

First Women FBI Agents: Susan Roley Malone Interview

Susan Roley Malone was one of the first two women special agents in 1972. This interview was conducted on June 21, 2012.



Video link: <https://www.fbi.gov/video-repository/newss-first-women-agents-susan-roley-malone-interview/view>

Video Transcript Below, courtesy of the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation

When I was in the eighth grade, my civics class instructor gave us a year project that lasted most of the year to examine and look at one of the federal agencies. We were to pick a federal agency, do the research on the agency, meet some of the people in the agency, and talk about career opportunities. How could one become a career—have a career in federal government in that particular agency?



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The agency that I chose of course was the FBI. I lived in the suburbs of Washington, D.C., and again, I said I had a number of family friends and had a great desire, read a number of books, I remember, of course, seeing that very famous movie, I think 1959, The FBI Story with Jimmy Stewart, and had a desire to serve my country and, of course, wanted to be an FBI agent, but at that time, of course, the agent position was closed to women.

In May of 1972, Mr. J. Edgar Hoover died, and my admiral gave me the opportunity to be a representative, one of many, to go to Mr. Hoover's funeral in Washington, D.C. And then shortly thereafter, L. Patrick Gray was named as the acting director of the FBI and they opened up the position of special agent to women. And I was encouraged by my friends and my own desires. I applied. I was interviewed and I came through the Norfolk field office and was selected as one of the first two women entered into duty on July 17, 1972.

We were sworn in at the FBI Headquarters in Washington and then taken down to Quantico to the academy and Joanne Pierce, who was my fellow female agent, we got to know each other, we roomed together, we supported each other, we were complementary, and knew that we were the first two and, you know, we're allies. We worked together, we would you know practice the run at night, we would, you know, go to the gym and work out. We were just colleagues, we would—there's that bond there when you you're someone's roommate and you're going through the same training it's whether there's a bond that's formed. That's a lifelong bond.

Having the first two women FBI agents was publicized in all the newspapers in America and I laughingly now say I'm a footnote in history. A footnote in history about being one of the first two agents, female FBI agents.

Of course, everybody wanted to see who we were. Sometimes I felt like I was an exhibit in a museum because everybody would say which one are you? Are you the Marine or the nun? My colleague Joanne Pierce had been a former nun and then was a teacher and a bureau clerk with the FBI when she was appointed with me. So she came with a very well-developed background as well also. And so it was, you felt like you were under a microscope at times. Everybody was, they were very, um, watching you intently, the staff, they treated us with respect, they wanted us to succeed.

Some of the agents that were already in the FBI academy for training would come and one of the agents sat down and came during the day and sat down next to me, at lunch, and was a little bit hostile and, why are you here?

He wanted to find out why are you here, who are you, why do you want to be here, what makes you want to be and FBI, what makes you think you can be an FBI agent? And I sat down and talked with him and I said, you know, I love my country just like you, I want to serve in federal law enforcement, I know the Bureau, have always cherished the good work that the Bureau does. And I want to be here for the same reasons you want to be here.

And he looked at me and I remember he sort of leaned back and he said, oh, okay. And once I talked to him and said I have the same goals and desires to serve my nation, to work in federal law enforcement, and for the same reason that he was there, then he was very accepting and he realized that, yes, that we had the same desires.

You know let me say it's like any organization. When you're the first and you're a pioneer, you know, you're going to get push back from some people. But I got a lot people that helped, a lot of people that held out their hands, and were colleagues and allies to help. Those people that didn't help or were maybe nasty to me, they have to walk in their own skin and you know they probably didn't feel good about themselves, I can't say. But it's any organization, when you're on the leading edge and you're one of the, you're standing out because you are new or it's something different, there's people that can't accept change.



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There was, if I recall, announcements when we went in was well written up in Time and all the different magazines and newspapers and of course when we were I think the Bureau received news queries as we were going through training and said yes the women were still in training and still moving along with their male counterparts.

But they wanted to minimize, I think, a media frenzy about this event because we were agents in training with our fellow agents. I think that was very important at the time. We wanted to be another agent just another agent who happened to be a woman.

We graduated in the fall and then we went to our field offices. My first office was the Omaha field division in Omaha, Nebraska.

So I get my cases and I'm looking at my cases and one case was cattle rustling and you are thinking the 1970's cattle rustling. But it was a big business, because in Omaha and Iowa and big slaughter houses and lots of money and they take them across state lines. But I looked at these two cases among the many cases I had and I was wondered if my squad supervisor or the ASAC or somebody was teasing me about giving me a case that involved train wrecking and cattle rustling all on the same initial batch of cases. But they were real cases which the FBI investigates as one of the violations of federal law.

Other cases involved, I'd have a case, I made an arrest right away in my first office with our team of agents—you always worked together as a team. But arrested a deserter and then had another fugitive arrest which so I immediately came to my field office and the next day or so made an arrest. That first case we went out and worked and worked joint but was able to make that first FBI arrest by a woman agent.

You know, I am where I am today because of the talents and gifts of many people that have opened doors for me, that have assisted me along on my journey. And especially some of the people that I recall that were FBI agents. And to recall Bill Stapleton, to recall Charles Bates, Hank Sloan, Bob Grant, who was in my FBI office in San Francisco, he and Walker Anderson and I worked many cases together, Carroll Garnett in my first office. These people had such talent and they were willing to share it. They were willing to take a young agent, whether it was a man or a women, and share that talent. And for that I am grateful.

It was a great opportunity. I will cherish my service with the FBI for the rest of my life.