

First Women FBI Agents: Joanne Pierce Misko Interview

Joanne Pierce Misko was one of the first two women special agents in 1972. This interview was conducted on June 22, 2012.



Video link: <https://www.fbi.gov/video-repository/newss-first-women-agents-joanne-pierce-misko-interview/view>
Video Transcript Below, courtesy of the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation

I had been teaching school and I met an FBI agent who came to our school doing recruiting and I talked to him. And that's how I eventually got involved in it even applying to the Bureau. And then I went to Washington, D.C., and worked in this, like I say, with this group of agents. And I loved the work that I was doing. I enjoyed it immensely. And then this just happened. So it wasn't something that I had been planning to do or thought was going to happen at the time.

And then when L. Patrick Gray came in, he just opened it up to women. And then my, the head of the training division at that time, came to me and asked me if I would be interested, you know. And I said, absolutely I would be interested, you know. And then the, it was nice because

the assistant director at that time sat me down and he said, now this is what it's like and this is what it's going to be like. Are you sure this is what you want to do? He wasn't pushing, he wanted me to do it, but he wanted me to know all the pluses and minuses of doing this. And I said, okay, and I still want to do it, kind of thing.

You were told you know you're going to report on this date. And then at that time you went to Headquarters, and you had an official swearing-in ceremony. And then we all were taken down to Quantico to begin training. There were 45 of us in the class at that time, two women and 43 guys.

The academy was fine. You know, the hardest part for me was the physical training. It took a while to do the two-mile run in a certain amount of time and pull-ups, you know, some of that physical type thing that I hadn't done a lot of prior to that. So that was the toughest part for me. The firearms training came with time. The academics, that wasn't a problem really. And the acceptance by classmates was pretty good. They, you know, I'm sure when they first saw that there were two women in their class it was like. Oh, we got them, you know kind of thing. But we got along pretty well and everybody kind of pulled together as a class. And I didn't really feel any animosity on the part of the guys because we were in that class.

In training class, I think we were all in the same boat. We were all trying to prove ourselves. We were all trying to do the academics and the firearms so that we were qualified to go out in the field and become special agents.

You get to list the field office you'd like to be assigned to, knowing that you are not going to go back to where you came from. That's just the way it was. I think I put down Miami and I can't remember what other offices and then the day you get your assignments you're all in this big room and they tell you. And they said, St. Louis, so that was out of the clear blue sky. So, but hey, it was an assignment and I was going to be a special agent, so it's a new adventure right?

When you get to your first office as a new agent, you are assigned to another agent to go out and just find your way around and get a feel for it. And I was so lucky I had such a great first office agent as a trainee who took me to all these places and showed me all the people I needed to talk to in all the white collar crime cases, gave me a lot of guidance and, in fact, it was cute, you see how people didn't really expect women to be a part of the FBI. We went into a bank one time to do an interview and the secretary goes in to tell us that, tell the boss that we were there and she says, there's a couple here from the FBI to interview you...that kind of thing.

Later on in St. Louis, I got assigned to a fugitive squad and at that time was military deserters kind of thing. I can remember very vividly the first case I had. We went out to get the guy and he found out that we were looking for him and he called back into the office; he was incensed that a woman was being sent out to get him, you know, that he wasn't worthy of a guy. He had to have a woman go after him. Then he comes back in to surrender and tries to pass his cousin



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off as himself. We got the fugitive, but he didn't like having a woman going after him, kind of thing. In St. Louis, I found the agents very accepting and just let me be an agent and do my work like everybody else and that's the way you prove yourself by doing the job that you were sent to do.

It's amazing to me that going into Pittsburgh, it was a little different atmosphere. The squad I was on, no problem. Other squads, they saw a woman and they were kind of, they held back as far as acceptance was concerned. They wanted to see how you performed, what you did.

I can remember one supervisor, in particular, didn't talk to me very much at all kind of thing. Then I started to work and the squad I was assigned to did white-collar, but we also did fugitive apprehensions. And I got assigned a number of what were then military deserter cases. And I started going out and we would pick these guys up. We would go out early in the morning and get them before they were out of bed practically and bring them in and process them and then turn them over to the military. Well that particular supervisor, his office was right out there where we processed these individuals. And after he saw us doing this time after time after time, I had proven myself and I was one of the agents.

I worked the fugitives, I worked bombing matters, I worked white-collar crime. So I got a lot of experience in the Pittsburgh office and eventually I got involved in the processing of applicants, recruiting for the office and recruiting for Washington D.C. I did a lot of that, both for the special agent position and for some of the clerical positions in Washington.

This was one of the most rewarding things that I did. I brought people in and took them through the testing process and then the interview process and through the physical tests that they had to go through. And you felt so great when they were able to succeed and actually received an appointment as a special agent. So that was a really rewarding thing that I did.

I honestly didn't see myself as a pioneer. It was just a role that I was fortunate enough to become a part of and I just was just carrying out that role of special agent. So, I didn't think of it in that regard at the time anyway.