

How a Y. L. Police Reporter Works

The Story of W9DXX—Mrs. Alice R. Bourke

MRS. ALICE R. BOURKE, hamishly known as W9DXX, for years past has been connected with the Chicago newspaper world.

For eight years she led an interesting and exciting existence as police reporter for the Chicago Tribune, and is probably the only woman journalist ever assigned by a great daily to cover crime as a regular night assignment.

Mrs. Bourke's "beat" for the Tribune covered more than a third of Chicago, including the "black belt," the stamping grounds of the war-lords of Beerland, the University district, the steel mills, and the finest residential section of Chicago. It ran from placid Lake Michigan on the east, to Bloody Cicero, the Capone stronghold, which forms the western boundary of the city.

Twelve police stations located in Mrs. Bourke's district furnished some of the biggest news stories that have broken in recent years.

Mrs. Bourke's work on the Loeb-Leopold story was rewarded by a FB bonus check presented by the Tribune.

Police reporters comprise the shock troops of journalism. They are the unsung heroes of newspaperdom. Their names rarely get into print—except when they make the obituary column. They get all the drudgery and hard work, the long early-morning sub-zero chases out to where "X marks the spot," they never get any sleep, BUT—if they prove trustworthy, they get ALL the news-tips, and ALL the fun and exhilarating thrills!

Fortunately for Mrs. Bourke's newspaper career, she gained the reputation of keeping faith and respecting confidences. A cop or gangster could give her the "low-down" on a story, secure in the knowledge that the source of the news would not be divulged. Consequently, most of W9DXX's stories were exclusive.

For the first month after Mrs. Bourke's assignment to the south side night police beat, the presence of a YL reporter was a matter of surprised embarrassment to the desk sergeants and squads. Then the ice thawed and they forgot she was a YL.

W9DXX knows several thousand Chicago cops. She was first to hear about their engagements, what the new baby was to be christened, and how long it was after Junior's tonsils were taken out before he could swallow! She cannot speak too highly of these policemen for their unflinching courtesy, their kindly helpfulness, their tact, and priceless, concerted determination to see that she got the news first.

The past ten years might be called the "Colorful Era of Chicago Crime." Never again will that city countenance another notorious character of such headline-magnitude as Alphonse Capone. Prohibition repeal and police radio legislate against it!

But Public Enemy No. 1 and all the lesser enemies have furnished plenty of thrills for W9DXX. During the past decade she has known and interviewed the "Bad Wolves" of Chicago gangland, and, sad to relate, she has found a few of them to be rather likeable chaps, in spite of their lurid reputations!

Fortunately for Chicago, most of these men are gone, some to prison, the wisest to

permanent hideaways, but most of them by the sawed-off shotgun route.

The ability to make friendships is the greatest asset a reporter can have.

On one occasion there was a shooting involving two bandits and two policemen. The bandits escaped, to be captured a few hours later. One police officer was killed, his partner was shot. Only the injured cop knew, or could tell what had happened. Before he was taken for surgical attention, he had a fellow-officer tip-off Mrs. Bourke where he could be found. Result: one exclusive first page story with 8-column heading, and seven exclusive pictures.

bing a Grand Trunk mail train of \$133,000 at Evergreen Park the day before.

All on the blind tip of a helpful old friend! The fact that the opposition newspaper took its kick on the "scooping" direct to the mayor and the chief of police made the joy of W9DXX complete!

Sometimes the confidence which Mrs. Bourke inspired was more annoying than satisfying, however, as in the case of Margaret Blank.

The first time that W9DXX saw Margaret, the girl had been arrested as the queen of a smuggling ring. She was handsome, dark-eyed, and photographed beauti-



Mrs. W9DXX and Her Modern Amateur Receiving Equipment

Another exclusive story came from a pulmotor squad which worked over a dying baby for 13 hours. The squad locked the doors, refused to talk to newspapers, or answer any phone calls except those from W9DXX!

Still another exclusive first page 8-col. headliner came about from a friendly old police captain who called W9DXX into his office late one Saturday night. "I don't know what it means, Mrs. Bourke," he said, "but I thought I'd tell you there are a great many outside squads out south tonight. Don't know why, but thought you'd like to know."

W9DXX called her office; the City Desk knew no reason for the influx of squads, and she was advised that she could go home early as things seemed dead.

On the way home, W9DXX saw a strange police squad whizzing along, and on a hunch decided to follow it. Three hours of work, many miles of speeding, much questioning, prying and piecing together, and she had a whale of a story telling of the rounding up of a gang of 16 men for rob-

fully. The police who arrested her tipped off Mrs. Bourke, and the Tribune got a 2-col. exclusive first page Sunday yarn. Margaret liked the story, and she liked the reporter.

The girl got out of that jam, and into many more during the next few years. Each time she was arrested, she would reiterate doggedly: "Send for Mrs. Bourke. I won't talk until she is here." And she wouldn't!

As Margaret specialized on being arrested about 4 a. m., W9DXX would just about get beneath the covers when some exasperated squad-leader, generally at the opposite side of the city, would phone, pleading: "Be a good sport and come over and get her to talk. We can't get a chirp out of her. Besides, it's a GOOD story!"

Of course, that always did the trick!

The last time W9DXX saw the girl, she was in a Yellow Cab stand, where Margaret had gone to phone the police, claiming that she had killed a man. She was dressed in men's clothing, and had a gun in each hand.

The man she shot was a dope peddler.

He did not die. Since then, her name has not appeared on local police blotters.

The most common question W9DXX encountered in connection with her police reporting was: "Aren't you afraid to go around on stories alone at night?"

The answer invariably was "No," because there never was any reason for fear. As a rule, there always were plenty of police around.

On only a few occasions during her years of newspaper work does W9DXX remember risking personal danger.

really do not mean much in newspaper parlance, she and the OM were ready to leave the shack for the theatre, when the phone rang. It was the City Desk.

"Listen, Lady, there's a big train wreck. We know it's your night off, but won't you please . . ."

W9DXX had on a new white silk dress, new white shoes and a new white hat. Fifteen minutes later, still so attired, she was climbing up a cinderly railroad embankment on hands and knees. At the top, she discovered that she was on the wrong side of the

With the coming of radio, such cooperation was at an end. Every clue was public property, and all the smart crooks had radios!

In 1929, the Chicago Tribune began broadcasting police calls experimentally over its station, WGN, and when Lieut. John Treacy's squad captured four men and women 3 minutes after they had stuck up an oil station, the newspaper story was generally commented on. We were living in such wonderful times!

Then the Chicago public went crazy over police radio, and so did distracted policemen and police reporters! The first week of the WGN police flashes, W9DXX and a squad responded to the call: "Man shot in prairie," half mile away from the South Chicago police station. When they arrived three minutes later, a thousand other radio listeners were on the spot, and the squad had to fight its way through. Just a false alarm!

Two weeks later a man was murdered in a hotel in the Oakland district. When W9DXX arrived with the squad, it was necessary for the officers to draw their revolvers to get through the jam of 3,000 sensation seekers outside the hotel.

The "old-timers" among police reporters remember the leisurely days before the automobile speeded up the tempo of the news. The contemporary police reporters found their activities augmented dizzily by the advent of radio.

Radio was not new, however, to Mrs. Bourke. Away back in 1922 she had been the proud owner of a Reinartz receiver which brought in a few market reports, a little music, mostly from KDKA, and plenty of mysterious, intriguing dots and dashes.

In those dim, departed days, receivers were still called "wireless sets," and people hesitated over the new word "radio," not sure whether ra-dio, or Al Smith's pronunciation was correct.

The Reinartz was responsible for Mrs. Bourke learning to read code, and her fanciful experiences with the old receiver were incorporated in a humorous story, "O Woe! Radio," which she sold to Radio Broadcast.

In 1930 Mrs. Bourke became W9DXX, but did not go in for consistent operation of her ham station until about a year ago, after her resignation from the Tribune, due to illness in her family.

The transmitter in her shack is crystal controlled, using a 47 oscillator, 801 doubler, 203A buffer, and a pair of 203As, push-pull in the final, with input of 650 watts on 40. The station is operated on 7040, 7160 and 14,320 KC. The receivers are a National AGSX, a Hammarlund Crystal Comet Pro, and a General Electric All-Wave.

DX includes all W, all VE, CM, D, EA, F, G, HH, K4, K5, K6, LU, LY, NY, OA, ON, TI, VK, VO, VP2, VP4, X and ZL. Signals have been heard in Poland, Holland and Russia.

W9DXX handles traffic, and enjoys rag-chewing and DX-fishing. She is a member of the A.R.R.L., I.D.A., Réseau Belge, Réseau Francaise, R.S.G.B., and has the honor of being the only YL member of the Society of Wireless Pioneers.

In addition to her newspaper work for the Chicago Tribune, W9DXX has been editor of the Chicago Comet, a south side community newspaper, and for a time was a member of the editorial staff of the Chicago Daily News. She has contributed fiction and articles to the national magazines, and has edited several books. She has two hobbies—amateur radio and book collecting, and owns a large library containing more than 3,000 first editions, and many inscribed and association copies.



Transmitter at W9DXX

She barely escaped pneumonia when her feet froze solid to the pavement at a January early morning fire. Police begged her to stay out of the black belt during the last race riots, but the Tribune said "Stay there." Although she was the only white woman on the streets within several miles, not a single person made a move to molest her, though she covered most of the street fights.

During a period when the leaders of two rival beer mobs had threatened to "kill each other on sight," and police were hot on the trail of both of them, W9DXX rode an hour through the "Bad Lands" in an auto containing one of the two warring Big Shots and his four body-guards. The story W9DXX got was a good one, but she admits a creepy sensation in retrospect!

An undignified flopping down to the floor of her car was W9DXX's prompt reaction to driving into cross-fire during the "smoking out" of a colored murderer hiding in an unfinished court building, early one morning.

On one of W9DXX's "nights off"—which

track to cover the wreck. A traveling railroad crane blocked her path, and the only way to get to the other side was to crawl under the crane, which she did. Just as she cleared under the firepit, the engineer dropped a great load of steaming ashes and red-hot coals to the track. If he had done so a fraction of a minute sooner, W9DXX would not be indulging in amateur radio today.

The first public appearance of W9DXX's new outfit was also the last!

The introduction of radio brought a great change to the police department, and to police reporting.

Up to 1929, a scoop could be "kept on ice" so long as the policemen and the reporter working on the case could trust each other. If ten men of an auto-theft ring were in custody, and two others were sought, the reporter could hold the story up long enough for the police to nab the missing pair, provided he knew the police would give him the story exclusively.