

## 2000 Recipient of the Dr. Lois-Higgins Grote Heritage Award MARY F. STOWE

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**Mary F STOWE** Born on 8/16/25 in Pekin, IL, and died on 11/26/09 in Seattle, WA. Mary became a Seattle Police officer in 1952. In her 46 years in Seattle Police Department, Mary rose to the rank of Lieutenant. She traveled the world to link with other police departments, including England, China and Russia. Mary was affiliated with the International Association of Women Police and attended their international conference in Seattle where she was honored with a life membership.

### **First Seattle policewoman watch commander had passion for her job**

Years after her 1998 retirement from the Seattle Police Department, Mary Stowe would still come back.

She'd go by to see the guys at the motor pool, went to the police awards banquet, and often visited current and retired officers she used to work with. In a police department that some officers say has a short institutional memory, Stowe was far from forgotten.

"She just felt very comfortable coming back," said Capt. Neil Low, who worked for Stowe as a cadet. "And everyone

was glad to have her."

It was a reputation Stowe, who died Nov. 26 at age 84, earned with years of determination.

She became a policewoman on Feb. 11, 1952, assigned to the now-defunct Women's Bureau and worked her way to sergeant by Sept 1956.

In late 1971, Stowe was promoted to lieutenant after being the first policewoman to take the same examination with policemen. During her time as lieutenant, Stowe became the first woman watch commander, overseeing the 3 a.m. to 11 a.m. shift at the Georgetown Precinct.

In 1974, it was announced Stowe was one of 26 semifinalists for the job of Seattle police chief. She didn't get it, but it marked the first time a woman officer had advanced that far.

"Competition is very difficult for me to understand," she told the P-I at her Georgetown office in 1973. "I like to win, but sometimes I'm very proud of what I've done although I did poorly in comparison to others."

Seattle's first five policewomen were hired in 1912, months after a city ordinance creating a woman officer position became effective. Their roles doing protection and rescue -- similar to social work -- were far from those of policewomen today, according to a reference work at the Seattle Public Library.

Though women had had some advanced roles, it was not until the 1970s when women started as permanent equals beside men on patrol.

Accounts give varying details of who was first, though the most detailed book, "A Different Shade of Blue," about the history of female police in Seattle, credits a group called The First Nine as the women who made history, being trained to stand as equals beside policemen.

Stowe was first part of the Women's Bureau, and spent several years as a juvenile section supervisor, then on the third floor of the city's Public Safety Building.

"I recall her being there in a kind of 'here let me help you' way," said Mike Germann a 25-year department veteran now with the Seattle Police Pension Office. "She was a role model, and people liked being around Mary."

Stowe earned an expert rating with a .45 caliber handgun, and was a member of the department's pistol team. In 1961, she was the only woman Seattleite entered into the Seafair Pistol Championship.

Early in her role as watch commander at the Georgetown Precinct, Stowe led a search for an explosive device after a bomb threat. She later worked in the North Precinct as a lieutenant.

"She always had a good presence," Low said.

Stowe, who didn't have children, traveled extensively to the Soviet Union and other foreign countries, observing women in police roles there, Germann said. In the 1970s, she spent her vacations exploring Mexico.

But her passion was police work, finding a way to help others.

"I didn't think of this assignment as being a first for a woman," the Pekin, Ill., native said after advancing to watch commander in 1973. "I'm just a police officer."

When she retired in 1998, Stowe told friends she didn't want a fuss made over her. She didn't see herself as a pioneer.

Stowe didn't do interviews when she was honored that year in the Dome Room of the Arctic Building, and joked to friends she might have to be dragged to the luncheon in handcuffs.

Some of those friends plan to attend a gathering for Stowe at Foss Home next week, where she had lived recently. She will be buried at her family plot in York, Neb., as she had wished, friends said.

"Those women and men currently serving as sworn Seattle police officers need to remember that it was through the tenacity of Lieutenant Mary Stowe and others like her that caused a change from an almost all male cadre of Seattle Police Officers into what you see today," Germann wrote in an obituary circulated among current department members. "That took a lot of courage."

*By CASEY MCNERTHNEY, SEATTLEPI.COM STAFF Wednesday, December 2, 2009*