

Police

The embattled LAPD has a new force with which to contend: a feisty inspector general with a history of knocking heads with entrenched bureaucracies

by Sigrid Bathen

When Katherine Mader was a young lawyer working as the patient-rights advocate for the California Health Department in the mid-1970s, she conducted a surprise, 3 a.m. inspection at Metropolitan State Hospital in Norwalk — a gloomy, institutional relic that resembled a prison as much as a hospital for the mentally ill. Her visit was part of a massive probe of the troubled state hospital system, which was under siege by the news media and residents' relatives incensed about substandard care and a raft of "suspicious" patient deaths and injuries going back years.

"I would go on to the wards to see if the people in restraints and seclusion had been checked every 15 minutes, as required by law," said the 48-year-old Mader. "The chart said they had been checked at 15-minute intervals all the way from 2 to 6 a.m. And this was at 3."

Hired by then-state Health Director Dr. Jerome Lackner to head a new Patient Rights Office and answerable only to Lackner and his chief administrator, Ray Procnier, Mader got results. Abusive, lazy or deceptive staff members were disciplined or fired, and several especially egregious cases of patient neglect, abuse or death were referred for possible criminal prosecutions.

It was Mader's methodical, exhaustively researched, utterly no-nonsense style that caught the attention of the Los Angeles Police Commission. Desperately in need of a tenacious troubleshooter, they hired Mader this past spring to be their first-ever inspector general. In hiring Mader, the commission gets someone who has seen law enforcement from both sides — first as a Sacramento County public defender, then in the high-profile, controversial patient rights post, later as a criminal defense attorney for,

Woman



Illustration by Norm Hines

among others, Angelo Buono, the infamous Hillside Strangler. In 1985, she took the unusual step from defense to prosecution, becoming a top prosecutor in the Los Angeles District Attorney's Office, prosecuting, among others, former Los Angeles City Councilman Art Snyder for campaign fund-raising violations during his time as a lobbyist. Getting ever closer to the inner workings of the giant, troubled LAPD, she was assigned in 1993 to the DA's Special Investigations Division, which probes officer-involved shootings.

Mader has already made waves in her new job — matter-of-factly pointing out to embattled Police Chief Willie Williams in a recent public hearing that his statistics on officers' use of racial epithets were, well, *wrong*. Sitting with Williams on a panel testifying before the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, Mader told the chief that her staff count of personnel complaints involving "ethnic remarks" by officers last year was 86. The chief had said 31.

"I was hired to call it like it is," said Mader after the meeting.

Procurier — the longtime former California state prison director who came out of retirement at the request of Lackner and a beleaguered Governor Jerry Brown to ramrod the controversial investigation of patient abuse and deaths in the state hospitals — said Mader was "very unpopular with some people" in the health department. "She was constantly calling things to my attention that I needed to know," Procurier said. "She was very tenacious, very honest. She would call the shots as she saw them."

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Mader's new position was created out of recommendations by the Christopher Commission after the 1991 Rodney King arrest and the devastating Los Angeles riots that followed. Appointed by the five-member Police Commission, which hires and fires the chief and is appointed by the mayor, the office is designed to provide independent oversight of the LAPD — its internal disciplinary processes, civil litigation, the effectiveness and fairness of citizen complaint procedures and the annual audit of the department's disciplinary system. One of her functions is to review every investigation by the LAPD's own Internal Affairs Division, which examines allegations of officer misconduct. "I look for objectivity and thoroughness," says Mader, "and I've

found a mixed bag."

In one instance, she raised serious questions about the case of an officer found guilty of "a sexual offense involving a minor" who was disciplined [129 days off without pay] but allowed to keep his job. "I vehemently disagree with the decision to keep him on," says Mader. "One of the criticisms made by the Christopher Commission is that the police department as an institution is unusually lenient [in officer discipline]. I believe an individual who violates his position of trust and authority in such a blatant way should not be allowed to carry a badge and gun."

She is also investigating allegations of "a hostile work environment for female officers in a particular division" of the LAPD, a massive bureaucracy which employs more than 9000 sworn officers and another 3000 civilian personnel. "This has been going on for a considerable period of time, and supervisors who are aware of it have done nothing about it."

In addition to reviewing internal investigations and initiating her own, Mader examines citizen complaints and those of officers who increasingly come to her with long-held concerns about the operation of the department. Mader says she does not view her role as "somebody who runs around looking over people's shoulders and saying, 'Gotcha!' I view my job as finding problems and rectifying them. I think it is very important for somebody like myself who is completely independent and with no vested interest in the department to be able to come to a conclusion and get the word out. That includes getting the word out when I find that things are working well."

She is also reviewing persistent allegations that "there is disparate treatment among the various ranks and divisions, as well as by ethnicity and gender, in the way discipline is administered," with officers from the rank and file, minorities and women, punished more seriously than command staff, which generally means captains and above. "These are stories that are perpetuated generally without any objective data, but the stories nonetheless persist." An analyst is currently going through every 1995 disciplinary complaint to determine whether those disparities exist.

A major focus of the office is breaking down the longstanding, unwritten officers' "code of silence" in investiga-

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tions of other officers. Noting that Williams says he has "stepped up" his own investigations of such cases, Mader is watching that process closely. She also plans to go beyond the confines of the hierarchy to look at allegations that there is "an inordinate amount" of domestic violence in the families of the LAPD — and to be certain that officers who commit acts of domestic violence, or any other crime, don't receive preferential treatment.

"When the public and officers in the department perceive there is a difference in treatment, it is bad for morale within the department," Mader said. "If there is a perception that people are being treated fairly, no matter what their rank, ethnicity, gender, whatever, I think it not only is good for the system but translates into better relationships on the street ... There is obviously a great distrust by certain members of the community toward the police department. Whether it is just or not, the perception exists. Obviously, there have been documented instances where members of the public have not been treated courteously or have been the victims of excessive force. Conversely, I think it's important to recognize that the police are out there, sometimes in extremely hostile situations. It's always going to be a very tenuous situation on the street."

Despite a somewhat chilly reception from the chief — who declined to be interviewed for this article, saying through a spokesman that it was "too early" to comment — she says most officers have been "fairly welcoming." Williams has instructed his officers to give her full access to information. "They are to cooperate and not give me any trouble," she says. "It took a few weeks to get that message straightened out."

Although Williams declined to be interviewed, his chief press spokesman, LAPD Commander Tim McBride, said he has met with Mader "and watched her in action" at numerous meetings. "Everything I've seen is supportive of her reputation of being objective and professional," he said.

Merrick J. Bobb, special counsel to the commission, called Mader's "an extremely good appointment" to a position viewed with some suspicion by the LAPD, which has been beset by criticism of its ineptitude in a range of responsibilities, from accurate record-keeping to cordial relationships with

community residents. "It's not easy to come into that position," said Bobb. "The LAPD has never had to deal with an inspector general before."

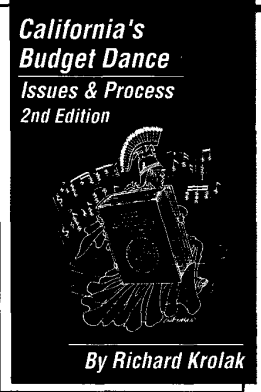
At 48, Mader has an impressive resume. Criminal defense attorney, prosecutor, health-care advocate, author of three books on the annals of big-city crime — *Fallen Angels: Chronicles of L.A. Crime and Mystery*; *Rotten Apples: Chronicles of New York Crime and Mystery*, and *Perfect Crimes*. She was born in Los Angeles to an Austrian scientist father with a Ph.D. from the University of Vienna, who barely escaped the Holocaust in Europe, emigrating to Los Angeles and eventually becoming chief chemist for the Los Angeles Air Pollution Control District, and a German-born public health nurse who met her husband in a Jewish social club in Los Angeles. She was their only child, and was cared for while her parents worked by her maternal grandfather, who lived with the family. Both parents, who died in the early 1980s, lost many relatives — including one of her father's three sisters, her husband and three children — in Hitler's Europe, and Mader still places articles in Los Angeles' *Jewish Journal* trying to locate any survivors or their descendants. Every few years, she visits an aunt, now 92, who survived the concentration camps and lives in Vienna.

Parlaying their own frugality and her father's reputed wartime skill at poker — which is believed to have provided the seed money for the family's

first house, a duplex in Los Angeles — Mader's parents moved to a basic '50s ranch-style in Brentwood when she was 11, and she was a member of the "Class of '65" at Palisades High School, made famous by a book of the same name. She met her husband, Norman Kulla, when both were students at UCLA, and they horrified their parents by getting married when she was 19 and he 20. They went to UC-Davis Law School together, and have defied the divorce statistics of their generation by staying married for nearly 30 years. They live in Pacific Palisades and have three children — 18-year-old Julia, a freshman at UC-San Diego, 11-year-old David and Hans, 7. Kulla is a tax attorney and investment adviser in West Los Angeles.

The somewhat grudging acceptance initially given Mader has made her investigations easier, but she has no illusions about the challenges she faces in dealing with an institution the size of LAPD. Even if she's successful in changing the department's culture, institutional reforms can be illusory. The state Health Department where Mader made headlines 20 years ago as the Patient Rights Advocate was reorganized around the same time her investigation was being conducted. A few years ago, on a whim, Mader phoned her old department (now called health services) and asked for the Patient Rights Office which she once headed.

"They had no idea what I was talking about," she says. "Hopefully, that won't be the fate of the inspector general." 🏠



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