

-1980-1981

# Police dept. hires first woman patrolman

By ANN CONY

Janet Noble knows almost nobody at the Watsonville Police Department yet, but she's already made a name for herself at the police station. The 24-year-old Hollister woman has been hired as the city's first full time female patrol officer.

She could hardly have been turned down after placing first in the applicants' written test and second in the oral examination. (She also breezed through the pass/fail physical agility test, despite a recent appendectomy.)

Although Chief Al Williams hired her in late December, Ms. Noble won't be patrolling the streets for a few months: she's in training now with the police academy at Gavilan College in Gilroy.

Five of the 41 students in her class are female, but one of the things those five probably will not be taught in academy is how to overcome hostility women officers face from male policemen and the public.

At least a few of the policemen in Watsonville are reportedly less than ecstatic about a woman joining the force, and are not expected to go out of their way to help a female rookie.

Ms. Noble is aware of that, and acknowledges that there is most likely a "mixed reaction" to her hiring.

"Most of the younger guys have been to the academy with women," said Ms. Noble, who anticipates less resistance from the younger officers.

She accepts the fact that some of the older officers might be displeased by

her presence. "I'm probably not going to be able to change that," she said.

"But I know I'm going to have to prove myself. Sure, I'll have weaknesses, but every guy there has weaknesses. The concern shouldn't be whether an officer is a man or a woman, but whether they can do the job," she said.

"I never think of myself as a woman in a man's world. I've always felt like one of the guys." (She grew up with three brothers and no sisters.)

Standing five-feet eight inches and weighing 140 pounds, she's not as big as most policemen, but she's not worried about her size.

Because her physical stature is less than overwhelming, though, she figures she'll rely heavily on brain power.

"I might have to stand there and talk to somebody a little bit longer," not resorting to force as readily as some of her male counterparts.

One of her strong points, she feels, is her ability to talk and listen to people.

"I'm genuinely interested in what other people have to say and I think that's important. It's good to let people vent their frustrations in a non-violent way when possible."

That does not mean she'll be afraid

to use physical force, she said. And she plans to work out to stay in good condition.

"The criminals are in shape. If you're not in shape, you're gone."

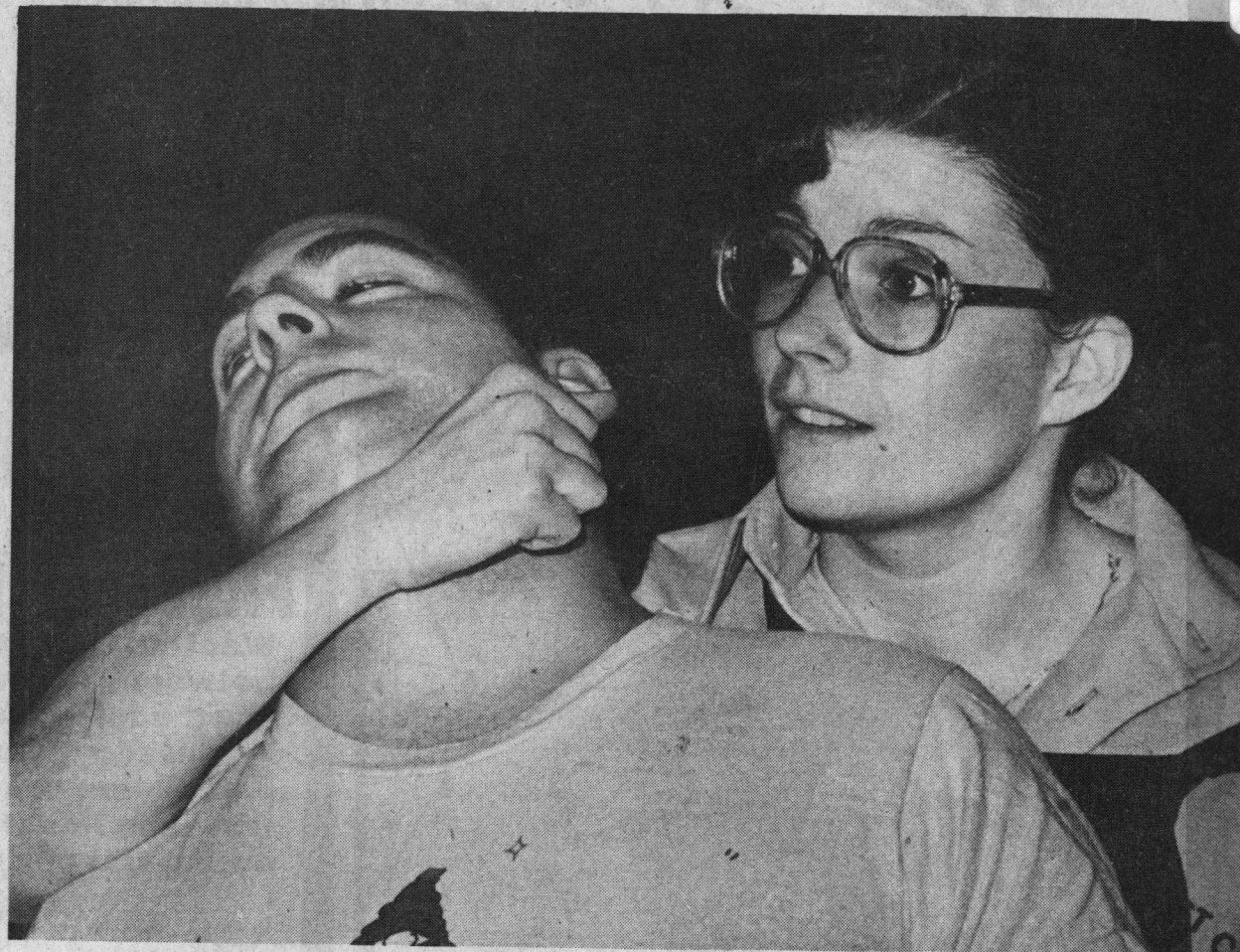
Ms. Noble first got involved in police work in 1977, while she was a college student. (She attended UC-Davis and Sacramento State.) She was studying biology and did crime lab work in Sacramento until 1978.

(Her original college ambition was to prepare for veterinary school, but that fell by the wayside. "I was a good student, but I'm interested in too many other things besides studying," she explained.)

After her experience in the crime lab, she got into the Yolo County Sheriff's Office as a reserve officer. "Because I was a student at the time, I could drop everything and go in when they needed someone to fill in," she said.

"Workwise it was great," she says of her days as a reserve. But she was the only single woman and she ran into a number of roadblocks. She says she got caught in a power struggle between two of her superior officers: she'd follow the directions of one and get chewed out by the other. Other problems arose from socializing with some of the officers. After five months, "It got pretty ugly — that's why I left," she says.

Ms. Noble says she will refuse to socialize with her fellow police officers here. "I can't. I have to take what I learned and use it in Watsonville."



Janet Noble demonstrates how to hold a violent suspect, the "suspect" in this case being one of her fellow students at the police training academy in Gilroy. The picture was taken during a training session this week.

WATSONVILLE  
REGISTER-PAJARONIAN  
January 24, 1981

REFERENCE