



Historic Bakersfield & Kern County, California

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Three Cases From the Juvenile Division

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By Gilbert Gia as told by Mildred G. Munding

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CASE #1: A Really Dumb Kid

The Kern County Sheriff's Office was very much a man's organization when I started in the early 1950s. At that time they had just one deputized woman, and the other females working at the office were matrons or clerk-typists. Chauvinism was rampant, and a girl had to look out for herself. By the mid-60s I'd taken classes and applied for the female deputy job that came up when the woman retired.

A little after I applied, the Undersheriff asked me very seriously, "Millie, are you sure you want to be a deputy?" I think he thought I didn't know what was in store for me. I wanted the job; I was hired; and I was assigned to Juvenile.

The attitude of male officers was women had no place in police work, and especially in the ranks. It came home to me that it wasn't just a female behind the badge that they resented, but all women hired into traditional, male jobs.



Then it was commonly believed that men were better drivers than women, so it was a blow to the males when I passed the academy's driving course. It was much worse on some of them later when I scored high on the firing range. I hadn't set out to prove anything, but I would soon learn what it meant to face injured male pride.

A case came up having to do with the Buckhorn on Union Avenue near California. The barmaid had closed up and was heading out to the parking lot with the receipts when four men jumped her. They drove her out east of town and cracked her on the head. She was able to make her way to a farmhouse and call the Sheriff's Office.

That morning I overheard that she'd recognized the men who'd done it, and three suspects already had been arrested, except for one by the name of Levi Roberson, a nineteen year old who they said Deputy Del Ray knew by sight. As the officers went over the mug shots of Levi Roberson, "a really dumb kid," I asked to see the pictures.

They refused, took the pictures, and walked out of the office.

Sometime later a woman called me and said her son had run off. I asked if he was with anybody, and she replied, "He went off with his friend Levi."



At right, River Theater on North Chester Avenue

Over at her Oildale house the mother gave me a picture as well as a description: tall, skinny, wearing a white T-shirt, blue jeans. She said that after they argued, he and Levi left and headed east on Roberts Lane. I'd worked Juvenile long enough by that time to know they were probably going down to the river.

At the intersection of Airport Drive and Roberts Lane I saw, across the street, two young men on foot. One had a white t-shirt and jeans and was tall and skinny.

I couldn't make a U-turn onto Roberts unless I went all the way down to Golden State Highway. So I floored it, but when I got back they were almost up to Hickerson Drive and were about to disappear into the neighborhood.

I rolled up slowly onto the dirt. One was the missing kid for sure. They waived as if to say everything was okay, and I waved back, put down the window and said, "Hey, your

mother's worried about you. Why don't you hop in?" What happened next surprised me: They both got in.

Taking a chance I said, "Levi, I'm going to call Officer Ray because he has some questions for you." The kid was quiet. I radioed the office, but the dispatcher came back that Ray was out of town. What do I do next? But I didn't have to do anything. Another unit had been listening in, and the officer pulled up and transferred the boys to his car. As it turned out, it was Levi Roberson.

I couldn't match the men for muscle, but I found out that people would open up to me a lot faster than they would to them. For a long time, deputies stopped talking about the case when I was in the room.

CASE #2: Fetching Greyhound Perry

Most old-timers who worked at the Sheriff's Office remember Greyhound Perry. I was in Juvenile Division in the 1960s when I first heard about the seven-year-old.

One summer we got a call from a woman saying her son was missing. Sylvester Perry wasn't at his auntie's or his grandma's and the neighbors hadn't seen him for two days. The mom gave me the names of her son's playmates, and I investigated, but nothing turned up. The office put out an APB.

The next day a call came in from the police at Prescott, Arizona. They had a little boy in protective custody who told them his name was Sylvester. He also said he lived in Bakersfield. By any chance was our Sylvester Perry a little Black boy about 3-feet, 10-in tall?

I drove out to Mrs. Perry's house by Fremont School, and she came back to the office with me. Prescott Police told her they'd picked up Sylvester at the Greyhound bus station. He was fine. How did she want to pay for his transportation back to Bakersfield?

At that time LeRoy F. Galyen was Sheriff, and the Office was pretty well-funded. The past summer, one of our deputies had been out to Arizona on an extradition, but this case was a different matter, and it wasn't going to be a freebie for Mrs. Perry. She signed to repay the county for returning her son, and my sergeant arranged for an officer to pick him up on a turnaround to Arizona.



The little boy's escapade didn't make the *Californian*, and I forgot about him, at least until August when Mrs. Perry called again to report him missing. We talked, and she explained how all this happened. It went back years earlier. Sylvester started riding the GET bus alone before he was in Second Grade. On one of his outings he discovered the Greyhound Bus Station on 18th Street, and he started hanging out there. The first time he went missing he had

been playing with some kids waiting in line with their mother, and he got on the bus with them.

I called Prescott on a hunch. The answer was Yes, Sylvester was there, and they were just getting ready to call me. Once again, Sylvester got a personalized trip home, and when I talked to the officers they told me the little boy enjoyed the trip, and he especially liked riding in the squad car. I told Mrs. Perry she was going to have to watch her child a lot closer.

School started, but at Christmas it happened again. This time Prescott called us first and wanted to know if we were going to handle it the same way. My sergeant said, "Call the mother and tell her the private chauffeur service is over." I wish I could tell you more about the kid, but I ever heard anything more about Greyhound Perry again.

CASE #3: "You can't make us come out!"

Kern County had kids living at Juvenile Hall and going to East Bakersfield High. One evening two girls turned up missing for dinner. The next day a call came in from a woman living south of town who said her granddaughter had showed up at her house the night before with another girl.

They were our Juvenile Hall girls, and my sergeant sent me out to the address south of Brundage Lane. When I pulled up, there was a fence between me and the house, and behind the fence was a big horse blocking the front door.



As I stood there trying to figure out what to do, a neighbor came across the road, opened the gate, and moved the horse out of the way for me.

The grandmother answered, and I asked, "Well, where are they?" She motioned back into the house and said they were locked in the bathroom. We pushed the door open. Nobody was there, but through the open window I saw a foot disappearing into a chicken coop.

They'd locked the door from the inside.

"Girls, we know you're in there. Come out."

"You can't make us come out!"

"I'm giving you ten seconds to get in the car, or I'm letting my partner's dog loose! I'm counting!"

Those girls busted through the door, and I had a hard time keeping up with them as they ran for the squad car. As we drove back to Juvenile Hall they never asked me where the dog was.

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