



Area Code
Jennifer Beals returns to 312 in Fox's new series

By Novid Parsi
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Like her character on Fox's new series, *The Chicago Code*, Jennifer Beals is a native Chicagoan. Also like Teresa Colvin, Beals is the daughter of a white mom and a black dad. And as with Teresa, the actor's father owned a store ("I didn't tell the writers that," she says). Perhaps most like her policewoman role, Beals, speaking by phone, exudes an aura that suggests she calls (and fires) the shots. The alum of Yale, *Flashdance* and *The L Word* plays Chicago's first female police chief, out to right the city's wrongs, in the drama from *The Shield's* Shawn Ryan, premiering Monday 7.

As research for this role, you went on ride-alongs with Chicago police. What did you learn?

I was in a car with a detective, and we were the first ones on a scene where a man had been shot and was bleeding towards unconsciousness on someone's front porch. I was able to see how they set up a crime scene, and we were able to follow the trail of blood for almost two blocks.

I imagine that was the first time you saw someone shot and bleeding?

No, it was not the first time I've seen someone shot [Laughs], unfortunately.

When was the first time?

In my neighborhood on the South Side of Chicago, and then I spent some time in Haiti in 1989 photographing the elections where you would see all kinds of heinous things. But it was the first time that I became aware of how people are so uncooperative with the police, that there's a group of 30 people there and at least five of them know who shot this man. It's a gang-related incident, and none of them will come forward, and so the cycle just keeps happening.

Could you tell me more about that time when you were a kid?

Um, not really, because it involves people who may not want to [Laughs] have me tell that story. It was a pretty decent neighborhood [at 82nd Street and Indiana Avenue], but there were things that happened.

Being the only daughter in a family of three kids—does that influence your approach to Teresa as a woman in a male-heavy landscape?

Oh, I'm very comfortable among men, and in college most of my friends were men. Working on *The L Word* was a transition, and it was exciting to be surrounded by women, it was exciting to learn a different way of processing. [*The Chicago Code*] is a very testosterone set.

You suggested to *The L Word's* creator that she make your character biracial. Did you also suggest that Teresa be biracial?

We talked about it, I didn't suggest. I said it would be interesting in terms of racial politics, an interesting way to approach it in the 21st century, but I said please just let me know either way what you're gonna do so I know what I am, who I am.

What difference does that make for you when playing this character?

You're aware of different points of view. It affords you a certain empathy that you may not have if you don't inhabit both sides.

What was that like for you growing up, to have both black and white families in Chicago?

Going to the Francis W. Parker School, it was kind of irrelevant. Class was more of an issue than race. There's a code, even among kids who are all entitled, of who has the most recent pair of Nikes or who has the pink Lacoste shirt.

Where were you in relation to that economic divide?

We didn't have any money, but I did have quite a few friends who did, and I ended up getting their hand-me-downs which weren't hand-me-downs at all because they had tags still on them. I wasn't raised with the idea that having money was important. It was much more important what was inside your brain; that will take you a lot farther than a really nice pair of Top-Siders.

I was struck by how overt *The Chicago Code* is about its premise of corruption in Chicago. What do you make of that?

What did you make of it? You live in Chicago.

It's something people say about the city all the time, but it's noteworthy that this new TV series is saying it so directly, so unapologetically.

I just think it makes for good drama, and everyday you can look in a Chicago newspaper and find a story. It's not stretching the truth.

Any story come to mind?

Oh, at a certain point the story becomes the same story over and over again. That's part of the code, but for every corrupter, you also have a reformer.

The show's premiering the night after the Super Bowl. Were you raised a Bears fan?

Oh my God, you have no idea. In the cold dark years when nothing was going on, we went to Green Bay for the games, freezing to death, only surviving by virtue of my mother's most excellent chili we would clutch like hot potatoes amongst the young Irish.

The Chicago Code *premieres on Fox Monday 7 at 8pm.*