

POLICE

Cpl. Marlie Frei on a traffic stop after a driver swerved surprisingly in front of her one night in late October.



JANE GERSTER/TIMES-HERALD

On the night shift

Riding shotgun with Corporal Marlie Frei

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MOOSE JAW TIMES-HERALD

Cpl. Marlie Frei is responding to a noise complaint when the driver ahead marks her as police and slows from 50 km/h to barely 30.

It's a vaguely amusing, somewhat annoying constant: people see a cop and slow to almost a crawl, even if they were already abiding the law.

"Like, the speed limit's just fine," Frei says, flicking on her signal and changing lanes.

It's a fall Friday and, so far, an unusually quiet night.

For 12 hours, Frei and her team will crisscross the city in the dark, watching for the tell-tale weave of an impaired driver, looking for anyone lingering suspiciously in places they shouldn't be and responding to calls as dispatch receives them.

It isn't exactly the job Frei pictured doing 16 years ago when she first started policing, nor is it the car chases, gunfights, and drama of the Hollywood cop's routine. In Moose Jaw the calls run the gamut: there are car accidents, hit and runs, dogs barking, fights, shoplifting, drugs and family disputes.

"I didn't realize I had to wear that many hats," Frei says. She's a cop but "kind of a social worker and sometimes psychologist, mediator, divorce/separation mediator."

It puts Frei and her colleagues in an interesting position. They have their finger uniquely on the pulse of the city: what's troubling it, what needs fixing, what's slipped under the radar. And so on this particularly brisk Friday we head off to see what's wrong in the city of Moose Jaw.

The radio buzzes from dispatch: a



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Cpl. Marlie Frei speaks with one of the constables on A-team during an "assist to locate" call in late October.

noise complaint, repeat offender. It's a common call.

Frei and a constable meet at the home of the complainant and listen, interjecting with the occasional question. Then, they knock on the door of the person being too loud and tell him to keep it down, reasoning with him when he protests that it's the weekend, jotting down his name for posterity.

In and out, it takes maybe 10 minutes. Mostly they listen, lend a sympathetic ear, and explain people's options to them.

Frei can't think of a single call – no matter how mundane or non-criminal it seems – that the police wouldn't answer. Wait, she laughs, "people will call and say, 'I've got a pipe burst and I've got water all over my house.' ...We're not plumbers."

Frei has been back on patrol for six months now. She just got out of a six-year rotation in the police's criminal investigation division, a posting she wanted for a long time in order to in-

vestigate child abuse cases.

"What more true innocent victim," Frei explained, "who could you help the most except a child?"

Now, Frei is the corporal for A-team, one of the city's four policing teams (A, B, C, D). Each team has a sergeant, a corporal, and six constables, but often – like tonight – they aren't at full manpower.

They do shifts: day, day, night, night, night. Then a switch: night, night, day, day.

Days have a different tenor, Frei says. There's more businesses open. There's court, more people going about their regular lives. At night, it's more patrol and often more serious calls.

Still, rarely do the calls require Frei or the constables to flick on their sirens and speed through the city.

They often spend time looking for kids that go out past curfew night after night and whose parents or guardians phone it in. "Assist to locate," since they're not yet missing. Tonight, a

drunk driver waylays the search shortly after midnight.

Frei, being the only woman on staff for the evening, is called to meet the arresting constable at the station to perform a search of the driver who is also a woman. You never know, she says, what to expect with a drunk driver.

They'll go in a cell until they've sobered up in the morning, the drunk tank if they're too inebriated to not fall off the bed in the regular cells. Some are angry, some sob and others – like tonight – are forward and flirtatious and a little indignant.

The job, the paperwork and the rules can all feel routine after awhile, Frei says, rolling her window up and down slightly to listen to the sounds of a sleepy neighbourhood, the cold air bracing. The trick is to fight the repetitive.

"It takes just one little twist to it or a flare up or something that totally changes the dynamic," she says and "things can go south quickly."



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Cpl. Marlie Frei returns to her vehicle.

The monitors in the cells area of police headquarters, where prisoners are kept.

A police vest.