

**Janet Stout Interview**

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Interviewers: Christina Park and Abigail Teller

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Transcriber: Christina Park

JANET: Okay, my name is Janet K. Stout, I'm a postal inspector. I became a postal inspector of June 1978. Um, I was originally assigned to the San Francisco division where I stayed for twenty-eight years. During that time I worked internal crimes, external crimes, financial deprivation. Um, in 1988 I became a team leader, um, on the external crimes team. The external crimes team included investigation of crimes against the Postal Service from people outside the Postal Service, such as theft of mail, bombs in the mail, assaults, um, other external type crimes. I remained a team leader in the San Francisco division, um—up until the time I left with one short exception where I was a, um, program manager at our regional headquarters in 1991 for about ten months. We no longer have regional headquarters but it's a—it was a position that was a, uh, a program management position not investigative so I was program manager in external crimes and then went back to the division as an external crimes team leader and later became a violent crimes team leader and a major crimes team leader, all just different nuances of external crimes. Um, about three years ago, I, um, did a detail at headquarters when we stood up our—a new program called Dangerous Mail Investigations shortly after the, uh, anthrax, um, attacks that were um in the mail, um, this program began to be developed and two years ago this, or two years ago June, I was promoted to Assistant-Inspector-in-Charge Dangerous Mail Investigations and Homeland Security at national headquarters, which is where I am now.

ABIGAIL: Thank you.

JANET: Your welcome.

ABIGAIL: How has your experience in the Postal Service been different because you were a woman?

JANET: Um mostly because when I first became a postal inspector in 1978 there were so few women. Um—the classes that went through the academy, there were usually two or four women at the most, never-never any more for several more years. We started hiring women in 1971. The, um, retention rate, uh, for women, uh, was a-a lot lower than it was for men so I can't tell you how many women were in the Inspection Service when I was hired, um, my first assignment in San Francisco I was only the third woman that had ever been in that division so in a division of, um, over a hundred people I was the third female inspector to ever be assigned there, um, my experience was different because they didn't quite know what to do with women, there was a paternal protective attitude towards women. Most women, uh, when they came into, when they were assigned a division, went to an audited assignment and, um, that was considered a safe assignment and, uh, that I too went to an audited assignment. Uh, shortly after I went there, they needed a, uh, woman to work undercover, which was also the other assignment that, uh, women were often put into, and so I worked undercover on a fraud case and, um, slowly but surely there got to be more women and, um, I re-was a team leader at the point where we had, uh, too many women to have more than one woman on a team so from 1978 until-well from the beginning of women in the, uh, Service until 1989 about, there was never more than one woman on a team so you were probably a lot more isolated than most males, and, uh, I was in the team leader meeting where it was debated what they were going to do if they had to put two women on a team, which was kind of an interesting experience for me so I think the main, uh, reason my experience was different is because, um, it's-it was a much more isolating, um, it was much more isolating for women than it was for men.

ABIGAIL: You said that the retention rate for women was lower than for men. Do you know what caused this?

JANET: Well, the traditional, um, often times, uh, if a women got married, um, she left the service for whatever reasons. It took a long time for the Inspection Service to figure out how to accommodate a-a pregnant agent, um, or a pregnant inspector. Um, the travel particularly on audit, where most I would, guessing about 90 percent of the women went, uh, was a, um, travel assignment where you were traveling all the time and so that's not, uh, conducive to a healthy relationships in some case so if you were in a relationship that was an extra strain on it, um, so the retention, there was actually a study done—I can't remember when but I think it was around '88, '89, uh, about the retention of women in the Service and that may be available. I may actually have a copy somewhere, but, um, they actually did a study, uh, to see why they were losing so many women and it was not un-it was not different, um, than other federal agencies.

ABIGAIL: What did they end up deciding to do with pregnant women?

JANET: (laughing) Um—well as-as this is the, uh, um, um, the situation now, uh, it is—being pregnant is handled the same way any other medical situation is handled, um, you can work as-and do the assignments the-uh based on what your doctors say what you can do so, um, it is now um, really not-not a big issue, n-not any bigger issue than it is if you were pregnant and you're working another job that your doctor didn't think mentally healthy for you. The only real big issue is that we don't allow pregnant women to, um, qualify in fire arms because it's, um, well when-when the day, when-when that decision was made we were still using ammo that had lead in it so, um, pregnant, uh, women are a lot more susceptible to lead-lead intolerance or lead poisoning, and also there was some studies that, uh, at a certain point at which the fetus d-developed ears that-that the shooting you could put earmuffs on-on the woman but you can't on the fetus so there's some very specific—

ABIGAIL: (laughing)

JANET: —things that-that, uh, affect whether or not you can, what part of the job you can do, and what-what precautions have to be taken.

ABIGAIL: How did being in the uh-um, inspectors, um, unit, how did that affect your family life?

JANET: Uh, I was single. Um, I was single, and had been single the entire time I've been an inspector so um I guess there's all sorts of speculation about how it (laughs) has uh affected my family life, um, but, um, not-not being married, I didn't have some of those, um, some of those issues that other women did.

CHRISTINA: Have there ever been instances where you had positive or negative interaction with male coworkers?

JANET: Um—some of both—lot more positive than negative but yeah.

CHRISTINA: Would you mind sharing some of them?

JANET: Um—there-I can tell you that there are some specific examples of sexual harassment, sexual discrimination, um, things that-that I tell the younger women these days that happened and they look at me like oh no that didn't happen. Um, there was, uh, quite a learning curve for everybody involved from the time that they started hiring women, and, um, there was a time when I and three other women did file a, uh, lawsuit because we felt that the promotion, um, process was, uh—was, uh, not being fairly applied so that's-that document is out there, it went to, it was, uh, filed in district court so—yes, there um, there are a lot of things that happened that shouldn't have happened. There are a lot of things that happened that

were very consistent with what was happening with other women, um—our society, um, didn't learn as quickly as-as I would have liked them to, and myself too.

ABIGAIL: Did-was there ever a woman's program in the Postal Inspectors Unit?

JANET: A woman's program?

ABIGAIL: Yeah.

JANET: Um, I guess I don't know what you mean, the Postal Service has a, uh, oh what was it called—a diversity program—but as far as a specifically a woman's program, mm, not that I'm aware of.

ABIGAIL: Okay.

CHRISTINA: Um, have any of the customers ever treated you , um—or have-have they ever given you trouble because you were a woman?

JANET: Um, actually um, when you say customers, when you're in law enforcement your customers often are criminals or people you're arresting, and, um, yeah, they-particularly early on I had a lot of surprise people, people that believed that I wasn't really a federal agent. Um, there was, um, several people that actually volunteered to be arrested, you know, again when-during that period of time there weren't many, um, female agents, and it took everybody surprise agents you worked with, people you arrested, the judges, the marshals, everybody. So yeah, I was definitely treated-treated differently, yes.

ABIGAIL: You said that you filed a lawsuit about getting promotions. Was that generally a problem or was it a one-time situation or—

JANET: Well, it was a series of um, of, um, decisions and processes and, uh, by the time you finally get around to filing an EO, it was what it was, an EO, and in those days, uh, EO's progressed to district court. Um, by the time you get around to filing an EO, it's because you have run out of options. (pause) And, you know, if you want to go on and Google me, you'll find it on Google.

ABIGAIL: Okay, I'll do that.

JANET: Okay (laughs).

ABIGAIL: We don't have any other questions but if there's anything you would like to share, we'd love to hear it.

JANET: Well what I would like to share is that this has been an awesome, awesome career; I wouldn't trade it for anything in the world, I just finished my 30<sup>th</sup> year last month so I've been an inspector for 30 years, it is incredible, the, um, changes in the Inspection Service from when I first came in. Um, the uh-women are, um, pretty much accepted now, particularly the younger generation of guys that come in, they never knew it in any other way so it never, uh, enters their mind that-that a woman sitting at the desk is a, is a, um, surprise. Um, I've been off and on during my career, work-served as training officer and really saw three real different generations that the men that I came in with, that you know this is something new, and something that had to be quote dealt with, uh, something that posed a problem for a lot of them and then the second generation where when those men's daughters were getting old enough to go into the workplace, um, they often suddenly, um-uh, developed a real understanding for some of the things that were going on when they had to see it through the eyes of their daughters and some of them, their wives, and then there's the third generation where it's just simply not an issue, and it's not an issue for the men

or the women, and as I said I've got some, some uh, good friends that are—are female agents that are rather young and they just cannot believe some of the things that happened, um, at the time, and how why it was such a big issue so—but all in all it's been a fabulous career, I am so glad I did it and, uh-um, I wouldn't change it.

ABIGAIL: Thank you very much.

JANET: Your welcome. Now, can you tell me something about how this is going to be used and when it's, where it's, I know it's part of the Smithsonian project—

[End of Interview]