

# What it means to be a **POLICE OFFICER**

**E**XPERIENCE was my eye opener. It was very personal and in many ways it was cruel but I had two wonderful people who stood by me and pulled me through — my Mother and Father. Being an only child was never an advantage for me, it was all the more reason why my parents taught me independence.

I can remember, as if it had been yesterday, I was completing my final term in Year 11 and I told my mother I was going to be a police officer. I was heading nowhere and fast; a decision for my future had to be made.

Having a possible career to look forward to kept me from getting into trouble. I began planning for a trip to Adelaide the following year as I knew there were Australian Federal Police there. I did not know too much about the Federal Police and reading information pamphlets told me next to nothing. There was only one way to find out how sharp the knife was ... to use it!

The best option I had was work experience through the school. Under normal circumstances you introduced yourself to the employer in person but in my position that was made difficult; I had to introduce and sell myself with a letter that was straight to the point.

Preoccupied with the hope of being accepted, I almost lost all hope when time was running out and there still was no reply. Finally, I rang the Federal Police in Adelaide and their reply was on its way and the answer was 'yes'. I found myself on a bus to Adelaide Friday night, to start work experience that Monday at 8 a.m.

The first face I met was that of Senior Constable Young. I became mostly attached to him, although singling out one person is hard because everybody that I spent time with had an effect on me.

The place was intriguing and as I passed from the corridor to the inside department through a security door, I was still coming to terms with what the hell I was doing. I followed Senior Constable Young to his desk and there I was introduced to Sergeant Ray Nias.

It was a quick run down of what I was going to be doing, then I was given a time-table of following events and shown where the coffee facilities were. After all, how was one to make it through the day without a cup of coffee?

An hour passed and in that time I settled down and was taken to the Regional Crime and Drug Squad area. I was not there for their company, but to meet Acting Senior Sergeant Adey in his office. He worked in the areas of joining the Australian Federal



- As part of a Community Involvement Program, 15-year-old student **PATRICIA AYLESBURY**, of the South Australian country town of Millicent, visited the AFP's Central Region to gain work experience. Back at school, she wrote an essay on her three days learning what it means to be a police officer. Her work provides an insight into how the youth of today view us.

Police, training, new legislation, checking evidence and generally getting the facts right.

I had to appreciate the fact that although the program I was participating in was work experience, there was no way possible I could be introduced to the actual jobs they did. Realising this made things a lot easier when I was trying to understand the things I was told and thinking of questions to ask.

I encountered every area with an open mind; to me these Federal Police were all equal in standards; they were no more inhuman than anyone off the street. Also, they were most likely to have more bad days than good, so it was likely that I would be with someone who was having a rough time. If so, I knew it came with the job.

I expected also there would be older members who did not agree with equal opportunity in the department. It was these attitudes that I was willing to understand as everyone is entitled to their opinion, even if they do not keep it to themselves.

I moved on to Communications and there I was introduced to Senior Constable Scholfield and Eddie Porter. Communications consisted of a Base Receiver/Transmitter for contact with the mobile Federal Police officers on patrol, a telex machine, a computer and printer, a micro-screen and a large switchboard that was used to disconnect two alarms in a vault.

In this switchboard was a read-out which printed on a paper tape records of time and date when the alarms were switched off and turned on again. This switchboard, which resembled a



large meter box, was connected to other areas of the building as well. Files were kept on VDU print-outs, telex messages and the usage of the vault. There was a combination on the vault of which two men memorised half each and both were required to open it.

I was interrupted while in Communications so I could be introduced to the Regional Commander of South Australia, Superintendent Ken Thompson. He was addressed by all as 'sir' and is a man who holds a great deal of responsibility and respect and in our general conversation was very sincere and direct. It had been three years since students had completed work experience with the Australian Federal Police in Adelaide, so I was privileged in that respect. Apparently the only reason for me being accepted was that the Regional Commander was impressed by my introductory letter and was curious to meet me. This strengthened the fact that I only had one chance in the beginning, that I had to be honest and straight to the point in that letter and, following it, I had to prove my ability as a person for a possible career in the Australian Federal Police.

That afternoon I met Senior Constable Pam Forbes from the Drug Unit. There were only four women in the department and I was told that, generally, it was difficult to be posted back to South Australia after training in Canberra. For the first time since I arrived I had the opportunity to talk to a woman and get her views about the job as well as make assumptions of her by reading between the lines. She was a very independent and confident woman and straight away I felt reassured with her. I liked her because she did not beat around the bush.

The Drug Unit was the largest unit in the department and they dealt mainly with the importation of drugs into Australia. They were all plainclothes detectives as were the detectives of the Regional Crime Unit. The thing that I and the community have to understand is that the Federal Police carry out policing of the Commonwealth legislation and the State Force polices the State legislation. This is why there is only the Australian Federal Police in Canberra.

On Tuesday I visited the vault and Senior Constable Young signed a record book with another Australian Federal Police officer before we entered and examined different types of heroin, cannabis and hash. The smell was intoxicating at first, but after being in there for some time one became accustomed to the smell. All the confiscated drugs were in numbered yellow envelopes marked with the year. All the drugs had to be stored, specifically weighed and tested by a chemist and then returned to the vault. The drugs are then kept in the vault until they are incinerated.

This day I also met the Warrant Squad which is a general inquiries unit. Here I was introduced to Senior Constable Brophy. He considered his job to be unpleasant, emotional, and that he was continuously exposed to situations which he found unfair. This Unit served summons for court appearances that involved divorce and custody of children which is all the Family Law Act and any other summons concerning the Commonwealth Legislation. The summons are a brief account of details involved in an offence and if a person fails to appear in court, they are apprehended by means of warrants.

The Federal Police execute warrants after they obtain this order from a Court of Justice. This area was difficult for the men who worked in it as they nearly all had families of their own. Their sole occupation was to get the job done as quickly as possible but when they put themselves in the other person's shoes, they did not always like what they saw or the way they felt. There is more to this job than the heartaches but it only takes one upset to never let them forget.

From the Warrant Squad I was taken by Gerry Hamm, a uniformed Federal Officer, to Adelaide Airport. The Australian Federal Police at the airport performed uniform duties and were concerned with international arrivals. The Australian Federal Police share a building with Customs and if people do not conform to the standards laid down by Customs, they are handed over to the Australian Federal Police. In the building they occupied there were interview rooms, detention room, firearms safety test area and the main office.

When firearms are imported into Australia, the firearms

tester, Charlie Kacsan, takes them through nine tests. If the firearms fail because they do not comply with the standards, they are sent to Canberra and burnt. Simply, this job was a one-man operation and still involved paperwork, as did all the other areas, but I think the job would become monotonous more than any other I had seen. The things that saved Charlie and the others that worked there from boredom, was their sense of character and spontaneous thoughts. They certainly brightened up my day and on my last day I sent them a message through the computer terminal to the airport. The reply I received was amusing as they considered I observed them under stress and that Charlie was still studying his policeman's manual, which was far from the real thing.

Directly from the airport, Sergeant James took me back to the department for lunch, after which I visited the Regional Crime Unit. I was introduced to Senior Constable Geick, plainclothes detective. For some time I actually felt inferior to her but I think the problem was she found it difficult to explain her job and after catching on to some of what she said, I believed her.

From Senior Constable Geick, I went to Senior Constable Dix who also was in Regional Crime. Senior Constable Dix lent me an old, in-service guide on 'Practical Advice for Investigators' to read and he also showed me how to take fingerprints, using my prints. At the end of the day I met Angela Jahnke who worked in the Registry.

On my last day I spent more time in Communications with Eddie Porter. He tried to teach me about the computer system but as it turned out I knew more than he did!

That day I also went to the Magistrate's Court in Adelaide with Senior Constable Young. We sat in on drink-driving offences and various others but most interesting was a psychological case in which the defendant was a hypnotist and the plaintiff was a man of a medical profession. Anybody can sit in on cases heard in the Magistrate's Courts and sometimes the unemployed sit in court all day listening to various cases and trials.

Before lunch I had a casual interview with Inspector Guest which ranged from hot water services to service in the Australian Federal Police. Following our discussion I had an hour to spare during which Eddie Porter and Senior Constable Young played photographers and took some photos that I will treasure always.

Slowly I worked my way around the department and said my farewells.

I was about to leave with Eddie Porter and Senior Constable Young when one of the detectives they called Cassidy (not as Butch but as Hop-a-long) picked two oranges for me off a tree beside the department building.

As I said my final goodbyes, I realised it was easier on me to spend three days rather than a week with them as a much too big a part of me had already been left behind.



NO, HOUSEBREAKING DURING THE SCHOOL HOLIDAYS DOESN'T COUNT AS WORK EXPERIENCE!