Transcript of a Saint Paul Police oral history interview with

Constance Loraine Bennett

1996

2010

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by

Kateleen Cavett

at

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All pictures are from the Saint Paul Police Department collections and the personal files of the Bennett family.

ORAL HISTORY

Oral History is the spoken word in print.

Oral histories are personal memories shared from the perspective of the narrator. By means of recorded interviews, oral history documents collect spoken memories and personal commentaries of historical significance. These interviews are transcribed verbatim and minimally edited for accessibility. Greatest appreciation is gained when one can listen to an oral history aloud.

Oral histories don't follow the standard language usage of the written word. Transcribed interviews are not edited to meet traditional writing standards; they are edited only for clarity and understanding. The hope of oral history is to capture the flavor of the narrator's speech and convey the narrator's feelings through the timbre and tempo of speech patterns.

An oral history is more than a family tree with names of ancestors and their birth and death dates. Oral history is recorded personal memory, and that is its value. What it offers complements other forms of historical text, and does not always require historical corroboration. Oral history recognizes that memories often become polished as they sift through time, taking on new meanings and potentially reshaping the events they relate.

Memories shared in oral histories create a picture of the narrator's life – the culture, food, eccentricities, opinions, thoughts, idiosyncrasies, joys, sorrows, passions - the rich substance that gives color and texture to this individual life.

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HAND in HAND

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Constance Loraine Bennett

appointed police officer October 7, 1996;

and promoted to sergeant October 6, 2001

HONORS AND AWARDS

Honorable Discharge, U.S Air Force, 1993

Merit Commendation, Saint Paul Police, 1999, 2001, 2008

Dean's List, Concordia University, 2000, 2001

Minnesota Timberwolves, "A Hero in the Making" Award, Dec 18th, 2001

Minnesota Twins, "Totally Awesome Coaches" Award, May 21st, 2002

Merit Commendation Award, St Paul Police, 2002, 2004, 2009, 2010

Minnesota Juvenile Officers Institute Award, January 29th, 2002

Minnesota Association of Women Police Mentoring Award, January 24th, 2002

National Association of Police Organizations Top Cop Certificate nominee, June, 2002

CB: Connie Bennett

KC: Kate Cavett

CB: My name is Constance Loraine Bennett.

KC: And you are a sergeant with the Saint Paul Police Department.

CB: Yes.

KC: Let us just spend a couple of minutes talking about your early life. Where were you raised?

CB: I was born and raised in the south part of Minneapolis, Minnesota. I was raised on 43rd Street and Fourth Avenue. I had both parents in the home. They were married for thirty-four years. I have one brother who is now deceased and I have three sisters. I'm the second to the youngest in the family.

KC: Did you have any exposure to police growing up?

CB: The neighborhood I lived in was very, very quiet, so we really didn't have a lot of police officers in the neighborhood at all. In fact, I don't recall growing up seeing any police cars at all. I really don't. The first time I remember seeing a police car was they were driving by and we had a large German shepherd and his name was Tim and he was beautiful. They stopped and they wanted to know if we were interested in selling the dog to the department or something, because he was really, really gorgeous—which now I understand why they wanted him. That was probably when I was about eleven, twelve years old. But before then, I don't recall ever seeing a police car.

KC: When you were growing up, were you an athlete?

CB: Yes, I had played volleyball and my main sport was basketball, and then I ran track as well at Washburn High School.

KC: At what point did you become interested in being a police officer?

CB: One day – I was probably about twenty-two or twenty-one – and I called the police department because someone had hit a tree on our boulevard in front of our house. Now I know her name is--I think her name is Mylan Masson.

KC: Mylan Masson. She is very active in Minnesota Association of Women Police—MAWP and IAWP, International Association of Women Police.

CB: After she took the report, I asked her, "What does it take to be a police officer?" She sat there for about an hour explaining to me the process and what you needed to do. After we were done, I thanked her and she left and I remember I turned to her and went to the house and I said, "I'm not doing that." I remember saying that. "Naaaa, I'm not doing that."

But some reason and I can't tell you why—it was almost like that seed was planted in that moment, because probably about a year later, I was in the Air Force Reserves at the time, and about a year later, I enrolled in Minneapolis Community College for law enforcement.

KC: What took you into being in the military?

CB: My father, his name is William Bennett, he was in World War II at the age of sixteen. Growing up through the years, we kind of grew up in a military setting, as far as structure and discipline. He always talked about the military, but there was something about the way he raised us to make sure that we had that discipline. It was instilled in me, so I decided to go ahead and join the military. I think it was back in 1986. I joined the Air Force and it was nice because it helped pay for school and then also it gave you the opportunity to travel and I had the pleasure of being able to travel overseas and to Germany and Amsterdam. It was a great experience.

KC: How long were you in the military?

CB: For six years.

KC: Did that structure, that discipline, that wearing uniforms, do you think that helped lay a foundation for wanting to go into the police department?

CB: No, I don't think it did. I mean, for me, I can only be honest and speak the truth and that is that for me that day when Mylan was at my door, I feel now looking

back that that was just a calling. I know it was a calling. I feel that being in the military though was like a preparation stage to help prepare for that calling. I didn't realize it at the time. It wasn't until I was in the police academy, when we were standing there in formation and it was a struggle for some people, but I remember standing there thinking, "This is really boring." But it was boring because I had already been through all this but on a more intense level. I was able to focus and disappear mentally and still maintain this because of the military. I believe that that was prepping me for what my calling really was at the time. I just wasn't aware.

KC: What did you do in the military?

CB: I was in inventory management, which is base supply, so my job was to order parts for aircraft that were down, or other units; if they needed parts or service we would order the parts. I was in MICAP in base supply, which means that we were responsible for making calls and locating the parts worldwide. That was nice because when I was out in Seattle, we had the opportunity to search for parts for Air Force One.[1] That was awesome, to be able to do that. Air Force One had landed during our time out there in Seattle, so I understood the importance of locating them parts because they had to get the plane up and out of there, I think it was the next day.

KC: Now this was the Reserves. What were you doing in your civilian life and then you would spend a certain amount of—one weekend a month in the Reserve?

CB: Right in my senior year in high school, I got a job with International Multi-Foods Corporation, which was located in the city center of downtown Minneapolis. I started in the mailroom, got promotions to payroll personnel and then treasury

[1] **Air Force One** is the official air traffic control call sign of any United States Air Force aircraft carrying the President of the United States. [Wikipedia]

and then exec role. After that, about five years later, I think I was employed with the Federal Reserve Bank, downtown on Marquette Avenue and I think I stayed there for about five years. I was a check clerk and then a sorter operator. Then I was a treasury clerk, which my responsibility was the treasury bonds and the bare bonds that are kept at the Federal Reserve Bank. That was my responsibility to maintain the security of them. From there, I left there and went to the United States Postal Service, which was three or four blocks down Marquette and there I was a mail clerk and then a sorter operator as well for the Post Office. I was there probably a year when I realized that that wasn't what I wanted to do. That is when I started school and went to school in the evening and then I worked at the post office during the night shift, until I graduated from school, I think in 1993.

KC: What were the signs for you recognizing that this was a real calling to become a police officer?

CB: Because after Mylan Masson came to my door that day and I said, "Nah I'm not doing that," even though I started school and finished and got my degree in law enforcement, my two year--a job came up the same week for the police department in Minneapolis and also for the postal service. They both offered me a conditional job offer the same exact week, within two days. The post office was offering quite a bit more money, so I made the mistake of choosing the money, but you are young, you are looking at the money, so I did that and I gave up the conditional job offer with Minneapolis. It was probably about four to six months into working at the post office and literally every time I heard the sound of the siren it felt like my soul was bleeding. It was really weird.

After a month or so, when I would go out and break, I would hear the sound of the sirens. I went home and I just asked for guidance. I prayed and asked for

guidance and I asked for God to send me a sign. If I made a mistake, send me a sign. The next day I got a call from a law enforcement training center. They said, "Hi, this is Law Enforcement Training Center. Your name was on this list for skills and your name came up. Now we were wondering if you wanted the slot. If not we are going to move on." I told her--I said, "I guess this means 'yes.' So I took it. That is when I knew it was a calling, because I had asked and got my answer the very next day. That is when I started skills.

KC: So at this point you had already finished the two year degree.

CB: Yes. And I was still working nights full time at the Post Office. And then I did skills full time during the day.

KC: You are working full time nights and you are doing skills full time day. Whoa.

CB: Full time during the day. And my daughter was probably about three or four years old I think. I look back now and I must have been crazy [chuckles].

KC: How do you manage that plus parenthood?

CB: I don't know. I look back now and it's like that is an incredible amount of strength. That is an incredible amount of determination and drive. If I thought of doing that today—I know there is no way I could do it today. I would be too tired. But I think for me, it was being guided spiritually I think and just listening and believing in myself internally, from my internal compass, versus letting others guide me. I have always been that way. Just the balance between my job and skills and my daughter, it was a struggle but I made sure to try to balance them. It seemed to work well.

KC: Where did you do skills?

CB: The Law Enforcement Training Center on Energy Park Drive in Saint Paul. I think I did skills in 1994.

KC: Then where did you apply?

CB: I think the easier question is where did I not apply? [That] would probably be the easier one. I applied everywhere, all the counties—Anoka, Ramsey, Hennepin. All the cities—Edina, Richfield, Bloomington, Eagan, Minneapolis, Saint Paul, all of them. It was a long journey.

KC: Did you have an idea of where you would like to work?

CB: Minneapolis, only because I was born and raised there. I didn't have any awareness of the history of policing or anything. You know how you get comfortable and just want to stay close to home. In skills—this is when I started to notice a pattern, because everybody in skills wanted Saint Paul. Everyone wanted Saint Paul. I remember listening to them talk. I go, "What is so big about Saint Paul?" I didn't know. It's funny when you look back now and you see it.

KC: What was your assessment? What was so good about Saint Paul?

CB: The words that I got was Saint Paul, back then, was apparently considered the elite, the department to work for, the department that set the tone, the standards, the image. They had a very, very high, strong image in policing. Because I had never crossed the river, because being from Minneapolis you generally don't go to Saint Paul and vice versa, but I had no idea. In fact, I could not even tell you what their uniforms looked like for Saint Paul back then. To me, I was looking at everybody like "Hmm, strange [chuckles]."

KC: Were there any particular challenges in skills?

CB: Not in skills, because I had been in the military. For all of this, all the training for policing, I think if you have had any military training, it's really not a struggle. The part I remember being a struggle for me was just I wanted to hurry up and get through it. I could finally relax, because I had been going to school and working full time. I have always worked full time since I graduated from high school. Everything I have done, all my college education, everything was done

on the side. I just wanted to relax. To me it wasn't a struggle at all. It was just getting through it, because sometimes in the military you would have to stand in formation for three to five hours. So to have to stand in formation for twenty minutes or so wasn't too complicated, because they kind of teach you how to maintain in formation and stuff. I don't think skills was a struggle at all. Actually I found skills to be very rewarding. It was fun.

KC: And you were an athlete, so learning to fight or the physical—

CB: —contact wasn't foreign. No. And actually when I look back on my life overall, and I try to tell my daughter this to this day, because I look back, I see where every step in my life has mattered and brought me to where I'm. I'm able to see how all these were tools to be utilized for whatever your purpose is in life. I tell her, nothing goes wasted, either the good or the bad.

KC: Now from 1994 you are hired in the fall of '96 in Saint Paul. So it's a lot of interviewing in between?

CB: That was all the departments that I had applied for. The struggle became—back then, equal opportunity was in place and some things I did here in skills, which confused me, too: "Connie, you are going to get a job easily because of equal opportunity." And I remember saying, "What are you talking about?" Well, you know, they have to hire minorities first or something—something was going on back then. I can't really remember, but I just didn't say anything. I remember hearing it a lot toward me and then when I went out and finally started looking for a job, the reality set in that this was a struggle. That this market is saturated and that for one job there may be three to four hundred people that show up. So I really struggled for those two years—three years actually, because that part of the process I was taken aback by, unaware that there would be struggles. I was just thinking I would finish skills and get out and get a job, but that didn't

happen. For every time you apply to another agency, what happens is the application process gets thicker and thicker, because you have got to put down everywhere else that you have applied.

I got conditional job offers with Minneapolis and with Hennepin County and I went through the whole process—the agility, everything, all the way to the conditional job offer. The memory that sticks out more than anything is—and this tells you how Saint Paul must have been elite too, because Hennepin County said, "We have a question for you." I said, "What's that?" They said, "We're hiring you." I said, "Okay." They said, "Well, we have a question for you." I said, "What?" They said, "If Saint Paul called tomorrow, would you take the job?" I said, "Yep." The next day I got a letter in the mail and they took back the conditional job offer.

KC: [Laughs] Was Saint Paul going through the process with you at this point, too?

CB: Yup. I had just applied there, so we had not even done anything else. I was shocked by that and I thought, "Hmm." But the blessing was—and then Ramsey County Sheriffs, same thing. I went all the way through the entire process and that went wrong, too. It just went bad. By then, my spirit was starting to be broke. I was questioning that I had been obedient spiritually and had done all these things and there were all these obstacles now. "Now," I'm starting to wonder, "was I just doing this myself or were YOU really guiding me to do this spiritually?"

I think it was in April—I don't know why I keep remembering the Oklahoma bombing, but I remember my phone rung, I answered it and it was Bill Finney.[2] He was the chief. He said, "Is this Constance?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "How are you?" I said, "Fine. How are you?" He said, "Fine. This is Bill Finney." He said, "I have a question for you." I said, "Yeah?" He said, "How would you like to come and work for the Saint Paul Police Department?" I was so exhausted from that application process that I even cursed. I said, "You gotta be shit. . . me." I said that right on the phone, but I realize now I was so exhausted that I said it just like reality, like I'm tired. He said, "No, I'm serious." [Laughs] I was like, "Oh, I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to say that." But he said, "No, I'm serious. I would love for you to come work for us and serve the City of Saint Paul." I remember I hung up the phone in disbelief. In disbelief, because it had been a long, long journey there trying to find a job. Me and my daughter's life changed from that day on. It really did. It was incredible.

KC: So your daughter is mid-elementary school at this point?

CB: She was five.

KC: Now who is supporting you with your daughter with all the academy? Early police work is strange hours. You were working nights before that.

CB: Yes. My mother was keeping my daughter during that time. I would keep her when I was home sleeping all the time, which was a struggle getting sleep then, but generally it was between my mother and then sometimes she would stay at

[2] William "Corky" Kelso Finney was appointed January 4, 1971; and promoted to sergeant April 1 1978. He was the first Black male promoted to lieutenant on March 8, 1982. He was promoted to captain February 23, 1987; and became Saint Paul's first Black police chief July 17, 1992. He retired June 30, 2004.

Danielle and Connie Bennett

my sister's house, so it would vary. But it worked. It worked. If you have that kind of energy, it will work.

KC: Any memories that you have about the academy, which would have been in 1996?

CB: Yes. I remember that they kept emphasizing that our academy was one of the biggest. We had forty. I don't know if you remember that academy, but there was forty and then I think there was either twenty women and twenty men or—and it was the most they had hired that were over the age of thirty. I remember Nancy Diperna quoting in the paper that we wanted people to join the police department who had lived, who had had some life experience.

KC: How old were you when you started the academy?

CB: Twenty-nine. And this is something else that is really interesting is one day I said, "Okay, if this is You telling me to do this, God, then I want to put that badge on by the age of thirty. If this is really *You*." That is what I said. My birthday is January 19th. We graduated January 18th. Now that was incredible. I did say that and sure enough it came true. I was older in age compared to a lot of the people in my academy, but I found that we had quite a few that were older. It was almost like we were automatically put into roles to set the tone a little bit. You could feel that and you could see that. Yes. It had a certain young feeling to it, but it also had the older, mentor, guidance feeling to it, too, so it balanced out really well. I remember that and I remember the diversity. It was different from

when I was going through skills and everything. It seemed like life was changing to become more diverse. I saw that, the differences there.

KC: How many women in your academy?

CB: I think there were twenty women and I think there were probably twenty men. I know it was close to even-steven. I remember that.

KC: How many people of color?

CB: Three. Sergeant Bryant Gaden,[3] Greg Williams. I know we had one Asian female, which was Lori Eide.[4] And an Asian male, Lue Vang[5] and me. There was such a variety, which was neat to see, I think for me.

KC: Any particular memories that you have of the academy?

CB: We were up at Camp Ripley and there were forty of us. Brad Hazelett,[6] that was our president in our academy and he must have thought, "Today I want somebody else to march the academy," so he had me do it. He had me march them to the building we were going to. He knew I was in the military, too, so he said, "Why don't you march them today?" I said, "Ehh…" He said, "Come on." I said, "Okay, okay." So I marched them. I went to leadership school in the military, so for me that was just standard. I always marched the troops to wherever we were going in the military, so to do that was funny because it brought back memories and it was really nice.

[3] Bryant Gaden was appointed police officer October 7, 1996; promoted to sergeant February 8 2001.

[4] Lori Eide Goulet was appointed police officer September 21, 1996.

[5] Lue Vang was appointed police officer September 23, 1996.

[6] Brad Hazelett was appointed police officer October 7, 1996; promoted to sergeant October 4, 2008.

One of the recruits, Sean Filiowich,[7] he could not figure out how to march. It was just funny. He kept struggling with it. I remember saying to him, "Heel Filiowich, heel. Like put your heel into the ground." And he was working on it as I was marching them [laughs]. He was just so like, "I'm going to get this." And that memory always sticks out to me, how you could tell he didn't have any military experience, but he was really trying to get it. That is when I figure some of us that had lived were doing the mentoring thing at that point.

KC: Did the women stick together in the academy?

CB: No. No. That is where the age difference played a role I think. Your mind set was in a different place. Sometimes when you are younger, it's about survival. Like when I was in the military, it was about survival, but they were forcing us and teaching us to work together as a team. Well, when you come right into the police academy, it's about survival. Back then they were just really getting women strongly into the department. I mean that was a large, large class of women. It was competitive. Sometimes you could sense the competitiveness, and that part for me was hard, because I have always come from a team work concept. If I saw one of the girls—like there was a female, her name was Stephanie Torok,[8] and she went up the rope during the agility test and then when she got up there, she got stuck and she couldn't get down. You know, you just lock up, because you are not used to it. In the military, that was standard. So as soon as I saw she was stuck and she wasn't coming down and it was timing on the test, I went over to the rope, at the bottom of the rope—because it had to

[7] Sean Filowich was appointed police officer October 7, 1996.

[8] Stephanie Torok was appointed police officer October 7, 1996; she resigned June 10, 1997.

be about fifteen feet up there, I think. I said, "Steph, listen to me. Listen to my voice. Listen to me." I said, "I need you to put your heel right next to the rope and grip it. Once you get it, then I need you to do the other foot the same way. One at a time. Don't look down. Just put your heel right up to the rope." She did and she was able to come down. But the reason I did it was because her fear was taking that step and falling. So if she's not looking but focusing, it will ground her enough to be able to make it down. And she did. And I did that because I believe that when you are a team, you are as strong as your weakest link, that you should be there. They teach you that. You go back and get that person. That is kind of the mindset that I had during the academy. Did everyone have that mindset? I can't say that, no. But for me I was looking out for them and especially the younger ones, and she was one of the youngest, to help them through. Especially if they hadn't had any military background or anything.

It's a very stressful environment. For me I think and the women, it varied depending on your age. Another thing is you have your different groups of people like you do at high school or anywhere else you go, employment. You can either want to be a part of the in crowd, with acceptance, because you think maybe it will get you through quicker or easier if you are a part of the in-crowd. Or you have people who are your lone wolves that stand alone and don't want to be a part of the in crowd. They just want to make it through and move on. There were a few officers like that. It just depended on where you thought you would fit to survive and make it through it.

KC: Were you independent or did you want to be part of the in crowd?

CB: I never wanted to be part of the in crowd. I just never have. In fact, it's funny because I didn't realize how independent I was until I walked through Western

District one day as a sergeant and I was a new sergeant, probably about a year on, and Commander Tim Trooien[9] goes, "Here she comes. Here comes that lone wolf." [laughs] And I looked at him and I said, "What do you mean?" [laughs] And he was like, "Here she comes." But he knew if I left I was up to something, I doing something, working on something, and when I came back, I would bring what it was I was working on. He just let me do that. He was like, "She does not need a whole group around her and if she does, she will ask, but before then just let her go." When he said that, I was like, "Oh my gosh, that is funny. He labeled me the lone wolf."

And it's a perfect fit, because I do—I enjoy—investigations was the best for me. I love it. To me, it's like the love of the hunt. It was wonderful. In the academy, I was kind of a lone wolf there, you could say, too, but if I saw somebody in trouble or needed support, I have always been that type of person. There were like four or five girls in the academy that I would communicate with on the phone a lot, and we supported each other through the tough times in trying to encourage each other to hang in there even when, like, say one of us wanted to give up and call it quits. We would, "Come on, you can do this. You can do this. Come on." We supported each other very strongly.

KC: Who supported you? You were supporting others, but did you run into any challenges and was there anyone that supported you?

CB: My support came from my family, daughter, my girlfriend Steph. In fact Steph, she decided to resign from the department [when] we were on FTO. But we are

[9] Tim Trooien was appointed police officer May 22, 1972; promoted to sergeant March 9, 1986; lieutenant September 1, 1998; title changed to commander January 1, 2000; he retired May 31, 2002.

still the best of friends to this day. She was my main support then and I was hers. We had a great friendship.

KC: What is Steph's last name?

CB: Well it was Stephanie Torok, but now it's Stephanie Wilharbor.

KC: What about Field Training? What were the challenges in Field Training for you?

CB: The challenges in Field Training were cultural issues. Sometimes you can be stereotyped as an African-American woman as being too aggressive, so I think for me I was holding back a little bit during Field Training because I didn't want to come across as being too aggressive. I was in an environment I wasn't familiar with, so I would venture out more on the comfortable side versus just being aggressive and getting out there. The struggle for me was I think in phase one and two. I had very relaxed FTO [Field Training Officer]—a couple FTOs who were very relaxed, and then when I got an FTO that is very aggressive and very go-go-go and hard-working. Then when I got to phase three, to them it looks like I had missed a phase, I missed something, I had not done, and I wasn't up to where I needed to be. What I have found is that the struggle on FTO was if there was a difference in personalities in policing styles with the FTOs. Once by phase three, I figured out what had happened so I got extended in phase four. Cory Manthei[10] was my final FTO when they extended me in field training.

They extended me, I remember that, in phase four and then they put me with Mamie Singleton[11] for a little bit. She is African American. Then they put me with

[10] Corrine Marie "Cory" Manthei was appointed police officer June 15, 1987; promoted to sergeant January 13, 2001; and retired December 31, 2007.

[11] Mamie Lanford Singleton was appointed police officer July 11, 1977; promoted to sergeant July 3, 1999; and retired August 2, 2006.

Cory Manthei. Well Cory Manthei was a very, very excellent FTO and she would verbalize everything to me, talk to me: "What do you think you should be doing right now? That call just came out. It said a burglary in progress. We're about eight blocks away. What should we be doing?" She would give me an example like that. What she was looking for, which I didn't realize, was that assertive behavior that I was holding back on. She was looking for that. I didn't realize that was what she was looking for.

My grandma died during that fourth phase and that made me exhausted, with the funeral and everything, so it was at that point where I just—"I don't care anymore." I was numb. Cory and I were on a call. It was a prostitute and I gave her a tag and I was trying get her to leave. I said, "Okay, you can leave now." She just sat there and then started talking back to me and I got so angry. I remember I raised my voice and I said, "Go! Now!" Cory was just quiet and then the next call I got, I handled all by myself and got Public Works to clean up the problem. It was some kind of spill or whatever.

Then we went back to the team and the next thing I know Cory says, "You're off FTO." I'm like, "Okay? What? I'm confused." [laughs] It was in the middle of my shift and I was off FTO. Then I went home and I always try to reflect on experiences and that is what I saw. She was waiting for me to show that. She obviously knew it was there, but I wasn't showing it on the outside, because I had this fear that was culturally based that if I came off too assertive as an African-American woman that it would be looked at in a negative way. I learned from that. Yes [chuckles].

KC: As a policewoman, did you find the times to be assertive and the other times to not be?

CB: Passive, yes. Yes. Yes and actually being an African-American female from the city has been a tremendous advantage on the street. A tremendous advantage. People skills, I have always had them. The ability to talk to people, like talk to them, face to face, talk to them, and not at them or down to them. I'm not that type of person. Combining all of it was a huge asset, very, very good asset. And knowing when to be assertive and when to pull back and that it was okay if I needed to.

Officer Bennett

1998

Probably about two months after I got off FTO. down there by Western Avenue, we were at a standoff. The police department was with the community and I was getting ready to leave and go home, but then something said turn and go down the street and see what is going on. I would say we had the majority of the cars in west district there. When I got there, our police officers were in a circle with their backs to each other and the crowd had us all at a standstill. It was all African-American culture, the community. I remember I got out of my car in shock. There was something terribly wrong here. I had dealt with the African-American female sitting on the curb about four or five hours earlier. They wanted to put her in the squad, but nobody wanted to touch her because the community was literally waiting for someone to touch her. I got out my car not even thinking. I shut the door. I walked right through our officers in the circle, walked right up the girl, and I said, "What are you doing? Get up, girl! Come on, let's go!" She got up with me

and the crowd allowed me to put her in the squad, and then they drove away with her, and then it just dispersed. But I had connected with her earlier—none of the officers knew that—because there was a call out earlier on her. Then sure enough, here we are again. I knew going home that day after I reflected that the only reason they allowed me to do that was because of the color of my skin. That is the day that I knew that that was an asset. I never forgot that, because they were all just standing still and nobody moved. I utilized it.

KC: When else have you been able to utilize that asset?

CB: With our officers, too. I was on a call as a backup officer for one of our sergeants now and she was dealing with him on a domestic, so he came back with a warrant and she was going to arrest him. We were in an apartment and as she went to tell him to turn around and put his hands behind his back, he refused. Now he is African American, the officer is Caucasian. I'm the backup officer, so I'm just sitting there because if she is handling it, you are just there to back her up. She kept telling him put his hands behind his back and he was refusing, mouthing off to her, talking crazy to her. He was just talking really crazy to her, disrespectful. I remember that. He was challenging her, and I got very, very frustrated, waited for about a minute, and then I grabbed him. Grabbed him and put him up against the wall and I spoke with him in that aggressive tone, so I switched, I changed. After it was over, he was very compliant. He turned around, put his hands behind his back, we cuffed him, and she put him in the squad and drove off with him downtown to arrest him. She got ahold of me later and she said, "I just want to say thank you." I said, "Oh, well you're welcome. It's just I got tired of listening to that and there's only so much I'm gonna listen to." She said, "No, no, no, because I want to tell you though," she said, "all the

way downtown he was so apologetic to me." [both Laugh] I was like, "Well, he should have been because that was disrespectful."

KC: He was a young, Black man?

CB: He wasn't that young, actually. He probably was in his twenty-eight to thirty-two, I think. But he was from Chicago and he was mouthing off pretty bad and there was a side of me that I could feel was losing tolerance at that point and I did. I was like, "No, we are done here. We are not listening to any more of this." So it was very, very productive and it can be at times. It really, really can be. I have not had any problems at all working West district or Central, or—I have not worked East, but it has been very enjoyable.

KC: When you got off of FTO, then you were in West?

CB: Yes.

KC: And then Central and back to West. So you spent a couple of years on the streets?

CB: Yes.

KC: Any particular memories that you have about that time?

CB: Well, Wheelchair Freddy was an African-American guy in a wheelchair. He was always on University and Grotto. I was just so confused why his feet were so torn up and what happened to him, his history. They wanted me to search him on FTO and he looked really bad and I was like, "Oof," and I didn't know if—but he had drugs on him. He must have sensed I was hesitant to search him and he said, "That's all right, sista. That's alright. I know this ain't you. I know it's them." I looked at him confused a little bit like, listen to him. Well, I asked the history later on that guy in the wheelchair, because everybody knew who Wheelchair Freddy was. They said he had been running from police and he was shot in the back and that is why he was in a wheelchair. You could tell his

hostility toward the police or whatever and his stumps of his toes had been cut off. It was just not good.

After I got off FTO, I came across him. I talked to him and I asked him the history of his life and he told me. We talked for a while, and I just said, "Well, I just want to know, because that day—" he said, "I remember when you guys stopped me and they told you that you had to search me or whatever." He said, "I remember you." And then it dawned on me, you are one of the few African-American females out here; you are probably sticking out like a sore thumb [chuckles]. Well, I was taking my daughter--years and years later, I was taking my daughter to a Timberwolves game in Minneapolis. We got to the corner at the stoplight. We were walking from the game, and I look down and I'm standing next to Wheelchair Freddy. I could not believe it. He was still going. This was probably two years ago and he was still going. The memory that I have from that is the fact that even though there are people we consider from the street, if you talk to them decently they never forget. They never forget.

And I never had a fear of going anywhere in Saint Paul, even unarmed. I never, ever had that fear. I think what sticks out the most is the communication with people on the street. If they do something wrong, yes, you have got to book them and take them to jail or whatever. and I always tell them that, but what I try to do is when you take them to jail, this prostitute, I would always ask her, "What radio station do you listen to?" She said, "KMOJ" And she said, "Why?" I said, "Because I think it's a good thing for you to listen to it right now." The whole way downtown to jail, I played KMOJ, the music on it. She broke down in the back of the squad and you see them for who they really are, their true

personalities and stuff. But it's a bad situation, you got to go to jail, so why not ease the pain a little bit? That was the part of working the street that I really enjoyed. Do you know three years ago I saw her again?

KC: Is she still working the street?

CB: Yes. So you see people over and over again.

KC: At what point did you feel comfortable in the style of officer that you have created for yourself? Did you try out different styles early on?

CB: I remember the first three months being uncomfortable off of FTO. It was the first three months, because you are so used to somebody being there to tell you if you are doing the correct procedures or dealing with people in a decent manor or whatever. So the first three months, it's hard to find your style because that security blanket is no longer there. I think what helped me come into my own earlier was for one, I was a parent; for two, I was older; three, the military; four, I grew with both parents in the home, with that had a military background, upbringing. So I had all those tools to use in my tool box. If this one didn't work it would be like, "Oh, shoot, go grab another tool to use." After that, it wasn't hard at all.

I think the way you communicate with people is the most important thing, because I had someone just yesterday saying to me, "You know most people don't like police." I said, "Tell me something I don't know." Then she said, "But a lot of them have a right or have a reason." I said, "Yeah, I know. I agree. Some people are gonna have a reason to like them, not like them." But she was trying to explain to me the perception of police from some people's compass point. When you work the street, you always keep that in mind. For one, you don't know what this person has been through before you got to them. For two, you

don't know the treatment that they have receive from someone else, so you take all these into factor when you are dealing with people. If you are dealing with somebody with extensive, long police history, it's probably going to be way more aggressive toward you, so you learn to take all of that into consideration.

KC: Has there been a time when you have had to be very physically aggressive?

CB: Yeah. This is where that passive aggressive thing is very important. I got a call up on Summit Avenue at the church there on Lexington—I can't remember the name of the church, but right on the corner there.

KC: Used to be Saint Luke's.[12]

CB: Okay, that sounds familiar. One of their employees was kind of mentally ill. The backup car was Sergeant Bryant Gaden and I got there first. He was no bigger than 5'6", White male, pretty lean, maybe 180. He was up in the main part of the church and they said he was the pastor, like a minister, but I don't know if he was of that church. I said, "Sir, can I get you to come with me please?" I was approaching him from the back and he turned around. He said, "No weapons shall be used in the house of the Lord." For a second I looked up like, "Is that true?" Because I didn't want to disrespect and I'm in the church. For just that second it was like that moral dilemma inside of me, and I felt it. Just as I felt that moral dilemma, he grabbed me. He came toward me and grabbed my arms and I swung him to the ground. Then the fight was on because I remember my radio went flying, but it was hooked, so only the other piece of it went flying. I had him on the ground, and I said, "Sir, I need to stop. I need you to stop." And he would not, so then I was able to get my mace and spray him. I thought it was going to work right away, it didn't. I was like, "Oh, my goodness, this is not

[12] Saint Luke Catholic Church/ Saint 'Thomas More Catholic Church, 1065 Summit Avenue, Saint Paul

happening." So I dropped the mace. and then I grabbed his shoulders and did the knee kicks that they taught us and that seemed to work a lot better. Then before I knew it, out of nowhere Sergeant Gaden came through and just contained him and got him instantly under control. By then the mace had kicked in. It was interesting. Called to a church you don't think that that is what you are going to get, but that was what I got. I think with the training and everything, I was able to take his momentum and swing him to the ground, so it helped me out tremendously that day. But we got him down to the hospital. He was put on a seventy-two hour hold. He wasn't taken to jail or anything.

KC: No charges?

CB: No, just seventy-two hour hold.

KC: And I hear you pulling out the different tools you have been taught.

CB: Yeah. They tell you the continuum. If one does not work, go to the next, go to the next. That was interesting to me, how that mace didn't work right away [laughs]. I was like, "You are kidding me, right?"

KC: You become a sergeant in 2001 and you are in the Western district as a sergeant. What was your assignment as a sergeant in Western district?

CB: I was the Burglary investigator and my job was to investigate any burglaries, garage, commercial, residential. I-94 down to West Seventh Street.

KC: How did you like that?

CB: Loved it. I loved it. There was something about keeping people safe and I have always believed that it's a struggle to be out here in the world and try to maintain and just deal with people every day, so when you go home, your home is your haven. It's the one place you can go where you should feel safe and relaxed. When someone's home was burglarized, I would take it personal,

because that is the one place I know I go, when I take all this armor I have on and take it off and put it on the coat hook. I get home, it's peace, quiet, serene. When you can violate that in somebody, it's not a good feeling, so I always came from that perspective when I was investigating cases. There were a lot of cases where you would have—like that one night, they broke into I-can't-tell-you-how-many homes down near Randolph and Snelling. It was so many, and the people were in there asleep and it made the 5:00 A.M. news. I mean, it made the papers for days and days.

KC: Did they call you in in the middle of the night?

CB: I think it was early, because we got moving really quick on that case, I remember. We were able to track the car. I mean literally one home, the homeowner—the neighbor saw them break in, going through the window of his neighbor's house. He got a bat and ran out the house and was waiting for them to come out of his neighbor's home and chased them down the street and was able to get a plate. That was our only lead, so by the next day we had the car, the suspects, we had everything. It was incredible. It was sad because children are in the home.

Connie Bennett 1999

So when I interviewed the suspects one of them told me everything. That is the importance of the people skills. He told me that everybody—and they put this in the paper, I think, because I shared it. He told me that everybody comes in their house and walks in the house and puts their keys right on the counter, usually by the back door near the kitchen, and women always put their purses there, too. He said, "So all you gotta do is crack

the door open a little bit and reach around and grab it and you're gone. You're good to go." Then he turned and looked at me and said, "You're learning something today, aren't you?" I said, "Oh yeah. Keep talking." And he did. He shared with me the mindset of a criminal and that is what I needed to see to better understand how this was so easy when everybody is sleeping.

So they were charged, and they did prison time. We did several warrants. It was a lot of work, and then I also knew that one of them had to live in the neighborhood, because they felt too comfortable. Sure enough, we located that home, too, and did warrants there. It was incredible, but for me the frustration came in the fact that now they have got to call in their credit cards, now they have got to change the locks on their doors. Now they have to do all these things. If I wasn't a homeowner, I would not get that. If I wasn't someone who has had to in the past call something in like that and cancel this, I would not get that. But the excruciating pain and the frustration you go through and the violation, when you put yourself in that person's shoes, you are able to empathize on how they must be feeling. If you can give them some peace in that experience, then you do that, or some security or some sense of "this is going to be okay," then you do that.

When I did burglaries, it was the hunt. I enjoyed making the wrong right. That is the way I looked at it. By bringing them in, it's giving the victims a sense of justice and peace as well. That is why I loved it, because it wasn't a case of hammering the bad boy, it was a case of—it's a win-win. Because those boys [who were burglarizing] were pretty young. Who is to say that that wasn't the

moment that stopped them? You never know. I love it. It's the best job I have had so far, to tell you the truth [chuckles].

KC: Now you have also been a school resource officer a couple of times.

CB: Yes. I was a school resource officer in the Rondo Complex:[13] Benjamin Mays, Museum Magnet, and then Capitol Hill.

KC: They are all elementary and junior high schools?

CB: Right there on Dale and Concordia. So I really enjoyed that and it allowed me to be creative. My daughter was really young at the time, the same age as the DARE[14] kids, so she was able to be a part of everything, too, which was great. We

D.A.R. E. Dreamers

2000-2001

all the different parades they do in Saint Paul. I had the girls in my D.A.R.E. class participate in the parades. We made costumes and it was just exciting and I loved that job, too. I loved that job.

KC: How many years were you a D.A.R. E. officer?

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[13] The Rondo Complex of Saint Paul Public Schools is located at 560 Concordia/Old Rondo at Dale.

[14] D.A.R.E.—**D**rug **A**buse **R**esistance **E**ducation. D.A.R.E. is a police officer-led series of classroom lessons that teaches children that police officers can be their friends and promotes drug and violence-free lives. Founded in Los Angeles in 1983, nationally taught in grades kindergarten -12. In Saint Paul D.A.R. E. was taught 1994 – 2003, and taught only in the 5th grade.

CB: I want to say two to three. It has got to be two to three. I don't know. It wasn't that long. It had to be more than two, though, because I remember doing the parades two years in a row, because it made the front page of the *Pioneer Press* the first year. Yeah.

KC: Any other experiences as a D.A.R.E. officer?

CB: Yes. I went in there to teach D.A.R.E. at the Benjamin Mays School. This is where my culture helped a little bit, too, I think. But they were just out of control. Those kids were out of control. They were not listening. Some of them were just very defiant in class. It was pretty much all African-American and one girl threw her D.A.R.E. book over the table. In the middle of me teaching, she just shoved it over her desk and it dropped on the floor. I stopped in the middle of class and I said, "You pick that up right now." And then I felt myself changing from professionalism to mom mode [laughs]. She got up and we waited. She got up and walked around her desk and picked up the D.A.R.E. book and put it back on her desk. Well that day I got so frustrated. I remember I left there. I walked out of class. I was so very frustrated with that class. I will never forget that. I went home and I felt so defeated. I did. I felt so defeated and something in me said, "No, you are not going to give up on them. You're just not going to do it." So I went back the next day and they were all sitting there like, "Oh, you were really angry yesterday." I said, "What is it that you want from me?" Just like that, to all of them. There was silence in that classroom. Then one kid spoke up. I said, "What is it?" And then he said, "Well, you don't understand something." He said, "You come in here teaching us this D.A.R.E. program, telling us don't do drugs, telling us this, telling us that." He said, "You don't know what we go home and see every day. You don't know what we see on the corner when we walk home from school. So what you're saying in this room and what we see, it's

different." Hmm, okay. They told me. So I had to redesign my D.A.R.E. training according to inner city. So I did that.

I did my lessons in a way that inner-city kids could understand it, went to the police property room, got the drug kit. During the third lesson of D.A.R.E., I would always bring in the drug kit, show them cocaine, show them all this other stuff and what it was. Then what I allowed them to do is role play scenarios. If someone was to walk up to them and try to offer them drugs or something. At the graduation, the entire class role played for their parents. We had six different scenarios and they role played for their parents. The entire class did. And that is the way I set the program up when I taught from then on. They loved it and the parents thought it was entertaining, funny. They loved it. But you could tell they understood now.

One day I was at Highland High School, a year ago and I walked through the front door and the boy goes—he is at the check-in desk. He goes, "Hey, did you teach D.A.R.E.?" I said, "Yeah. Who wants to know?" [chuckles] He said, "'Cause you taught me. You were my D.A.R.E. officer." I said, "Really?" He said, "Yeah." I said, "Did you learn anything?" He said, "I don't do drugs." I said, "Well impressive. Very impressive." I thought that was interesting that he remembered me, but I don't remember him. I don't.

KC: As you said, there are not a lot of Black women in uniform in Saint Paul.

CB: Yes. So that really made that whole period very rewarding, that moment he said that.

KC: What is the difference between the curriculum that you are given for D.A.R.E. and teaching it to inner city kids.

CB: It's idealism. It's not realism. The problem is the reality was missing. Ideally, we don't want you to do drugs. Ideally, we can tell you what could happen, but the realistic part of it was missing. In their eyes, they had already lived the reality. One kid pulled me aside and told me what was going on outside the classroom. She told me what was going on at her house, with her family, and what they were doing at home as far as smoking marijuana. That is something they see every day, some kids. What we are doing when we come in and teach D.A.R.E.--it's a confusing message to them. Does that make sense? So I also had to figure out a way to explain that to them as well: that everyone makes choices, that even though there are things you can't control or things--this one kid, it really bothered her to the point where she was crying, I remember. They are looking at you like, "Finally, somebody I can tell how much this bothers me." The realistic part of the D.A.R.E. program was missing.

At the Minnesota graduation for D.A.R.E officers, they had me come up and speak. The BCA—State of Minnesota's Bureau of Criminal Apprehension—had me speak on this issue and I did. I shared it with the D.A.R.E. officers that were now graduating and getting ready to go off into their schools about my experience, what happened and why I think it's important for you to teach the D.A.R.E. program according to what environment you are in. that you are going to have to adjust, adapt and overcome these obstacles and barriers that you are going to experience. I shared my story with them, because I never saw that coming. I thought the D.A.R.E. program was great. And it's great idealistically, but the reality is, they need to include the—I called it the environmental influences. I had another lesson added onto mine and that is what it was. Environmental influences.

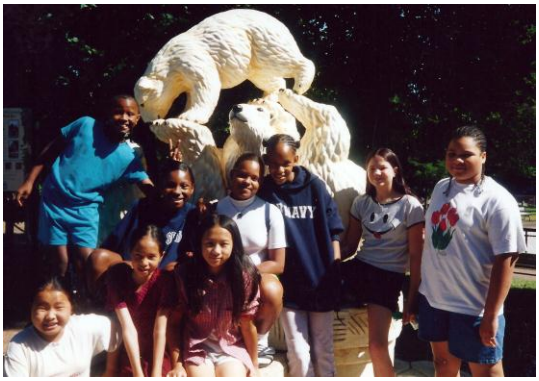
KC: Did you get any pushback from your superiors?

CB: No, nothing, but one of the commendations is for that. One or two of them, I guess. I don't know. It's for the D.A.R.E. thing [laughs]. The only pushback I could say I had was after teaching D.A.R.E. for a year, I saw a need. I saw a need to do a little bit of follow-up. When the school year was over, I asked if I could do a summer program with the kids and then get the other SROs—School Resource Officers—involved in the program. I was told no. I said, "Why?" "Because we don't have the money." I said, "I'll do it myself." I remember I was told, "Well, then you do that." And I did. And I did pay for it. And it did make the front page of the *Pioneer Press*.

Then the next year, it was an expectation at that point. But I didn't do it for that. I did it because I'm in the school, I see what is going on, and there was a need there to keep those girls busy, because a summer without nothing to do… We kept them busy eight hours a day. So Arlington High School[15] let us rent out two rooms, including the art room. They got to swim for an hour every day. They approved that for me. The whole eight hours the girls were in the program, they were at Arlington High School, all summer long. We had an hour of cadence. Three of the officers I brought in had military training, so they would come in for an hour and teach the girls cadence and stuff for the parades. By the time we got ready in the middle of the summer when the parades started, they were ready to go. We would use that long path at Arlington to practice the cadence and learn

[15] Arlington High School is located at 1495 Rice Street

D.A.R.E. DREAMERS



Zoo Field Trip

Rice Street Parade

2000

how to turn around on beat and everything. It was Abla-Reyes Armando[16] and Paul Harper[17] and Tina Kill.[18] Their job was to show up at two o' clock every day. They had parade cadence. Each hour of the day, they would go in the art room and create their gloves and their mask for the parade. They had an hour to swim, an hour to do the manicure stuff and the pedicure stuff and learn that—self-care. Then they had an hour of performance, so they all broke into groups and had to decide if they were going to sing or if they were going to dance or what they were going to do for the final performance for the summer. Each hour, they had something they had to work on and when it was over, it just all came together and we had a huge ceremony at Arlington in the cafeteria. All the parents came. Very, very diverse. We had Asian, Hispanic, Caucasian, African-American and they all came and brought food.

KC: How many kids?

CB: Forty.

KC: Wow. All girls.

CB: Yes.

KC: What did you call this program?

CB: The D.A.R.E. Dreamers. Dare to Dream. And they each got an opportunity to sing a small solo on stage for about one minute and then after she sung her solo, she would go off and the music would change for the other girl. They did a

[16] Abla-Reyes Armando was appointed police officer October 28, 1995.

[17] Paul Harper was appointed police officer April 3, 1994; promoted to sergeant December 8, 2001; and retired February 21, 2003.

[18] Tina Kill was appointed police officer November 13, 1995; promoted sergeant October 6, 2001.

fashion show for their parents and they let us use the dressing rooms in the back of the stage, so they were changing and there was an officer, Sergeant Tina Kill. She was back there, "Okay, go go go! You're on!" [both laugh] So the whole thing was just so wonderful.

KC: And they gave you the summer, paid you for the summer to be able to do this.

CB: Yes. And we organized it and Arlington was kind enough to donate the school to do that. It was incredible, just incredible, how much fun it was. And it brought the officers together, too. That was really nice.

KC: Then at a point you also worked with the P.A.L. program. The Police—

CB: —Athletic League.

KC: What brought you into that?

CB: I coached for fifteen years. Yes.

KC: Where?

CB: I coached for the City of Lakes Girls' Basketball Traveling Association. I coached for the park board, Pearl Park in Minneapolis. I just coached Highland High School team. What was that, last year? Last summer. Took them traveling. So it was just a lot of experience with athletics. I love working with youth, too. Chief Harrington wanted me to create this Police Athletic League or get it up and running off the ground. I started with one basketball team and it went from one basketball team to serving four to five hundred kids.

KC: What year was this?

CB: It was 2004 to 2007. We were taking them on field trips every summer. They had a schedule that we did. We did a schedule every summer where they went several places and we tried to mix it up and let them see places they had never been. We took them to the caves in Wisconsin, a lot of Timberwolves games, and Valley Fair. We just went everywhere, the water park.

Back Row: Officer Kathleen Brown, Sgt. Connie Bennett, Officer Carla Hughes, Officer Sue Drutchman, and Sgt. Mamie Singleton

KC: Now are these kids from McGroveland and Highland or are these at risk kids from Frogtown.

CB: At risk from the entire city.

KC: And you had five hundred in the program?

CB: Yes.

KC: Wow. How did you get funding for this?

CB: The first year what happened is once I was assigned to the project—there is a national P.A.L., you can apply for grants, so I applied for the national one and the Police Foundation provided part of the funding as well. Between the Saint Paul Police Foundation and the National P.A.L., as long as I did the grants for them, too, then the amount of funding increased tremendously, so we were able to do that. The kids also participated in the bike giveaway at the Metrodome with Target Corporation, and we bused them all over there and they got to play on the fields and do all these extra activities. And then every kid was given a

brand new bike. So that was kind of fun, too. And then they got to ride the bikes around the Metrodome. The trick was getting the bikes home, back to Saint Paul. We planned for that though. I had ordered a bunch of Coach Busses so we were able to put them all underneath. It was funny.

KC: Is that still going on?

CB: You know what? Sergeant Ray Jefferson[19] is now doing the P.A.L. program. They might be restructuring at this time. That is the only way I think I could put that—restructuring.

KC: How come you left after three years of doing P.A.L.?

CB: I don't know. I think it was a case of being tired and maybe feeling that it was time. Sometimes you need more, and when you start to work with larger numbers of kids, you need more resources. We were at a time where we were pulling back and there weren't the resources to be provided. One of the issues that was at the top of the list was transportation. When you start working with a large amount of youth, transportation is very important, because you need the ability to get them to where you need to get them. There were just a couple reasons why I decided maybe it was time to move forward.

I was also in school for my Masters, so that was a lot. My daughter was in the high school stage now, and it's important to be there for her. There were a lot of things that went into the decision, and it felt like a good time to transition.

KC: Where did you go after P.A.L.?

[19] Ray Jefferson was appointed police officer April 24, 1991; promoted to sergeant July 3, 1999.

CB: I went back to investigations in Central District. I had the West Seventh area for the last three years, from the Excel Center down to I-35. I'm really enjoying it. I miss it now.

KC: When you talk about investigations, there is a special smile that comes on your face. There is an energy that comes from you.

CB: When you have your own area you work, it's personal and it becomes a part of you. Especially West Seventh area, because it was so small. Everybody knew everybody. It's crazy. You get to know all the business owners. I have met Mancinis,[20] been down at Bennett's Restaurant. I mean, you establish all these relationships with people, and they know you are going to do something. They know you are not just going to let this lie. To see it cleaned up, to see the improvements, to see when there is a problem in the neighborhood and you are determined to remove that problem and you do, then they believe in you. They believe in not only you, but they believe in the department, that yes, they hear us, they are going to do something. After about two years, you are at that point where they know they can call you personally. You know what is going on down here? No, you are going to tell me [both laugh]. And then, even being on the email list of the entire community, too, it was just—I'm still getting the emails, too. That is probably why I smile. They keep me up to date on what is going on. It's that part. It's just the love of knowing that you are really giving and contributing to people's lives in a better way. It's a blessing. It's a blessing, and it keeps you connected to the community as well, so I really love that. I do and I'm going to miss it. I knew I was going to miss it, yes. But again, transitioning.

[20] Mancini's family opened their Italian restaurant in 1948 at 531 West Seventh Street, Saint Paul.

KC: What made you decide to go back to school? Now did you have a two-year degree before you came into the department?

CB: Yes, I had a two-year degree in law enforcement from Minneapolis Community.

KC: So at some point you finished up the four-year.

CB: When I was an SRO—School Resource Officer—I was in school for my Bachelor's at Concordia University, so then I got that then in 2001. Yes, because I was an SRO I remember.

Connie Bennett

2000

KC: Then you went back to get a Master's?

CB: And when I was in the Police Athletic League, I went back again. Something with little kids makes me go back to school. That is funny [laughs]. For my Master's in mental health counseling, because I found my niche as an investigator. One of the parts of investigating that was so rewarding to me, more than anything, is interviewing in the jail and interviewing victims. It's such a passion, it was. I could be interviewing someone in the jail, and I look and it has been two hours and it feels like it has been five minutes. But it was just like breathing. I started looking at that, questioning that, like wow. It's like you really enjoy that one on one and going to the deeper issues in life with people. That is

when I decided to go back to school for my mental health counseling license, so I could eventually go into private practice. But I enjoyed it, because investigations allowed me to interview anyone, the whole continuum of people, whether you were a criminal, whether you were a victim, whether you were just a normal person. It didn't matter. The enjoyment I got out of it, and then also I felt that rapport was established really, really quickly, no matter with who it was. That is one of the important things to do.

Confession rates pretty high. Pretty high. But I think again, it goes back to that just treating a person like a human. I'm not here to judge you, it's not my job, and even after—there was a lot of laughter during interviews, a lot of laughter [chuckles], which was crazy because sometimes the Ramsey County Deputy would say, "Is everything okay in here?" I was like, "Yeah, yeah, everything's okay [laughs]." But we would be laughing so hard sometimes. It's funny. And then I would say something like, "Well, you know I'm gonna charge you. You know that, right?" "Yeah, I know." It was like, "Okay." [laughs] But it's the ability to still be able to do the job, make the wrong right, and still treat that person as a human being. It's very important to me. The tears, truly, truly sincere, when you see someone break down like that and it's just ripping them apart. It varied—the responses, the reactions, but it was real.

KC: Now in June of this year with a new chief, you were assigned to the Employee Assistance Program.

CB: Yeah.

KC: That took you out of investigations.

CB: Yeah, it did. The timing was very incredible, because I had just finished the academic portion of my degree in February, so I'm blessed. Not everybody can

say that, that life turns out that way for them, to be utilizing every degree you have—because my Bachelor's is in organizational management and human service. The Employees Assistants' Program brings together all three: the mental health counseling, the organizational management human services, and it also brings together the law enforcement, all in one package. As I look at my journey, I see it. Did I understand when it was happening? No. Did I even know what organizational management human services was? [laughs] Not really. I still to this day don't know how I got into that degree. I have no idea what… but I get it now and I do and I see that. It also is inclusive of the interviewing and the passion with helping people and listening to them and treating them as a human beings. I'm able to do that as well.

KC: The Saint Paul Police Department's EAP[21] was a pioneer to the best of our knowledge. It was the first in the nation to start an EAP within a police department.

CB: I didn't know that.

KC: Yes. Morrie Anderson[22] started it. It was the first time it had been started and it ended up being a very successful model, because it wasn't just sending police officers out to somebody that didn't understand police to be doing the

[21] The Employee Assistance Program began in June 1981. It was founded under the guiding philosophy that the most effective counseling for police is by specially trained police officers, offering officer and family counseling in chemical dependency, emotional, psychological, critical incident trauma, PTSD, and relationship issues. Initially SPPD's EAP served SPPF and other agencies. Nationally, SPPD's innovative model was copied by other agencies. This program was initially designed by Sergeant Morrie Anderson after the department sent him to Hazelden's EAP internship training.

[22] Morris "Morrie" J. Anderson was appointed patrolman January 21, 1963; promoted to sergeant September 30, 1967; and resigned July 29, 1988.

counseling. Saint Paul has a history of being many firsts, but this was another one of the important firsts that we started.

CB: That is interesting. I didn't know that. Wow. Well, I can tell you for me that it's an honor and I see the importance of a positive and productive program, but one with empathy and true compassion, understanding of the issues that people deal with every day.

KC: What other stories can you tell me about memories that you have of cases you have worked on in your fourteen years in Saint Paul?

CB: Oh, I first became an investigator and there was this cleaning company and they were going in and cleaning homes here in Saint Paul. While they were cleaning, they were removing the property. They started getting the case numbers and I have always been known to be able to see patterns. I can do this and see patterns and say, "Okay, there is a connection here" really quickly. Well, when I first became an investigator, that happened on one of my first cases. It turned out there were I can't tell you how many homes they had done this in. It was a lot. Then I was able to figure out that they were doing this to all the homes they were cleaning. Once this happened, I started calling each victim, interviewing them, asked them for a list of their items, anything specific they were looking for, blah blah blah. And they would let me know that. After we did all that, I took about four investigators with me and we did a search warrant at the suspect's home over on the west side, I think it was. So he didn't know we were coming. We were able to recover a bunch of property; I mean a lot. Well, I could not get anything solid out of all the property we had recovered. Maybe a couple things, but they were not so specific where you knew without a doubt. Except this one ring. It was a class ring and I think it was from Cretin Durham Hall. I think it was. His mother was Mary Atmore. When I did a show at West District, I put out

all the jewelry, all the stuff we had recovered and everybody came in that day and looked around. She pointed at that ring and said, "This is my son's." She said, "I know it is." She flipped it over and it had his initials inside of it. She was a very assertive woman, one of the females. She was feisty, so I like that in her. She was without a doubt. She was one of the first victims that called in and was very frustrated, because some of these clients, they are not poor. If they have a cleaning person, they are comfortable financially. We were able to get them charged on that because of that ring. Well, the next day, I think because of the showing, it was on the front page of the *Pioneer Press*. Her son is sitting there, holding the ring right there. In that moment when I saw that, I knew that this job had tremendous meaning and purpose, because even though it's just a class ring, to him it meant something. To her, it was a confirmation that she wasn't losing her mind and that they were really taking her property, because you never saw them do it. They just knew without a doubt. It was my job to prove it.

To see that was really powerful, but it gets better, because years later, I sent my daughter to Benilde Saint Margaret's. I'm looking through the book of Benilde Saint Margaret's and there is Mary's name, because she has a child going there, too. I just thought that was incredible, how everything came back around, you know? I was a new investigator and it was an awful lot of work, but it really paid off, because then it just stopped instantly. It made me realize how many people there were actually out there victimizing, and that if you don't do your job, all these people still continue to be victimized, because you chose to do your job or you chose to ignore it. I saw the impact of just saying, "Hey, we need to deal with this." It was just incredible. Even interviewing the suspects in that case. They showed a lot of remorse. A lot of remorse, a lot of guilt and even went as

far as to talk about how they had built relationships with these victims. They were family. They had their garage door codes. And the victims said the same thing. That is why they were so hurt, because they were like family. It was kind of bittersweet.

KC: You lose an incredible amount of safety and trust if you have allowed someone into your home and like them and trusted them and then find they have violated you.

CB: Right. That was good to have that case and have that experience at the very beginning, because it almost set the tone for the importance of doing burglary investigations for me. I think that was it. Also, I had mentors throughout the fourteen years I have been here, mentors that I didn't even know before this job. First there was Charmoli.[23] He was in Homicide. Then there was Tim Trooien. He was in Western District and he took me under his wing as soon as I became a sergeant. There were just so many. There was Labossiere.[24] And they didn't have to. It means more to me, too, because I'm an African-American female. These are all Caucasian males. You don't have to take me under your wing. You choose to do it and guide me and make sure that I know the dos and the don'ts and the importance of doing your job to the best of your ability.

KC: What about other women? Were there any other women that stepped up to be a mentor, to guide you? Were there any other African-Americans that stepped up?

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[23] James Michael Charmoli was appointed patrolman January 16, 1967; promoted to sergeant September 6, 1975; and retired August 31, 1999.

[24] John Labossiere was appointed patrolman January 16, 1967; promoted to sergeant October 14, 1972; and retired September 8, 2000.

CB: The African-Americans that stepped up were Mel Carter.[25] From day one he came into that academy and I had no idea who he was. None. Everybody else is staring, because he walks right over to me and he says, "Put your hand up," because we were doing DT. He says, "They're too low. Put 'em up, put 'em up." So I put them up. And then the whole time he is going, "Up, further! Come on. Come on." The whole time I'm thinking, "Who is this?" Because I don't know who he is, but I'm not going to say anything. He was mentoring me and I didn't even realize it, but I knew it was a blessing, because I didn't know anybody in law enforcement. I was out there on my own pretty much. Al Singleton[26] is another one.

KC: These are both Black men. Mel Carter came on in 1975, the first class with a large number—with ten Blacks that came onto the department. Very nice man, very kind man.

CB: Yes. And Al Singleton had been a tremendous mentor for me as well. Tyrone Strickland[27] had been there for me to ask questions to. If I didn't understand something, I would just ask and his honesty—I knew that he was going to call a spade a spade if I ever needed the truth about something that I was seeing, but I wasn't sure if that was right. He was always there for that.

Chief Bill Finney. He mentored from afar. What I mean by that is he always made it clear that "If you need anything, I'm here, but other than that, you are on your own, kiddo. You got to hold your own here." He never said that, but I got

[25] Melvin Whitfield Carter, Jr. was appointed police officer September 8, 1975; promoted to sergeant April 13, 1991; andretired February 14, 2003.

[26] Al Singleton was appointed police officer December 10, 1984; and retired July 23, 2011.

[27] Tyrone Timothy Strickland was appointed police officer September 19, 1988; promoted to sergeant May 17, 1997.

that. I understood it. I understood it only because for one, I came from a military background, so I understand chain of command. Does that make sense? So I understood that. I'm not going to walk up to a four-star general and say, "Sir, can I talk to you for a minute?" [chuckles] I'm not going to do that. I had an awareness of not to do that. But he was always there. He was always there and in fact, one time I had a traffic stop down on Ford Parkway, and I called it out and he showed up. He must have been in the area and he just showed up just to make sure things were okay. He has always been there if I needed guidance, too. Even today still, if I ever need guidance, I know I can call and he will help me out. It's just these people have been tremendous mentors.

As far as females Mary Nash,[28] Krystel Karels.[29] These are both Caucasian females, but me and Krystel new each other before we came on the department. We worked at the Federal Reserve Bank together. My life does--it comes full circle all the time. She left first in 1993. She said, "Well, I'm gonna be a cop." She went to Saint Paul and then three years later, I walked in the report writing room and I remember she looked at me like, "This can't be real." [both laugh] She said some language that I will not repeat like, "What are you doing here?" [laughs] I joked around, "Following you." Our friendship goes beyond the badge a little bit. As far as Mary Nash, I know I can go to Mary and say, "Mary, this is what I've got, blah blah blah." And she will say, "Well, Connie, I know you want me to say it's purple, but it's green." She has always been that way to bounce ideas

[28] Mary Anne Nash was appointed police officer September 18, 1989; promoted to sergeant out of title February 12, 2000; promoted to sergeant September 9, 2000; commander September 3, 2010.

[29] Krystel Letitia Karels was appointed police officer May 2, 1994.

off and stuff like that. There is Lynn Wild[30]—phenomenal. She works the West-Seventh area. She is still an officer, but she has been on many, many years, part of the CIRT—Critical Incident Response Team. Her and Lucia,[31] I looked up to them, because I could see their scars, what they had been through. They never actually came out and shared their experiences, but you could feel the battles that people who paved the road before you. I could always feel that with some of the females on the department—the trailblazers and the trendsetters. You could see what looked like invisible scars to other people, but I could see them, respect them, honor them, and never forget that they are there. I never ever disrespected someone that came before me because of that.

KC: Lucia and Lynn are both incredible street cops.

CB: Yes.

KC: You talked about it being a calling to come into police work. You talked about the God presence in your life, the spiritual guidance. Would you use that in your police work, in your investigations?

CB: That is what was guiding it. That is what was guiding it. All the time. I mean, if you look at my history on this department and you see some of the things I have done with the enormous amount of energy that it would take for somebody to do that stuff, that is not me. I know that. Just sitting here talking, I realized this as I

[30] Lynn Wild was appointed police officer January 30, 1984; promoted to sergeant December 15, 2001; budget cut reduction March 14, 2003; advanced to sergeant August 30, 2003; voluntary reduction to return to being a street cop December 3, 2005.

[31] Lucia Theresa Wroblewski was appointed police officer March 20, 1989; Medal of Valor September 29, 1996; Class C Medal of Commendation 12-28-1990, 12-28-2006, 2-15-2007; Saint Paul Officer of the Year in 2001 with partner, Officer Tim Bradley.

was listening. I was thinking, "Holy mackerel, how could you have pulled that off?" But it wasn't me and I know that.

There was a time where I was in a high speed chase down in Seventh Street area, down in West District, so Snelling and Davern area, and I knew the officers could not get to me. I was chasing somebody. There were people on the roofs helping me out, showing me which way he went, because the dust was flying. He ran into a tree, jumped out of the car and took off running. I jumped out of my car and gave my location, took off running after him. I could not see him at all. I was just led, intuitively was guided that day, and didn't realize that I was being guided intuitively. I went halfway down the block and I got right to this house and something said "Turn, walk through the yard," and I did. As I walked through the yard, I got right past the deck in the backyard. It got strong, the gut feeling got strong, and then when I got to the garage, it just died instantly like [snaps]. Just like that. I said, "Well, what the heck was that?" So I backed up, and then the intuition got stronger again, like full range on a chart. Then I looked. I saw the deck, but the deck was only this high off the ground, maybe five inches, six inches. I don't know. I put my feet and my hands down and I looked under the deck and I saw a tennis shoe. I was like, "Oh, my gosh, he is under there." I could not believe it, because in the middle of the block, you have no idea where you are at, where he is at, and you just found him. I drew my gun slowly and I said, "This is Officer Bennett, blah blah blah, Saint Paul Police. Come out of there with your hands up, blah blah blah." Then I called my location in and everybody came running.

I remember looking at my sergeant's face, because he was like, "How did you find him?" I don't know. I have no idea. I didn't even have a canine, so I could not—I went home that day wondering, too. And he did and he was like, "Uh, uh, good job!" Then the veterans came in and cuffed him and took him away, because it was Neubrand[32] and Swintek[33] and all them. I remember I went home that day knowing that there was no way I could have done that. There is no way. I didn't even see which street he turned down. I had no idea. I never forgot that. Then, as I went through the years on the department, to some of my sergeants that would look like "Gosh, she is really, really a great investigator. How do you get these confessions? How do you—?" And it wasn't me. The truth is it wasn't me. I believe in my heart that if you let God speak through you and let Him use you as a vessel, than whatever is meant to be is going to happen and it's going to be for the benefit of everyone that is involved. It's not going to be for you to get the glory or for you to do that. The commendation and the awards and stuff, like I told you earlier, I didn't know that stuff was on there. A couple of those things, I had no idea, because it has just never been really an interest to me, because I feel that we are here to serve a purpose.

There are going to be times as police officers where we are going to run into people and they are going to need you in that moment. You need to know, or at least have a feeling, what it is that you are supposed to be doing in that moment. If you are so full of yourself, you have no idea what you are supposed to be

[32] Paul Earl Neubrand was appointed patrolman September 3, 1968; and retired August 31, 2000.

[33] Howard Joseph Swintek was appointed police officer September 8, 1975; and retired November 30, 2002.

doing. There was a day—today I still say a quick prayer or say, "You're here, right? [laughs] Hello." It might come across to other people like you have this confidence, but the reality is your confidence is based on your beliefs and your morals and for me, it's my spiritual walk and knowing that what I believe in is pretty solid. That's my foundation.

KC: When did that come into your life?

CB: When I was three, pretty much. When I was three. And it has never went away. But I'm the type of person that if you tell me something, you have to prove it. No wait, 1969—I was either three or four.

KC: But faith is a lot of not proving—having a faith, basing your life, believing in God is an abstract for most people.

CB: You mean that sense of knowing?

KC: That sense of knowing is not like proof for a court of law.

CB: Right. For me, for one thing, I think that spiritually, I believe that He knows all of us, or whatever you believe in. He knows you because he is the creator of you. Kind of knows your personality and everything, how you're going to challenge or if you're the type that believes anything and whatever. For me, I'm a person you have to prove it to. I have just always been that way, so even then I remember being feisty, like, "Oh, no. You are going to have to prove it to me." Just like when I prayed, and I said send me a sign. That is what I'm doing. I'm sending a fleece out, kind of. "I'm looking for Your guidance, but I need You to send me a sign, because it could be anything. I could be believing in anything, but I need a miracle. I need something that I know it's solid, it's You. The moment You show me that, then I'm very obedient." I have been doing this my entire life. Even going back to school this last time, the same thing. I would get a card in the mail. Walden University. I chucked it. Got another card in the mail

and I said to Mamie Singleton--I remember I said to her, "Do you think this is some kind of sign?" She goes, "I don't know." I said, "Ugh" and I chucked it again. Well, then the third one came through the mail and it was like, "Okay, He is probably getting irritated." [both laugh] That was in 2005 and that is when I went back to school.

My life has always been that way. I believe it's the same concept as when they say if spiritually He sends you a boat and you are sitting here waiting for a ship, that is on you. But he sent the boat. I'm that type of person. I believe in that strongly, so I did go to Walden and that is where I graduated from in February, because I felt I was to be obedient in that moment. Who was to know that the EAP job was waiting ahead? I didn't know. If I'm obedient, then my path is more steady. If I'm not, then this is what happens and then I'm out here trying to figure out how did I get off course? So I have found my life to come together by being in the quiet times and listening in the stillness and, "Oh, yeah..."

KC: Is there a particular faith tradition that gives you support around this?

CB: Well, I was looking for a church for about three, four years. I finally found one two years ago, which is Park Avenue Church on Thirty-Fourth and Park. The reason or how I found this church was, go figure, I was watching the news and somebody had burglarized the church three times. Instantly I thought, "Well, that is not fair. I mean, how dare you burglarize that church?" [chuckles] Well, I'm on Burglary Investigation, so it caught my attention. I was like, "How dare they do that?" Then the next part of me said, "Hey, you are looking for a church. Maybe you might just go visit one time, see how it is." So I did. I had a feeling about it on the news, and then I walked in the church two years ago and unbelievable. Unbelievable. I was like, "This is it." I knew the moment I walked

in the door. The way that happened, too, was kind of ironic, bringing the whole burglary thing in there. I end up over there, so then I'm in the choir and I don't know anything about Methodists. That is what the church is, Methodist, but I can tell you that it's not even about that. It's about what you feel and it being right and the people that belong to the church representing what spirituality truly represents, no boundaries. That is the way it feels here. There are no boundaries. It's so diverse. It's incredible. Oh, I love it.

KC: I have been there.

Connie, what do you want your legacy to be with Saint Paul?

CB: I think it's just the thoroughness. Investigative thoroughness, the "She's just not gonna let it go." And if you come to her and tell her about something, she hears you, because officers did that all the time. They would come in off the street, "Hey Sarge. Blah blah blah. And this was going on and blah blah blah." [chuckles] And I would stop what I was doing, literally, and turn around and listen. The reason I would do that is because if it wasn't important, why are they standing here? They are standing here because this has meaning. They would take ownership of their area, so when I was working West Seventh, Lynn Wild was one of the officers for West Seventh, but these guys really took ownership of that area. I as the investigator took ownership, too, so the results were just incredible. The charges, the convictions, it was like a joint effort. If I take it personal, they knew they could come in and I would do something about it. It became just this whole bond between me, the officers, the community, the business owners. We were all united. That is what it felt like.

One of my commanders said that to me years ago for the D.A.R.E. to Dream program, when I was an SRO. At that banquet I told you about in Arlington, it

was Commander Debbie Montgomery.[34] She walked over to me and a whole bunch of other people, and she said, "What I can't figure out is how did you get all these people and these officers to work together? I just can't figure that out." I remember thinking, "What are you talking about?" I did. I remember thinking, "We are having a get together. Everybody was supposed to bring food. All the officers had assignments. What are you talking about?" But now, as I investigated the West Seventh area and saw what we did there, I went back and thought about what she said, and that is what she was talking about. "How did you get everybody to work together?" For me, the answer was, you have to care. Whoever you are serving, you have to care about them more than you do coming to work every day and just making that money, because if you are coming just to make the money, it's not a good reason to be putting the badge on. I don't think it is. For me, I would say that if you brought her an issue to do with criminal activity or anything or investigation, she would take it and run with it and would get back to you on it. That is probably what it would be, I think

KC: Thanks, Connie.

CB: You're welcome.

[34] Deborah Louise Montgomery was the first female to complete the same academy as male recruits and was appointed police officer September 8, 1975. She was the first Black woman promoted to sergeant November 8, 1987; lieutenant May 29, 1998; title change to commander January 1, 2000; senior commander February 8, 2003. She retired July 31, 2003, and became assistant commissioner the Minnesota Department of Public Safety 1991-1998. She was the first Black woman to serve on the Saint Paul City Council, 2004-2007.

Minnesota Association Women Police **Mentoring Award**

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Connie Bennett with daughter Danielle

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