

1996 Recipient of the Dr. Lois-Higgins Grote Heritage Award FELICIA SHPRITZER

• [Link to "Matter of Shpritzer v. Lang", Supreme court, Special Term, New York County, December 8, 1961](#)

The Police Give In, Name 2 Women Sergeants

*'Latter-Day Susan Anthony
Who Sued to End Old Ban
Wins Her 3 Stripes*

The Police Department promoted women to the rank of sergeant for the first time yesterday.

One of the two promoted, Miss Felicia Shpritzer had sued for permission to take the sergeant's examination in 1961.

Police Commissioner Michael J. Murphy opposed her suit on the ground that a sergeant's duties were physically unsuitable for a woman. But Miss Shpritzer won a final decision in the Court of Appeals in June, 1963.

Miss Shpritzer and 125 other policewomen took the test on April 11, 1964. Of those taking the test, Miss Shpritzer and Mrs. Gertrude D. T. Schimmel were selected for promotion yesterday.

In a speech at a ceremony in Police Headquarters, Commissioner Murphy said:

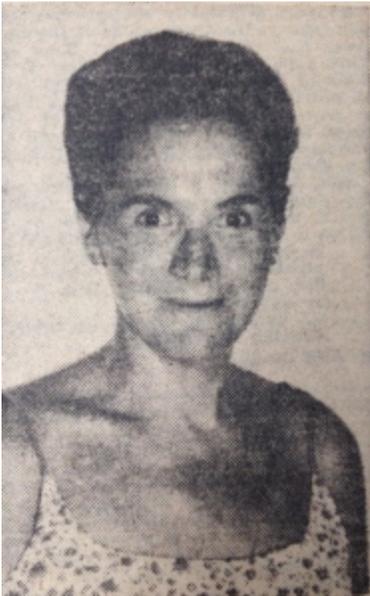
"This day marks another significant milestone in our department's history — the emergence of our policewomen from the ranks. For the first time, two of our policewomen will wear three stripes. We welcome them and wish them well."



The New York Times
Mrs. Gertrude D. T. Schimmel, at left, and Miss Felicia Shpritzer after they were sworn in as police sergeants.

...at the threshold" The Schim... supervised by a woman. But

Felicia Shpritzer Dies at 87; Broke Police Gender Barrier



Felicia Shpritzer, who in the early 1960's broke a gender barrier in the New York Police Department when she earned a sergeant's stripes, paving the way for the advancement of women in police work across the country, died on Tuesday at St. Vincents Hospital and Medical Center in Manhattan. She was 87 and lived in New York City.

"She did great good and it had a national impact," said Patrick V. Murphy, the New York City police commissioner in the early 1970's, who knew her.

After being rejected as a candidate to take the sergeant's qualification test, Policewoman Shpritzer sued the city, won the court battle and then became 1 of 2 of the 127 policewomen who took the test to pass it.

"I'm sure there were a lot of women before Shpritzer who sought advancement in the department and then gave up, figuring it was not worth the risk," Commissioner Murphy said. "But Shpritzer was determined and very professional. I had great admiration for her."

Policewoman Shpritzer served almost 20 years as a policewoman in the Juvenile Aid Bureau before she and five other women applied to take a test for possible promotion

to the rank of sergeant in 1961. Two weeks before the test was held, all six women's applications were rejected. It was then that Policewoman Shpritzer filed suit against the New York City Department of Personnel, arguing that to deny her a chance to become a sergeant was "discriminatory, archaic and illegal."

She also cited a section of the City Administrative Code providing that any member of the Police Department assigned to the Juvenile Aid Bureau "shall retain his or her rank and pay in the force and shall be eligible for promotion as if serving in the uniformed forces." Accordingly, she said, she should not be barred from taking the qualifying test.

Police Commissioner Michael J. Murphy -- a predecessor of Patrick V. Murphy -- opposed her suit, submitting an affidavit in which he declared that women lacked the physical strength and endurance required of a police sergeant. He also pointed to a section of the code that read, "There shall only be one rank of policewomen within the Police Department."

In June 1963, the Court of Appeals, New York State's highest court, ruled in Policewoman Shpritzer's favor, and the following year she and 126 other policewomen took the four-hour test at Brooklyn Technical High School. The atmosphere was tense. The only candidate interviewed by a reporter for The New York Times who was willing to give her name was Policewoman Shpritzer.

"Pass or fail," she said defiantly, "I will never regret having made the opportunity available to women."

The two women who passed that day were Policewoman Shpritzer and Gertrude Schimmel, who in 1971 became the city's first policewoman to serve as a captain. Their immediate assignment as sergeants was to supervise about 160 policewomen attached to the Bureau of Policewomen.

Thus, no policeman was to be supervised by a woman, although both female sergeants indicated at a public announcement of their promotions that they would continue to seek advancement in the department.

Accepting the change, Commissioner Michael Murphy called the appointment of the two women "a significant milestone in our department's history," adding, "We welcome them, and wish them well."

Felicia Shpritzer was born on Nov. 12, 1913, in Gloversville, N.Y., but soon moved with her family to New York City, where she graduated from Washington Irving High School. She received a bachelor's degree in mathematics from Hunter College, a master's degree in speech from the University of Michigan and a master's degree in police science from the City University of New York.

She was appointed to the force in 1942, serving 17 years in the Youth Division, where 57 of the 278 women in the department were assigned. At the time of her lawsuit she had a spotless record and had received a number of Police Department awards and citations.

After 34 years with the Police Department, she retired as a lieutenant in 1976.

By WILLIAM H. HONAN DEC. 31, 2000