

Opinion: An officer and a friend



Donna Kingman, second from right, retires today after spending her entire career with the South Lake Tahoe Police Department. Photo/Bill Kingman

By Kathryn Reed

In retrospect, having your roommate clean her service revolver when your date is coming over for the first time might not be the best idea. It did, however, keep what's his name in line. I just don't remember a second date.

Today is South Lake Tahoe police Officer Donna Kingman's last day on the job. She is retiring after having started with the department in December 1987.

Hers is a storied career in many ways. When she was 8-years-old with her family on vacation in Southern California there was some police incident that she recalls being the coolest thing – she just doesn't remember exactly what it was. That led her to want to be an officer. She begged and begged her

dad to buy her a pair of handcuffs. He finally did.

Through her youth her desire to be an officer never wavered. Kingman went to CSU Sacramento where she majored in criminal justice. The South Lake Tahoe native knew she wanted to work for her hometown department. While she tested with others, she was one of five who was hired that December. About 600 had applied.

In her tenure she has worked for six full-time chiefs and two interims. She's been part of some of the biggest cases – like the murder at Campground by the Lake in 2001. Kingman was working in detectives at the time. (In 2003, Lisa Platz was found guilty of the murder of her 9-year-old daughter, Rebecca Aramburo. The child was found with her throat slashed inside a tent at the campground. Platz was sentenced to life in prison. Her boyfriend James Csucsai hanged himself in jail.)

I met Kingman in September 1988 when I first moved here. She lived in the apartment below me on 13th Street. Being the same age and single it led to many nights out at the Cantina, which we could walk to, and to Lily's to dance. It was inside High Sierra, which is now the Hard Rock. It seemed like a weekend ritual with us.

Unfortunately, Kingman remembers the night she dragged me out of there and all I could say was something about my shoe.

"I don't know whatever happened to that shoe," she laughed. I don't either. "You had to hang your head out of my car because it was new." I don't remember enough to argue with her memory. We both agree I didn't get sick.

Kingman had a Camaro and as two women in our early 20s we thought we were pretty cool cruising around in it. The heater would be on and the sunroof open. They were fun, carefree days – and nights, and really early mornings.

I was covering cops for the *Tribune* at the time. My boss

thought this would provide with me intel. *Wrong*. Her boss was worried. *No need to be*. To this day Kingman has always been loyal to the department. I've also never asked for anything that would compromise our friendship.

During that stint at the *Trib* I thought it would make a great story to try out for the department, but not let the higher ups know. This was when SLTPD had an obstacle course. That was first test; the written, psych evaluation and other stuff came later.

I ran into a 6-foot wall. Literally. More than once. Kingman was in charge of that particular obstacle. She told me to place my foot on the wall, jump, grab the top and haul myself over. This was a slick, wood wall. I thought her instructions were stupid until they worked.

"I remember at the end of that you were like 'oh, my god'. I think about two hours later you were on the couch and you didn't want to move," Kingman said. My selective memory has no recollection other than I completed the course and gained a tremendous amount of respect for those carrying a badge.

By then we were roommates; renting a house on South Shore Drive. Eventually another officer, Lori Scott, joined us. This was before she married her current husband.

Oh, the fun we had.

I left Tahoe for bigger papers, but Kingman and I stayed in touch. I came back for her wedding that was in town, with the reception at the Ridge. Then our calls and letters dwindled, before becoming non-existent. (This was pre-texting and emails.)

When I came back in 2002 I learned she was still at the department. By then she had a son – who is now 19. Our lives were different. I was managing editor at the *Trib* then. We were friends, but not. We didn't – and still don't –

socialize. We've never been to each other's house. And, yet, I still consider her a friend. We wave when we see each other. She picked me up in her patrol car when I was on foot because my car was in the shop. (I figure she can't get in trouble for that now.) Ironically, it's her dad, Bill Kingman, who does the "Then and now" articles for *Lake Tahoe News* who I am better friends with.

Oh, the laughs Donna and I have had in the last few weeks reminiscing about life in our 20s. Now we're both 50.

She always seemed to be in the thick of things. A pursuit she was on not long after being hired remains the longest in the department's history. She followed the suspect from here to Sacramento – making it there in 32 minutes. The dude wasn't happy a woman caught him.

At times there were three women patrol officers on one shift, plus the sergeant. Suspects thought a guy should be called. Even if there were one to call, one wasn't needed.

"Most people who did wrong know they did wrong. I try to treat people decently so I am not adding to their issues," Kingman said.

But she is also guarded about her personal life. Retribution is a real part of being a cop – even in South Lake Tahoe. Someone once broke into her home and killed her dog. That's not the only incident.

She's had to pull her gun many times, but never fired it. However, she has been there when her colleagues pulled the trigger. Taser – that was more her instrument of choice.

Some cases have stuck with her more than others. The near fatal slashing of **Susie Rizk Laney** is one of those. It was a case that necessitated the department to bring in a psychologist for officers to talk to.

There's the **Adam Rose** case. He was on his bike when a drunken driver hit him. From there the two formed a bond.

"Adam Rose is up and walking around and doing his thing," Kingman said with a softness that speaks to their friendship that formed after the incident.

Then there was the juvenile rape victim whose case she handled while in detectives.

"We had a connection and have a friendship as a result of that to this day," Kingman said. "When she comes in to see me she is so successful today. It is so awesome to see through the darkest time there is this shining star living her life."

Like anyone, there are things she would do differently, what with hindsight being 20-20. But she would not choose a different career or another town.

Thanks for the memories, my friend. Good luck in retirement. Go see the redwoods, the cherry blossoms, sleep in and please give me the exclusive when you find Bigfoot.