

She works youth cases

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charge," Rochford said. Rochford joined the Farmington Hills Police Department in 1978 as its first female road patrol officer. And even though her male counterparts, for the most part, "treated me as an equal," Rochford moved into the Juvenile Section within two years. With child abuse and neglect one of her top concerns, that's where she felt she could make her strongest contribution.

"I just have a real interest in it," she said. "With all my training, I've obtained some investigative and interviewing skills that have enabled me to successfully prosecute cases that otherwise might not have been pursued. It takes a certain amount of patience and understanding to deal with young kids who have been abused."

YOUNG VICTIMS of crime as well as their parents often view police officers as family counselors. But Rochford leaves that to qualified service agencies.

Nonetheless, she tries to break the ice as tactfully as possible. "The initial contact with the family is crucial," she said. "I often determine whether a parent, if responsible for the crime, confesses or denies responsibility."

Rochford got into police work by chance. After graduating from Michigan State University with a bachelor's degree in retailing in 1974, the Inkster native — not wanting to leave friends or family — balked at out-of-state job offers.

She soon heard that the Southfield Police Department had a new civilian position — community service aide.

Interested, she hired on. She spent two years patrolling in a marked community service car, taking reports for such non-emergencies as hours-old burglaries, property damage incidents and minor animal injuries. She also assisted the elderly and aided stranded motorists.

For the next two years, she

'Time heals some of it, but being molested is a lot of hurt for a child to get over.'

— Sandia Rochford, juvenile detective

worked in crime prevention — doing residential and commercial security surveys. She also attended several crime prevention schools. That specialized education would later help her land a position in the Farmington Hills Police Department's Juvenile and Crime Prevention Section.

AFTER FOUR years as a community service aide in Southfield, Rochford decided she wanted to pursue police work as a career. She applied to the Michigan State Police "because of its reputation" and to the Farmington Hills Police Department "because it was hiring young officers." No sooner had she applied than she was accepted by both, "due no doubt to affirmative action."

Hooked on becoming a trooper, she opted for the Michigan State Police Training Academy's 14-week program in Lansing.

"We'd get up at 5 in the morning to do pushups, chinups and situps and march around," Rochford remembered. "But I enjoyed it. It seemed out there interested more in a job than police work."

A testament to her perseverance, she was one of only 63 in a class of 135 that graduated. Of the 35 women who started, only 10 graduated.

Rochford became the first female trooper assigned to the St. Clair County Post, a generally rural area where "rush hour consisted of a couple of cows and a horse crossing a two-lane blacktop."

Although she enjoyed the level of respect shown state troopers, she yearned for the bustle of a more metropolitan department.

SHE ALSO wasn't high on the possibility of being transferred to any of the 62 State Police posts. "I wanted to stay down in one area with the intention of one day having a family."

Dennis Brills, today a fellow Juvenile and Crime Prevention Section officer but then an auxiliary officer also interested in a full-time position, convinced Rochford to apply in Farmington Hills. That was in 1978. "Ironically," Rochford said, "I got hired a year before Dennis did."

Awarded one department citation, Rochford was honored in 1982 for her investigation of an attempted murder involving a juvenile suspect.

Eager to keep abreast of the rapid changes in law enforcement, Rochford often attends classes.

She recently completed two week-long sessions sponsored by the Women Police of Michigan in conjunction with Lansing Community College. Topics included sex crimes investigation.

Skilled in the use of firearms, Rochford also is a range training officer for the department.

As a juvenile and crime prevention officer, Rochford often addresses community, civic and school groups. Her talks range from self protection for women to Neighborhood Watch programs.

A YEAR and a half ago, she married a fellow Farmington Hills officer, Sgt. Dennis Rochford, Detective Section supervisor. Despite the common work base, they limit night-time discussion about cases to "just really important ones."

As new parents who work full time, the Rochfords, who live in Novi, never have enough time to spend with daughter Kimberly. Says Sandie: "Every minute we have, we spend with her. The time the three of us share is precious."

To ease the stress of balancing a family life and police work, Rochford recently joined a women's over-30 soccer league.

She also "dabbles a little bit in eurythmy, although I think everybody with a new baby does."



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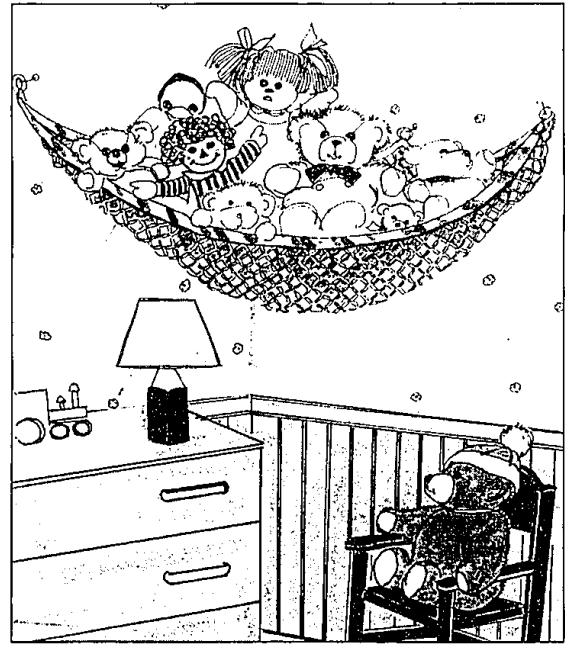
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