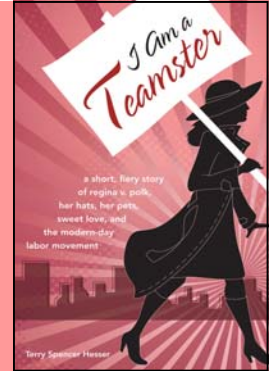


I Am a Teamster

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

by Terry Spencer Hesser



Remembering the Teamsters' Tough & Tireless, Beautiful & Brilliant Champion

When Regina Polk wore high heels and a stylish hat, management knew she was ready for battle. The striking beauty with perfect makeup and designer clothes defied the stereotype of the Teamster, adding a dramatic feminine flair to the role of union representative. Once she dazzled with her looks, she conquered with her intelligence and passion as a formidable advocate for workers' rights.

As a labor organizer and business agent in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Regina Polk was a pioneer—one of the first women on the professional staff of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, and one of the first to organize female white-collar workers. Her bold efforts to empower women within an environment of male dominance helped a growing population in the workforce find a voice, better pay and benefits, and a measure of respect through membership in the most powerful union in America.

Recollections of the captivating and gutsy Regina Polk include:

- ♥ Her lifelong compassion for animals; commitment to women's rights, civil rights, and worker's rights; and unabashed love of the finer things in life.
- 👤 Her first taste of union activity: As a grad student in Chicago, working as a hostess at the Red Star Inn, Polk battled institutional injustice on behalf of her coworkers. Red Star fired her; Teamsters Local 743 hired her.
- ♥ The great love affair—despite divergent passions—with Tom Heagy, whom Polk married in 1980.
- 👤 Polk's reputation as a brazen, unapologetic warrior with a talent for handling grievances, most notably for employees at Blue Cross/Blue Shield, the University of Chicago Hospital, Chicago State University, and Governors State University.
- ♥ The plane crash, on October 12, 1983, that ended the life of the 33-year-old Teamster on a fundraising mission.

**Rich in personal impressions, observations, and insights
by those who knew and worked with Regina Polk
at a time when organized labor needed a bright star, *I Am a Teamster*
offers a vibrant portrait of “a realist who . . . lived as she believed
and felt that it was more important to actually help one person
than talk about saving the world.”**