

GIVING VOICE TO THE DEAD



by Carla Garrett

A Western University PhD candidate is digging up new leads in Canadian cold cases by looking into the social environment of victims' skeletal remains.

Using theories and techniques as a biological anthropologist, Renee Willmon is proving how social science is emerging as a viable method in criminal investigations.

"I want to tell the stories of the dead — how they died. I access the past and give a voice to those who no longer can speak for themselves," she says.

Her work is part of a campus-wide Cold Case Society at Western, created by cop-turned-professor Dr. Michael Arntfield. His multi-disciplinary method of investigating cold cases has garnered international attention and landed a TV series *To Catch a Killer*, now airing on the Oprah Winfrey Network.

"We are trying to increase the role that social sciences and research in those areas can bring to investigations," says Willmon. "Forensic science has gotten so much attention by applying techniques used in biology or chemistry to forensics, but a lot of the social sciences don't get applied in the same way and I think a lot can be gained from that respective."

It's not "sexy science," she says, but is a tangible component of traditional forensic investigation.

Like an archaeologist uncovers information about how earlier civilizations lived, Willmon uses this same technique to dig into details about perpetrators — and investigators.

"The investigators themselves also play a role, in that they decide what to record, what

becomes evidence and how that evidence is interpreted," says Willmon, adding it's important to understand how data may have been influenced at that time.

Willmon brought about new revelations in a 1969 murder after analyzing a four-decades-old crime scene on the show.

The body of 19-year-old Lynda White was found in a shallow grave in a bush lot five years after she went missing from London, Ontario. Her body was fully skeletonized and one of her arms was missing.

By applying knowledge of the decomposition process, probable animal activity and other environmental factors it was determined that her body was not at that site for the full five years she was missing.

"It also actually made the connection to another case much more striking," says Willmon.

In that case, the body of a young woman was found unburied in a landfill site. The coroner suggested then that the body had likely not been there the entire time she was missing.

"Renee's contributions have been outstanding and underscore the value of anthropologists and archeologists to police investigations for decades," says Arntfield, host of *To Catch A Killer*.

"Renee's role is to take that type of field work outsourcing and crime scene consulting to the next level, and conduct analyses of dump sites and crime scenes as archeological sites in earnest."

Although White's body was no longer in the bush lot, Willmon's analysis of the scene assisted in bringing new details of the perpetrator's actions and engagement with the victim, thus furthering the comparison between similar murders.

This process, known as "mortuary arche-

ology," will be covered in a new scientific journal Willmon and Arntfield are creating called *The Journal of Cultural Criminology and Forensic Semiotics*.

Similar to a polygraph, Willmon says her evidence is not admissible in court but can help further an investigation.

"It's difficult to quantify, but methods are emerging," she says.

Willmon joined the Cold Case Society in 2011 as a way to maintain her interest in forensics, while she completes her PhD in anthropology at Western.

Fascinated with Nancy Drew as a young girl, Willmon's shelves now hold books about dental moulds, analysis of burned human remains and Gray's Anatomy.

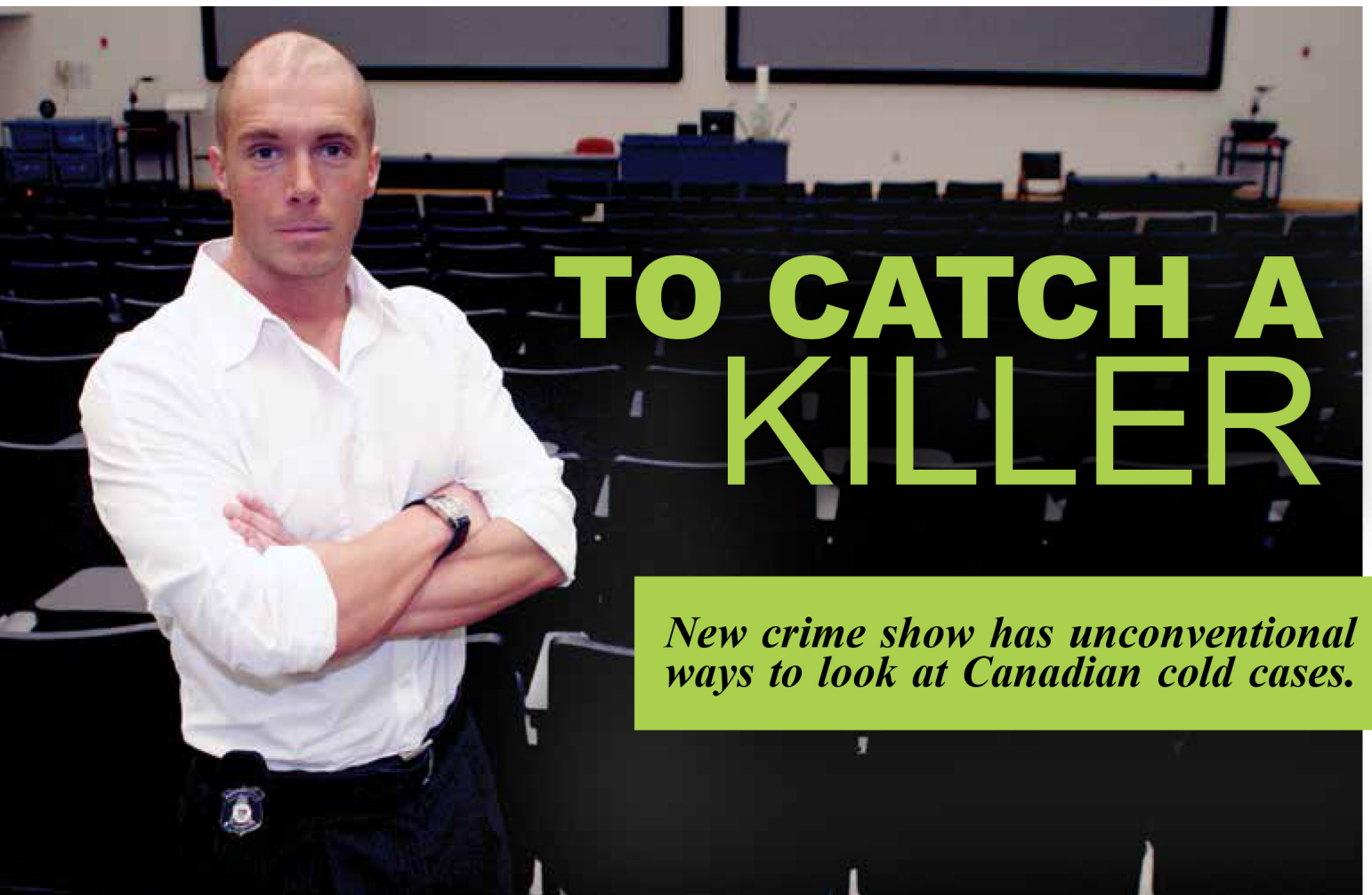
Her office space is adorned with skulls, skeletons and various other artifacts from previous civilizations.

Willmon wanted to be a detective, but wasn't interested in the "typical" career path of a police officer.

She now works as a consultant and has assisted with investigations for the OPP, Toronto Police and Hamilton Police. Her expertise also took her into the US where she worked alongside coroners at the Miami-Dade Medical Centre.

Willmon would like to see criminal investigators work more collaboratively with civilian experts to provide additional insights into cases otherwise missed in traditional police work.

Carla Garrett is a freelance writer and contributor to *Blue Line Magazine* in the Greater London region. She may be contacted at carlagarrett@bell.net.



TO CATCH A KILLER

New crime show has unconventional ways to look at Canadian cold cases.

by Carla Garrett

He travelled through cities and towns in Southwestern Ontario picking up young girls, then dumping their bodies. He scattered their clothing along rural roads and may have even kept a limb of one victim to satisfy his sick fetish.

This once-convicted killer is suspected to have gotten away with several other murders four decades ago. They call him David.

A team of civilian investigators may have uncovered a new lead that could spell the end for this suspected necrophiliac serial killer from the 1960s. Their findings are documented in a new TV crime series airing this month on the Oprah Winfrey Network.

To Catch A Killer, produced by Halifax's Ocean Entertainment, is transforming the traditional police approach to cold case investigations.

A first of its kind in Canada, TCAK follows a squad of five civilian experts led by Dr. Michael Arntfield—a 15-year veteran cop—as they investigate unsolved Ontario homicide cases. Each episode documents a six-week investigation and shares the results with the victims' families. A report detailing their discoveries is then provided to the police for follow up.

"It's unlike anything... you cannot manufacture or stage the raw emotion and the remarkable finds that are found in real time on the screen," says Arntfield. "It's about re-

invigorating cases; not commandeering them."

Described as a combination unscripted drama, documentary and reality show, TCAK is classified by the CRTC as an advanced education program.

"It is more real than any reality show... it's closer to live TV," says Arntfield. "It will make you smarter; it will engage you."

The show doesn't have large fancy crime labs or flashy state-of-the-art equipment (besides the Smart board). The set is actually an old brick building with large wooden desks and modern laptops.

It's the results that are astounding.

Cold case file

Jackie English, 15, was last seen alive 45 years ago on a London, ON overpass. Her naked body was found dumped in a creek. Her clothes and shoes scattered across two counties. Police never made an arrest.

Based on intelligence collected on TCAK, police have a new suspect to investigate. David—his full name and other identifying information was obscured on the show for legal reasons—is suspected in at least two other murders in the London area over a three-year period.

Using a scientific and mathematical formula designed by a Vancouver Police officer to track down serial killer Robert Pickton, the team created a geographical profile leading them to David, who was convicted of non-cap-

ital murder sometime in the 1970s.

By plotting places of interest in the English case and comparing those of other similar crimes, they were able to determine David is the most likely suspect. He is still alive and no longer lives in the London-area, according to the show.

There have been no arrests to date, but Arntfield says "who knows where follow-ups will go."

A success story

The show bridges the academic world with criminal investigation, drawing on experts from various disciplines, including a medical biophysicist, anthropologist and psychotherapist.

It is "intellectualizing policing," says Arntfield, a concept the Vancouver Police Department (VPD) has embraced in both active and inactive homicide investigations for years. "Building a relationship with the academic community is huge and the value they bring to investigations," says VPD Deputy Chief Adam Palmer. "Our homicide investigators are very skilled and accomplished at what they do, but we often bring in experts to look at things in different ways."

The department has an established relationship with area universities, drawing on archaeologists, entomologists, forensic accountants, knot analysis and telecommuni-

cations specialists, among other subject areas.

"It is key to the legitimization of policing in a knowledge-based society... and a matter of cost effectiveness," explains Arntfield. Police departments don't have the money to pour copious amounts of resources into cold cases, so outsourcing them to people who can makes sense, he adds.

Drawing on multi-disciplinarians to investigate cold cases started as a course developed by Arntfield, a professor at the University of Western Ontario. It morphed into a campus-wide Cold Case Society, now requiring a selection process, including an interview, for one of the 15 spots which open each year.

"It has exceeded my expectations and ballooned into something much bigger," says Arntfield.

One squad managed to locate a person of interest in a 1967 Wisconsin murder who had been presumed dead. Although they violated the rules of the society by making contact, the team got a statement from him in California. Police publicly reopened the case, however the man died before they got to him.

Arntfield wasn't surprised by the interest in taking his idea from the classroom to the TV, since it has received much media-generated attention.

"It is something very relevant to Canadians and certainly very televisual," he says.

The show has generated new tips in many of the featured cases, which had faded from the public eye.

The idea of "fresh eyes" on decades-old homicides is behind a new cold case web site recently launched by the VPD. It encourages civilian participation by posting photographs and summaries of inactive cases.

"As years go by these cases fall from the public view – but the families, loved ones, friends and police never forget," says Palmer.

More than 17,000 people visited the site in less than a week, sending in 33 tips.

Forces in the U.S. have been posting cases for years and the concept is growing in Canada; the RCMP and Toronto Police are already doing it.

"Even if Canadian police services are reluctant to officially condone the series and acquiesce to a more American style of public engagement via the commercial media, at the very least initiatives like the VPD outreach suggest that some agencies are progressive enough to see the merits in such a system," says Arntfield. "It is certainly encouraging to see."

As for TCAK, Arntfield says there is a possibility for a second season but this ambitious professor has a lot more on his to do list, including several textbooks and journals to write.

"This is just another rung in the ladder I'm climbing," he says.

Visit www.michaelarntfield.com for more information. To *Catch A Killer* airs Saturdays at 8 p.m. on OWN.

Carla Garrett is a freelance writer and contributor to *Blue Line Magazine* in the Greater London region. She may be contacted at carlagarrett@bell.net.

LETTERS

I loved your commentary on the "Just Walk Away" policy for Toronto Police. Everything you said, especially in the second and third paragraphs is so true it is amazing I am not the only Police officer who thinks this way. Unreal that in this day and age people still need to be taken by the hand to help them get through their daily lives, when they have no idea what is going on in their own neighbourhoods. Well done and I agree with you 100 per cent.

Andrew P. Miller
New Brunswick

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Upon hearing the news that Halton Regional Police are moving to black and white cars I am no fan.

As a former Halton Regional Police officer and having looked into the police colour design from a traffic standpoint, I wonder why this change, which does have a negative impact on visibility in different traffic conditions.

Black, or black-and-white, despite the fluorescent logo markings and two-tone black and white do diminish the silhouette of police vehicles.

Why, when the U.K. has a national uniform standard for emergency vehicles, we can't get the

message that each emergency response vehicle variation has a negative impact on so many aspects of first responder work, is beyond me.

It might be nice and nostalgic, as was the case for the OPP going back to black and white, but it is not the safest for police members, who drive such vehicles.

We have an aging population with increasing vision challenges.

We can't get our act together on national, let alone provincial, safety standards — hats, equipment or vehicles, Canada is a long way off the mark as is the case here in Halton Region with this change.

Look at the U.K. model for police vehicles throughout England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland: it works.

Even the most elementary research work can highlight this problem. For safety-first organizations, I wonder why it isn't safety first for employees?

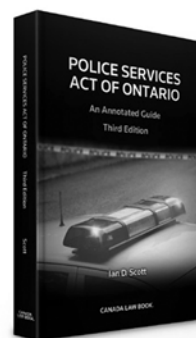
Take a lesson from a national standard in the U.K. and admit that we could do better than making police officers feel good about the colour of their police cars.

James (Jim) Drennan, PhD, Dean,
School of Justice and Business Studies,
Fleming College, Peterborough

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