

That's a Teamster: Idealist, Realist, and Rabble-Rouser, *Living as she believed*

♥ On February 14, 1950, Regina V. Polk was born with a small birthmark between her eye brows in the shape of a valentine heart on its side. Spiritualists would say she was marked with goodness. Later, nearly everyone would say it. (p. 4)

✪ She joined the Civil Air Patrol and got involved in a number of rescue and recovery air operations in southeastern Arizona. When not riding in rescue planes as a spotter, the bold 14-year-old worked on the ground to help the adult crews strategize where to look for a missing or downed plane. She was awarded and acclaimed for her efforts. (p. 12)

♥ Regina was impulsive, opinionated, full of an independent spirit, and adventurous. She was also progressive and self-directed, already speaking, in the pre-women's movement middle '60s, about her very strong desire to be free. She read the *Kinsey Report* at 14 or 15 years old and talked about it. Ignoring convention and tradition from childhood on, she insisted on living her own life as she saw fit. (p. 18)

✪ Jimmy Hoffa, whom she never met, was her personal hero. (p. 39)

♥ Once, while driving down a rural road at night in Cook County, she noticed six men carrying homemade picket signs out in front of the Diesel Recon Company. She stopped her car, explained who she was and what the Teamsters could do for them, signed them up on the spot, and later negotiated their contract. On another occasion, Regina chased an eighteen-wheeler truck whose driver had tried unsuccessfully to cross one of her picket lines. With angry Regina in hot pursuit, the driver eventually stopped the truck, got out, and ran away from her on foot. Regina chased him into a bar, where she found him trying to make a phone call. She presented her case and convinced him not to try and break the strike. (p. 60)

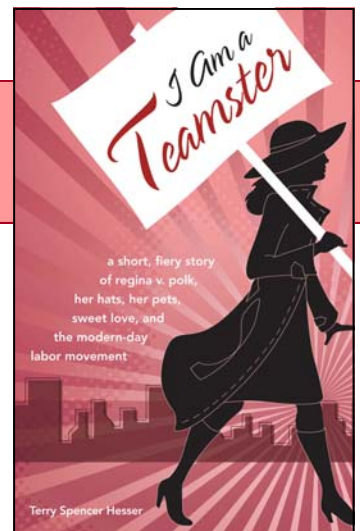
✪ Regina's picket-line activities led to many charges being filed against her for misconduct, including an episode not long after her wedding in which she slapped a policeman. But she had a strategy that worked repeatedly. Regina would appear before the court dressed as demurely as possible in a beautiful dress and hat. Nobody would believe that such an attractive and well-dressed woman could do the things she was alleged to have done. (p. 83)

♥ By 1980, Regina was being recognized on a national level in publications as significant as *Time* magazine and the *New York Times*. (p. 90)

✪ When Governors State, like the University of Chicago, stalled contract negotiations, Regina organized a strike to occur on the day that 3,000 special needs kids were coming to the campus on busses for the Special Olympics. To avert what would have been extremely damaging publicity, the university settled the contract the next day. (p. 93)

♥ In May of 1981, Regina was selected to deliver the keynote speech at Local 743's annual Stewards' Seminar, affectionately called Teamster Prom. It was a huge honor. For personal inspiration, she played a record of a speech that her hero Jimmy Hoffa had delivered at a Teamster convention 15 years before. At the end of Regina's speech, the 31-year-old Teamster received a standing ovation. (p. 100)

✪ The Regina V. Polk Scholarship Fund for Labor Leadership was founded in 1983. Since then it has made \$780,000 in grants benefiting more than 650 women—not counting the students in the high school program—supporting Regina's belief that the future of the labor movement depends on developing creative leadership. (pp. 143–145)



from the pages of

I Am a Teamster

a short, fiery story of Regina V. Polk, her hats, her pets, sweet love, and the modern-day labor movement
by Terry Spencer Hesser