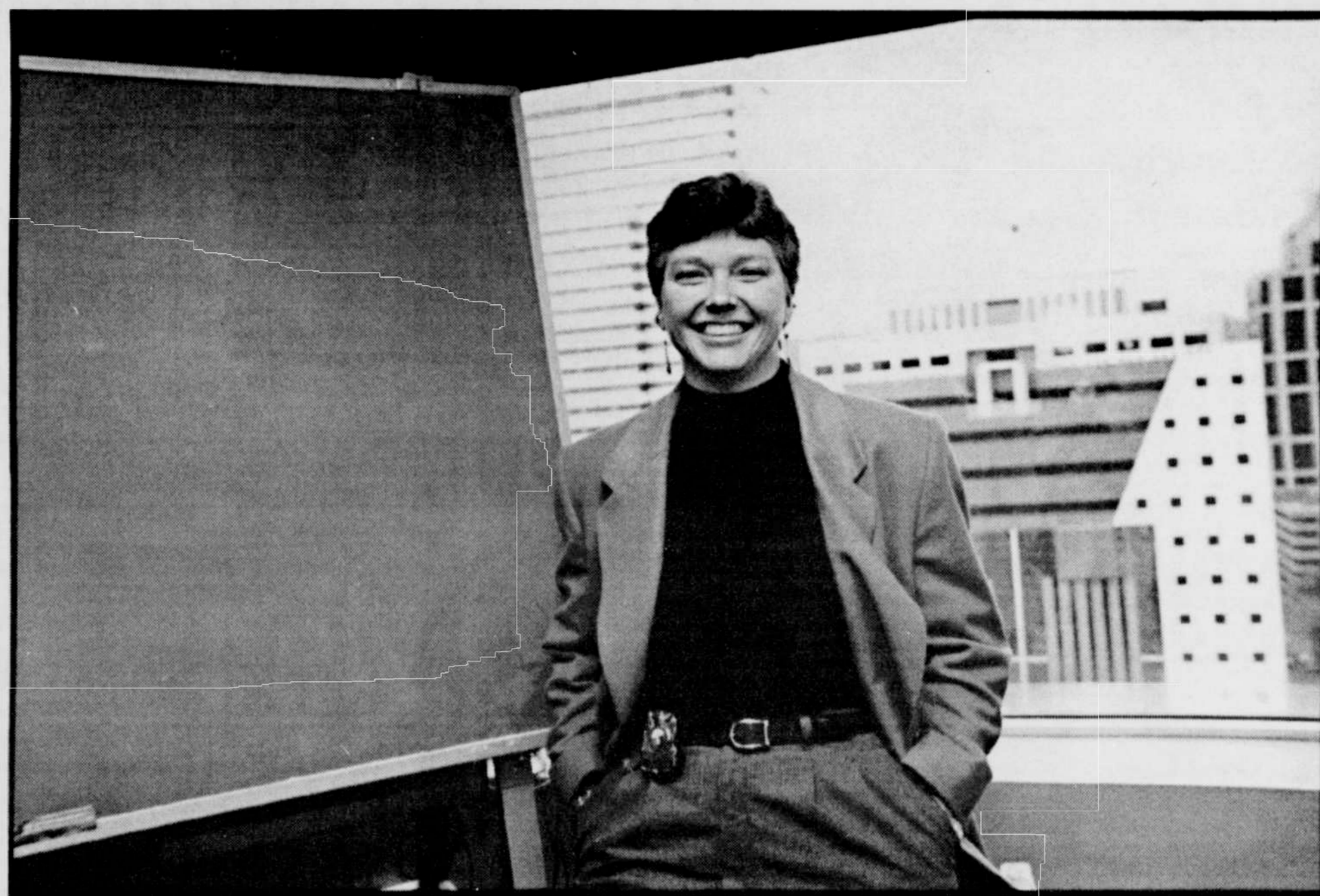


The Thin Queer Line

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Police academy instructor Sara Westbrook

years. "But I know that it's the perfect work for me to be doing."

Westbrook started out as a deputy in Thurston County, Wash., and then moved to Portland after being offered a job with the Portland Police Bureau. She says the idea of police work struck her as a college student, when she was pursuing a degree in liberal arts.

Throughout her career, Westbrook says, she's maintained her identity as a feminist.

"The women's community sometimes thinks I've aligned myself with them," she says. "I used to try to wear both hats and maintain a sense of objectivity. Others saw it as a conflict and I tried to respond. I still want fairness for women, and as a law enforcement officer I want fair treatment and justice for everyone. I used to see it as a choice between my friends

and my career, but now it's more integrated."

The fact that she's gay, Westbrook says, has been integrated as well.

"In a good way, it's an absolute nonissue that I'm gay," she says. "It's a known fact that I am; people ask about my partner. We had a commitment ceremony a year and a half ago and several co-workers and supervisors attended. In Portland, I've never felt left out of things."

That was not the case back in Olympia, where Westbrook was not out.

"It was my own self-inflicted prison," she explains. "Since then, I've had mostly positive responses whenever I've told people. People usually say, 'Oh, of course you are.' So far, it hasn't changed my friendships with anyone on the job."

Perhaps one reason Westbrook and others are comfortable being out at work is the existence of Vision, a social group for queer employees of the bureau.

Westbrook—along with everyone else interviewed for this article—dismisses the macho nature of police work.

"Sometimes, guys can just be macho, period," she says. "But there's lots of macho cultures under the umbrella of being male, and I've heard much scarier stories from the business world. We're certainly a predominantly male career choice, but it gives us great debates and fodder for terrific humor."

(Despite the efforts made by *Just Out*, no gay male officer would step forward to be interviewed for this story.)

Although she plans to return to patrol,

Westbrook is currently taking a break from the streets by serving as the bureau's crisis intervention team coordinator. The team is her profession's response to chronically mentally ill and developmentally disabled people in crisis.

For her, the switch from squad car to office offered a much-needed break.

"I knew intuitively from the beginning of my career that I am part of the human race, part of the greater body," she says. "But what you see on the street blows holes in your soul. You have to get more thick-skinned and dehumanize the situation, otherwise you could not survive. But the balance for me is that I want to maintain my humanity and my ability to remember that people are involved, and see the horror of humanity and not have that destroy me."

An intricate equation, to say the least, but Westbrook has managed to find her own peace.

"I maintain a life outside of police work," she says. "I'm active in a social world that has nothing to do with my profession, and I'm a fabulous aunt."

Westbrook is also pursuing a graduate degree in interdisciplinary studies.

"To immerse myself in the arts and how other people see the world," she says. "To keep me whole and keep my mind open."

Both Westbrook and McGinley mention a particular colleague as a positive example. In 1991, Katie Potter—an officer and the daughter of then-Portland Police Chief Tom Potter—tore the door off the closet and came out as a queer cop in a profile first published in *Just Out* and later picked up by the national media.

"What made it such big news was that nobody had really gone public at that time," she says, looking back on the event. "Plus the fact that my father was so high in the bureau. Historically, the police have been the oppressors of gay people, so for a father and daughter to come out together made it even more interesting, I think."

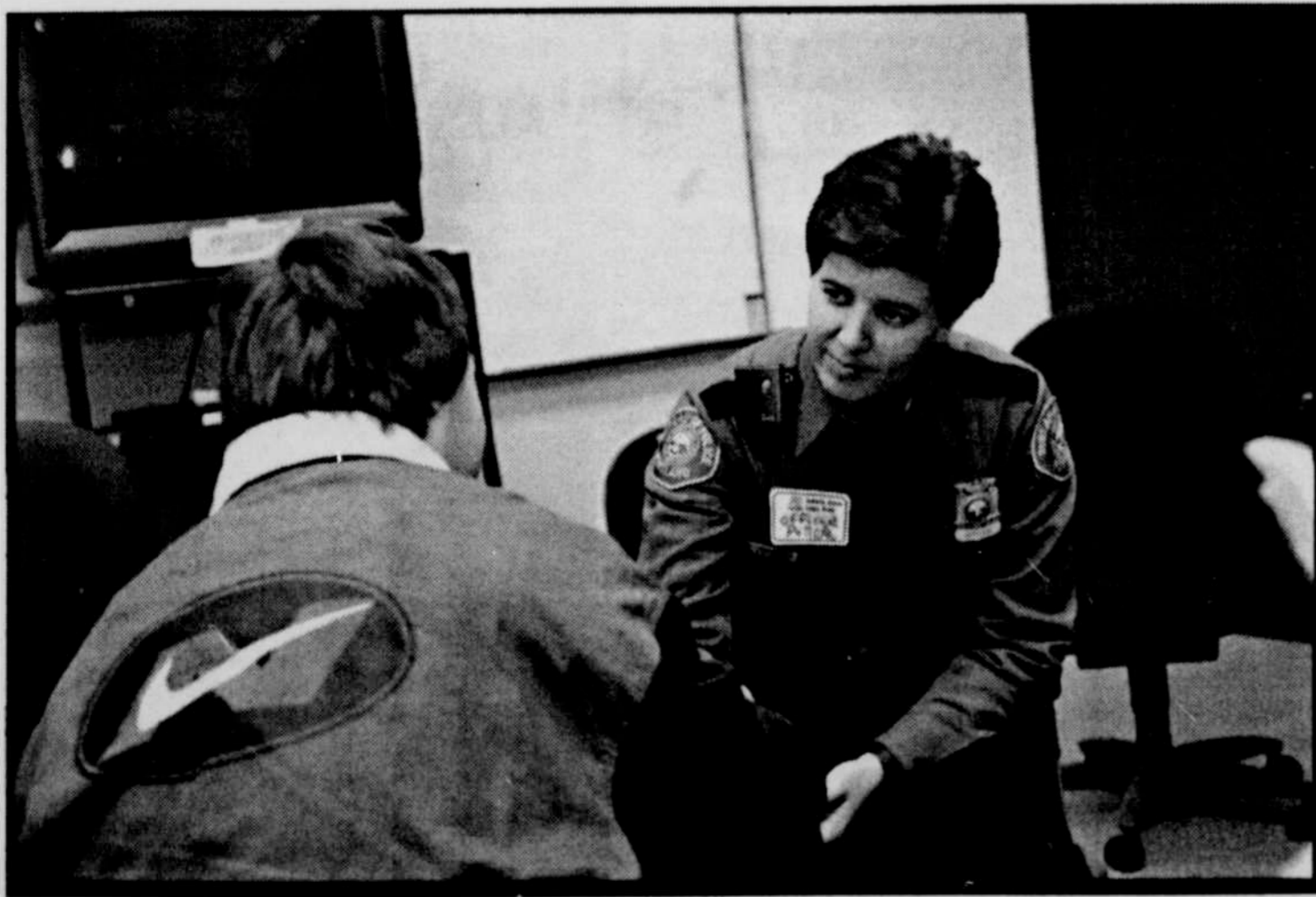
What Katie Potter couldn't have known at that time was that she would become the poster child for queer cops. Public appearances have become a way of life for her since then. Still, she recalls, her coming out was not without a price.

"There were some things that happened," she says.

Her car was vandalized in the bureau's parking lot. There were letters in magazines all over the country with unnamed sources from the bureau saying they resented the fact that Potter and her father came out publicly.

"But I'm sure there were lots of things that didn't happen because of who my father was," she says.

There were, of course, some nasty rumors. Like Potter attending a party-turned-shoot-out in Washington County with her girlfriend.



Katie Potter (right) talking with an employee of Goodwill Industries

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