. "But most of the big cities and many of the mid-sized cities have become more progressive in hiring blacks, Latinos and women."

The dean of female chiefs is right here in North Texas. Barbara Childress, the police chief of Richland Hills, a small burg in Tarrant County, will mark her 30-year anniversary next month. "When I became a police chief," said Childress, 65, "many of the reporters were talking to me and one of them asked me, 'What do you want us to call you?' I said, 'Chief,' maybe?" And once, she said, a female underling came to her and said, "As a female officer, how am I supposed to act?" "I said, 'Act like yourself. You're a woman. You're never going to be one of the guys. Just enjoy who you are and what you have to offer.' "

All of the women on top wonder, as I do, why so few females have broken through barriers that, for decades, funneled women into roles of what one expert calls "municipal mothers," which means they were hired to deal with runaways, prostitutes and other social-service duties. They've made tremendous strides in recent decades, working their way through the ranks and assuming top jobs in cities from Houston and Austin to San Francisco, Detroit and Washington. But the overall numbers aren't staggering.

If anything, they're stagnant or shrinking, said Dorothy M. Schulz, a professor of Law, Police Studies and Criminal Justice Administration at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice at the City University of New York. "Women now make up about 11 percent of people in law enforcement," she said. "It was as high as 13 or 14 [percent] a few years ago." And of the estimated 18,000 police chiefs in the U.S., she said, between 2 and 3 percent are women, which puts the total number at 360 to 540. "The pipeline is shrinking, so there's fewer to rise to the top," Schulz pointed out. Schulz isn't some sleepy academic sitting in her office cooking up ways to pad her credentials. She's the retired, first-female captain of the Metro-North Commuter Railroad Police Department in New York. She's also the author of several law-enforcement-related books, including *Breaking the Brass Ceiling: Women Police Chiefs and Their Paths to the Top*.



While researching that book, which was published in 2004, Schulz found some women were reluctant to draw attention to their ascension in the male-dominated culture. "Some women actually think the attention paid to their appointments can be a challenge," Schulz said. They don't want to be viewed as "some sort of freak," she said.

Wilson doesn't want that either. Thus her quandary: How does she champion the promotion of more women in law enforcement without drawing criticism from mostly male colleagues who may misconstrue her message as, "Hey, look at me." "I don't want to be perceived as a diva," she said. "I am the police chief. I just think this is an issue that needs attention."

*James Ragland writes on race and culture, education, social services and public health. Follow him on Twitter at @jamesragland61 and on Facebook at facebook.com/JamesRagland61.*



~ Faith is not knowing what the future holds, but who holds the future ~

My grandmother-in-law died this week and during the business of preparing my younger children for their first attendance at a funeral, comforting my husband and family, planning the trip around the holidays and work commitments, I found inspiration during this seemingly inopportune time. First, I was thinking of how fortunate my children are to have known their great-grandmother and I started thinking of so many things like how culturally different my husband's family is to mine. However culturally different they may be, there is an abundance of commonalities when considering their journey from a foreign land and lack of acceptance upon arrival. For my husband's side, it was about the plight of the Irish immigrant. Somewhere down the line, there were genuinely bold people who left their land in a leap of faith for a better life for themselves and their family.

My own grandmother was born in 1896, so I never met my great-grandparents; but I often wonder what life was like for them. Born in Puerto Rico while it was under Spanish rule, my grandparents had to wait a few decades after the Spanish-American War before they were given enough rights to travel as Americans. They didn't leave, at first. They had my dad and his siblings and as I understand it, things got pretty bad for everyone with the Great Depression and then WW II. With these problems and the dawn of air travel to New York, thousands of people each year were enticed to leave their native island of Puerto Rico and moved to New York between 1946 -1950. What would inspire these people to leave the only home they ever knew?

Where did they get the courage to leave - many knowing they could not speak the language of the main land- and yet they took a giant leap of faith? They wanted a better way of life than was available in Puerto Rico, and although each held personal reasons for migrating, their decision generally was rooted in the island's impoverished conditions. These people were brave. They were courageous and full of faith. Like them, many of our ancestors took huge risks to have a better life by traveling to America. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "*Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase.*"

While I admire and applaud these people for the courage they had to take that first step to leave the island and go to NY, I am thankful this is not the path my family followed. My father says we would have had much less opportunity there. Instead, my family averted New York altogether. They contracted their collective gardening and housekeeping skills for boat passage to Galveston, bound for Chandler, Arizona. Talk about a bold leap of faith! Not only were they leaving their native home with their children, they decided to go the path less (or perhaps, not yet) travelled.

None of us need to look very far down our ancestral line to discover that we come from people of great courage, strength, grit, and from whom saw possibilities ahead and were determined to improve their lives or even the lives of others. Many parallels can be seen in our own family history to the decisions many of us face today when we confront our options and our desires to move forward, especially as they relate to the challenges we discuss surrounding women in leadership, law enforcement and non-traditional roles. Pushing through barriers can be scary. Let's not fool ourselves; we are afraid to fail; afraid of rejection; afraid to lose. But isn't this when we truly learn and grow? Michael Jordan shares with us his feelings of failure and success of his own when he said: "I've missed more than 9000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. 26 times I've been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed."

If my grandparents had not had the courage to face their fears, break away from the familiar and get on that boat, I likely would not have become a police officer, would have never met my soul mate and have had the family I've got.

This gives me pause to ask myself (and it is my fervent hope that you will do the same): why should I not take that leap of faith to better conditions for my family and me on my own proverbial island? Looking back and finding inspiration through my ancestral line, I feel more assured and a strong draw to do more; to take the next leap.

I'll end by asking you to consider what Mark Twain said about exploring dreams. He said:

*"Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do, so throw off the bowlines, sail away from safe harbor, catch the trade winds in your sails.*

*Explore, Dream, Discover,"*



The Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas (LEMIT), at Sam Houston State University, Criminal Justice Center (CJC), Huntsville, Texas, invited Major Debra Schmidt, Harris County Sheriff's Office (LIFE Class 6) to participate in the professional police exchange visit of Texas Law Enforcement professionals to China October 8 to October 18, 2013.

LEMIT recognized the continuous efforts of Major Schmidt in the promotion and support to our law enforcement management and leadership initiatives at the Institute as well as the

Department of Criminal Justice. The visit to China, under the auspices of LEMIT, CJC, and the Zhejiang Police College, provided an opportunity for Texas law enforcement to be exposed to international perspectives on policing, comparative criminal justice philosophies, dialogue on universal crime trends and emergency issues as well as unique regional and cultural differences in policing.

Major Schmidt was among the delegates chosen to represent Texas law enforcement and the United States as ambassadors of best practices and concepts in crime prevention, deterrence, leadership and education. Participants were hosted and headquartered at the Zhejiang Public Security College in the city of Hangzhou, province of Zhejiang.

The delegation was headed by LEMIT Executive Director Dr. Rita Watkins.

Two of Austin's finest are making history as the first female leaders of the SWAT team. SWAT officers are highly skilled and trained and they respond 24 hours a day to the most severe circumstances. Now, a woman is with them, riding shotgun. Assistant Chief Jessica Robledo takes a



moment to introduce herself to the elite members of APD's SWAT team. "Nothing was every handed to me okay. You guys know what it takes to stay in here. To be in here," said Robledo. "It is my pleasure to work for you." For the first time, the all-male team is answering to two women with Robledo at the top and Lt. Katrina Pruitt as the direct supervisor. "Totally broke the glass ceiling," said Pruitt. Pruitt rides shotgun in the SWAT tanker to every call. "So, I've got eyes on as they're making entry," she said.

The last time women played a role in SWAT was in the 80s. Back then it was the Special Missions Team. They inspired Robledo as a young officer to work in narcotics. She broke barriers back then too. "They called us the jump out boys and I was the first female and they used to call me the jump out girl," Robledo said.

Pruitt worked in narcotics for 11 years and also served as a negotiator assisting SWAT. She gives possible reasons why SWAT may have remained male-dominated for 20 plus years. "It's not that they would take a female they have very strict guideline for their physical assessment," Pruitt said. "They're on call a lot. So a lot of female when they've got a few years on the department that may not be a role they want to take always being attached to their pager at any moment having to get up and go out to a SWAT call." Pruitt is still getting used to those calls. "It is pretty cool except for 3 a.m. when I have to get up and go to work. I keep telling these guys I'm not a morning person," she jokes. But Pruitt could not be more passionate about her job. She encourages other women to join her. "Women going forward they have an opportunity here. They have nothing but themselves holding them back," Pruitt said. "My advice is don't let your fear paralyze you. Fear of the unknown," Robledo said. "A lot of the time women may step back maybe they're not as big, as fast, as strong, but you know what? They're just as smart. They have just as much heart and they have that fire in their gut and they can do anything a man can do."

Lt. Pruitt is also over the bomb squad. Assistance Chief Robledo is in charge of all special operations which includes not only SWAT and the bomb squad, but the air unit, the K-9 unit. She also oversees the highway unit, the 9-1-1 center, victim services and special events



TABC Sgt. Sonia Salinas (Class 6) pictured here with Assistant Administrator Ed Swedberg, TABC Commissioners Jose Cuevas Jr., Steven M Weinberg M.D., J.D., Melinda s. Fredricks receiving her 20 year plaque with TABC



Congratulations to Kristine Miller (Class 7) on her promotion to Sergeant on November 25, 2013



## Female Officer Survival Course

March 24-27, 2014 (8am – 5pm)

Presented by: Safariland &  
The Plano Police Department



**Location:** Plano-Richardson Police Training Center – 4912 14<sup>th</sup> Street, Plano, Texas, 75074

**Course Description:** Become proficient in defensive and survival tactics designed for women. Designed by female law enforcement officers for female law enforcement officers, the goal of this course is to impart the skills and knowledge required to survive a fight for your life. Students will develop improved firearms accuracy, mental preparation and confidence through this challenging training education concept. Subjects include, but are not limited to:

Enhance shooters' fundamental firearms techniques

Develop advanced gun-fighting skills

Employ Defensive Tactics specific to the female office

Improve tactical decision making skills

Utilize practical application through Scenario Based Training (SBT)

**Instructor:** The Chief Instructor is Dorcia Meador, a 31 year veteran of the Fort Worth Police Department and is considered by many to be one of the best female shooters in the country. She is a 4-time women's NRA champion with honors. She also holds 5 national records for police pistol combat competitions, 5 in the 1500 PPC revolver and 4 national records in Police Pistol Combat semi-auto. Dorcia is joined by two other Instructors with impressive resumes to make this course fast paced and exciting.

**Who May Attend?:** Each student must be a sworn law-enforcement or correctional officer, federal agent, state-licensed security officer (OC only) or active military. Basic firearms proficiency is required. These courses are not available to civilians.

Tuition: \$425.

**Registration:** Register online with Safariland directly at this link:

<http://www.safariland.com/training/Patrol-Related/OfficerSurvivalforFemales.aspx>

Required equipment: Hat, Ear and Eye Protection, Body Armor, Duty Rig, Belts, Mag Pouches and Accessories, Duty Handgun, Firearm Training Replica (i.e. a Red Gun®), Minimum of Three Magazines 500 rounds of handgun ammunition, Certified Protective Equipment for FX® or Force on Force

For more information, contact:

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