

Hi Chief Larson,

Thank you for your response and for passing my letter along. Although shedding light on the poor treatment of probationary members and minorities wasn't my initial intention, it's difficult to speak about LAFD without it coming up. I did leave very bitter. It was incredibly disappointing when I realized the brotherhood I had worked so hard to be a part of, at "the greatest department in the world", was actually full bigoted men who actively tried to make me and most of my coworkers miserable.

I have heard on maybe 10 separate occasions from rookies that they "wanted to drive their car into a tree while coming into work" - not to die, but to be just injured enough that they wouldn't have to go to work that day. I've heard of two occasions where men have exposed themselves to women in locker rooms saying some variation of "this is what a real fireman looks like". I had "Junk" written on my helmet and another member had it spray painted on her brush coat. I've been detailed from overtime stations on the basis of "no way are we working with a chick today". Seconds after I completed an interview with PSD investigating whether or not I've ever been sexually harassed, the male Captain said "Are you an athlete? Your body looks really athletic". Incidents like these and the countless others weren't even the worst part of my time with LAFD... I think it was that as a group everyone pretends this doesn't happen, but when talking to anyone individually they almost always admit they're miserable too. No rookie will discuss what they're going through with QA. There is no confidentiality nor trust between members at LAFD and the fear of the retaliation they would experience keeps their mouths shut.

I cannot imagine what you have been through during your years with the department, and I do not want to assume that you've hated your experience as I've hated mine, but these last 4 years were the worst of my life. They have changed me in profound ways and I am only just recovering while I start another fire academy with South Metro Fire Rescue.

LAFD's academy broke me down and never built me back up. The tower encouraged unhealthy and selfish competition among recruits, and taught them that if someone is struggling they don't deserve to work there. I remember day 1 of our Academy - everything was on fire, we ran in and did push ups, burpees and tower runs, and everyone was screaming at the recruits. I probably didn't quit that day because I was too scared to talk to any instructors. I remember 4 recruits did quit that first day. Starting the academy with 80+ members and graduating with 45 isn't an accomplishment, it's a failure. When I struggled in the academy, I heard things like "I wouldn't want you

rescuing me" or "why don't you just quit now and save us the trouble" from leadership and a serious lack of encouragement and teamwork from any of my fellow recruits. During probation, our group messages became a forum for hazing and general negativity - anyone who asked a question was ridiculed because that's what they were taught was the way things were done during the academy.

Although only a week in to my new academy, I have been treated with the upmost respect by all instructors and recruits and am finding my love for this profession again. My fellow recruits are working together and supporting one another in ways I didn't know was possible in the fire service. My skills have improved more in one week than in all my years with LAFD and I'm seeing members with zero experience manipulate hoselines and catch hydrants with more competence than the terrified and beaten down rookies graduating LAFD's tower. This is all because we aren't scared of making mistakes, asking questions, and proving ourselves to our fellow recruits and to the department.

I apologize that what was going to be a quick reply has turned into a saga, but I'm finally in a position where I can speak up about what was going on. I don't think this letter will drastically change any culture or traditions LAFD holds dear, but I personally know many members who are still suffering who could use a little change. LAFD won't ever be the best department in the world while so many of its members are forced to just accept the abuse for a paycheck.

I hope you can find a way to help LAFD grow - but this may only be accomplished by leaving so many of their rotten traditions behind.

I wish you all the best,

Katie Becker