



Text Version of Audio Story: Cool Broad

I was seventeen years old, mad at the world, and I made sure on a daily basis the world knew it.

I was as angry as any one seventeen-year-old boy could be. I was a punk ... had a chip on my shoulder.

“Let’s see,” she said, as she sat in her chambers.

“Speeding — 110 in a 45. A high-speed chase on mountain roads with your lights off to evade capture. You must be quite a driver, young Mr. Lauver, to outrun a 30-year veteran of the Pennsylvania State Police.”

“Oh, and here we have a charge of harassment for calling a police officer names that, as a lady, I won’t repeat.”

I could throw the book at you. You could end up in a detention center. You’re close enough to your 18th birthday that we could just consider this an adult matter.”

I shrugged my shoulders. I didn’t care. I told her, *“Do whatever you want.”*

“Mr. Lauver, I bet you’re one of those young men who thinks you don’t get any breaks. I bet you think the world is out to get you. Well, Nelson Lauver, this is one time you are going to get a break. I’m going to just give you fines and make them relatively low.”

It was the late 1970s, and it was still several hundred dollars.

“I’m going to let you pay on your fines at five dollars a week. I expect you to be here, every week. If you’re not, I will issue a warrant for your arrest. I know your daddy, also. I could pick up this phone and tell him about your trouble with the law, but I’m not going to. This will be a matter between you and me.”

“Okay,” I said in bewilderment.

She should have thrown the book at me. I know that, and I knew it then, too — but I was too much of a punk to admit it.

“Why do you think I’m giving you a break, young man?”

“Well, I guess because you know my dad.”

“Mr. Lauver, your father is a very nice man, but it wouldn’t matter to me if he was the king of Siam. In my court, I call it the way I see it, and I wanna tell you what I see. I see a young man filled with promise. There’s something very special about you. I know you can’t see it in yourself, but I can.”

Those words did more to change my life than any sentence that any court could have imposed for my out-of-control teenage behavior.

We would become very good friends, and every time since — that I’ve seen her out somewhere — she would come over to me and strike up a conversation.

It was her way of saying, without actually saying, *“I told you so. I knew you would grow up to be okay, and I knew you were at a make-or-break place. I knew you needed someone to believe in you.”*

She was one of those very important people who helped me to believe in myself.

She became one of the biggest fans of The American Storyteller Radio Journal.

She had most of the CDs. She constantly complimented me on my work.

I had said to her often, *“Well, how about if I tell our story on the radio someday?”*

“Nope. No need for that. At least not yet.”

“Well. If not now, when?”

She smiled. *“You wait ’til I’m dead, and then you tell it. I don’t want people to think I’m a softie.”*

I just got word. She had a massive heart attack last night and died. I started to write immediately. She said I could.

The honorable Marian S. Mertz was 81 and the coolest old broad I’ve ever known.

Broadcasting from the Juniata Valley in the rural mountainous interior of Pennsylvania, with the music of Johnny X, I’m the American Storyteller.