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EILEEN McNAMARA Jumping to judgment



What if the big, bad, scary black man didn't do it? Willie Bennett had a long, ugly rap sheet when Boston police identified him as the prime suspect in the shooting death of Carol DiMaiti Stuart.

So did Jesus Carrasquillo when police named the Boston gang member as a suspect in the fatal shooting of an assistant attorney general, Paul R. McLaughlin.

There was plenty of circumstantial evidence, but neither man, targeted by eager investigators and trumpeted by a credulous media, was ever arrested. Why? Because someone else pulled the trigger in those high-profile murder cases.

That is worth remembering as the lynch mob gathers for Darryl Littlejohn, the bouncer at a New York City bar being linked by a flood of anonymous police leaks to the rape and murder last month of Imette St. Guillen. Littlejohn might prove to be the killer of the 24-year-old graduate student from Mission Hill, but being under suspicion is not the same thing as being under arrest.

Sometimes, even a career criminal is innocent.

There was a time police did not name a suspect until they had nailed down enough evidence to make an arrest. Now, police identify a "person of interest" at the earliest stages of their investigation. One anonymous police source described Littlejohn to Globe reporters last week as "our only potential suspect." What does that mean? That police have narrowed the field or settled on a target?

We know better than to think that cops always get it right the first time, so why do we broadcast their preliminary thoughts on a case as gospel? Carrasquillo was a drug dealer with a motive to kill a prosecutor, but it was a rival gang-banger who assassinated Paul McLaughlin.

Why do we treat a suspect's protests of innocence as pro forma denials, but take every nugget of information from police, no matter how anonymously sourced, as a breakthrough? If the goal is to find the truth, why do we use the word "setback" to describe the fact that two rape victims did not identify Littlejohn in police lineups as their assailant?

Even as the media hysteria against Littlejohn built last week, the City of Boston agreed to pay \$3.2 million to a man who had been wrongly convicted in the rape of an Emerson College student.

That was one of more than a score of cases in the past two decades in Boston alone in which prosecutors sent the wrong man to prison, sometimes for years, often for the city's most notorious crimes. Think Donnell Johnson, who did five years for the murder of a 9-year-old boy, a murder he did not commit.

Those miscarriages of justice are cautionary tales. If Littlejohn is guilty, evidence will tie him to the crime. But am I the only one in Boston who gets shivers reading that detectives are going door to door interrogating every young black man in Littlejohn's Queens neighborhood who might have been an accomplice?

Remember, Mission Hill is not just where St. Guillen grew up; it's the neighborhood that police turned upside down in the Stuart case in a single-minded search for a phantom black man in a black sweat suit. Didn't we learn anything about probable cause in 1989?

Does no one else feel queasy when a cop attributes to fear a rape victim's failure to ID Littlejohn as her assailant? "We think the victim got scared," an anonymous source told the Herald. Or maybe he is not the guy.

When Stuart did not pick Willie Bennett out of a police lineup, police sources insisted that Bennett looked "most like" the man who shot Stuart and his pregnant wife. "That's the guy," an anonymous cop told the Globe days before we learned that Stuart himself was responsible for his wife's murder.

Last week, The New York Post ran a photograph of Darryl Littlejohn on Page One under a headline that read: "IT'S HIM." Maybe it is, but let's not put the conviction before the arrest. It's worth remembering that, despite all the Page One headlines, it was not Willie Bennett and it was not Jesus Carrasquillo.

Eileen McNamara is a Globe columnist. She can be reached at McNamara@globe.com.

There's been a crime, and you're investigating. At the scene, you find this cigarette butt. What can this evidence tell you about what happened?



A new BU program is teaching prospective detectives how to find out

Inquiring minds



David O'Brien (left) and John Dalli looked over a box of evidence as part of a class exercise last month. The two men are students in Boston University's new program to train people in private-investigation skills, to use either in seeking a new career or in their current jobs.

By Suzanne Smalley
GLOBE STAFF

Amy Cosindas, would-be private eye, studied the evidence and found rusty shears and broken pottery tile. Aha, she thought: The crime must have occurred outdoors. The shears were caked with dirt and the remains of a centipede. Cosindas inferred that the victim might have been gardening when attacked.

Analyzing "crime scenes" like this one is part of the coursework at the private investigation class Cosindas, 33, is taking on Saturdays. Come Monday she'll be back at her day job, as an information systems analyst at a local hospital.

Cosindas is one of 15 students in the new Boston University adult education course. She is also part of a nationwide boom in interest in private investigation, fueled in part by the wild popularity of television shows such as "CSI," which glorify crime scene investigators. For some, dabbling in the shadowy world of private sleuths presents a chance to escape the tedium of their 9-to-5 jobs and perhaps do something more fulfilling — and thrilling.

"It's the job that I've always said, 'Gosh — that I would love to be, kind of behind the scenes, doing the work,'" Cosindas said, describing the class. "There's something about the challenge I really like — the mystery, the unknown, and being able to go back to somebody and say, 'This is what the facts are, and this is what the truth is.'"

Cosindas's classmates include a human-resources manager and a detective. **DETECTIVES, Page B4**

A page from the lesson book: Interpreting evidence

Suppose that as an investigator, you are reviewing the following pieces of evidence. What might each of them suggest to you? Who, what, when, where, how, or why? The answers are subjective, and some evidence may suggest several answers.

EXHIBIT A

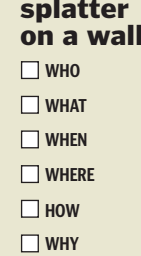
A threatening anonymous letter



WHO WHAT WHEN WHERE HOW WHY

EXHIBIT B

Blood splatter on a wall



WHO WHAT WHEN WHERE HOW WHY

EXHIBIT C

A store receipt



WHO WHAT WHEN WHERE HOW WHY



EXHIBIT D

Dirt from a shovel

WHO WHAT WHEN WHERE HOW WHY



EXHIBIT E

A cellphone

WHO WHAT WHEN WHERE HOW WHY

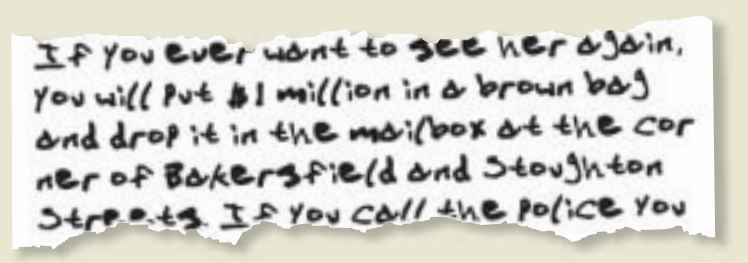


EXHIBIT F

A ransom note

WHO WHAT WHEN WHERE HOW WHY

SOURCE: Chapter 2 of "Foundations of Professional Investigation Student Workbook," Boston University. NOTE: Images used here as "evidence" are illustrations only.



ONWARD — Democratic gubernatorial candidate Deval L. Patrick told a large crowd of supporters at Faneuil Hall yesterday that their work has only just begun. **B6**

Drowning in Norfolk

Rescuers recovered the body of a 26-year-old Millis man yesterday morning who apparently drowned in an ice-cold Norfolk lake after taking a late-night canoe trip. **B3**

Lessons from Vietnam

Former presidential advisers such as Henry Kissinger and Alexander Haig Jr., speaking in Boston yesterday, see similarities between old and current wars. **B5**

Planned sculpture ignites race debates in Portland

By Jenna Russell
GLOBE STAFF

The subject of the bronze sculpture could hardly be less shocking — mom, dad, and two children heading to a baseball game. But the artwork, commissioned by the owner of the popular minor league baseball team in Portland, Maine, has provoked a standoff between the city's would-be benefactor and its public art committee.

The Portland Public Art Committee has balked at accepting the gift of the statue, which would stand outside Hadlock Field, the home park of the Double A Portland Sea Dogs, because it includes the team logo, a form of advertising, and at 10 feet high is too large, some members said.

But another criticism of the sculpture has unleashed an angry backlash and prompted debate in the city about the role of public art: Some committee members expressed concern that the all-American family depicted in the sculpture is white. Portland has enough statues of white people, they said.

'It's not like a holiday gift — it can't be exchanged.'

WILLIAM TROUBH
Lawyer

Those comments, reported by the Portland Press Herald, have unleashed a flood of criticism by residents of Maine and other states who called the public art committee arrogant, out-of-touch, and ungracious. Of 111 public comments posted on the newspaper's website, more than 100 called for the statue to be accepted.

"I'm not racist, but there's a statue here that's not white." **STATUE, Page B7**



PHOTOS BY DOMINIC CHAVEZ/GLOBE STAFF

John Bish (at left) took notes during a class on private investigation techniques. Bish runs a foundation named for his slain daughter, Molly.

Inquiring minds learn to be sleuths

► **DETECTIVES**
Continued from Page B1

sources consultant, a records research company president, an at-home entrepreneur, an archivist, and a retired financial executive. Some have ponied up the \$3,995 tuition for the six-month certification course that began in January (a second class begins in May for \$4,995) because they want a new career; others want to use the research and interviewing skills they learn for their present occupations.

One of the students in Cosindas's class is John Bish, whose daughter Molly disappeared from her lifeguarding job in Warren in 2000 and was found dead three years later. Bish is a probation officer who runs a foundation in his daughter's memory providing private detectives to the families of missing children free of charge (he is also studying at BU on a full scholarship). He is interested in learning investigative techniques so he can participate more directly in the work of the Molly Bish Center for the Protection of Children and the Elderly.

Ruth Ann Murray, the director of the Boston University Center for Professional Education, said she decided to offer the class in large part because the private investigation field is rapidly expanding. According to the website of the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, private detectives and investigators held 43,000 jobs in 2004, and employment in the field is expected to grow by 18 to 26 percent between 2004 and 2014.

Private investigators have long been needed to work for insurance companies trying to sniff out fraud, for defense lawyers interested in discrediting state witnesses, and to trail unfaithful spouses. Now, they are called upon increasingly to screen prospective employees and, in the Internet age, to track down the perpetrators of identity theft, e-mail harassment, illegal spamming, and electronic copyright infringement.

Brandon Perron, who is the national director of the Criminal Defense Investigation Training Council, which trains and certifies private investigators specializing in criminal defense work, said the BU class fills a need for more classically trained detectives to handle the increasing number of electronic-based investigations.

"This course is providing something that nothing else does — it's bringing the



Amy Cosindas examined evidence during a class exercise for her Saturday adult education course on private investigation at Boston University.

old school and new school together," Perron said. "A lot of detectives have jumped straight to the new age, but they've lost the critical-thinking skills, the art of canvassing a neighborhood . . . the ability to crack a case."

Murray said that students who complete the BU course should have an easier time finding work as investigators, though students say it won't be clear how well they can do in the job market until they've obtained their certificate and begun hunting for work.

Murray said that when she tells people about the course, she often hears wisecracks about the iconic scotch-swilling, trench coat-wearing private eye. But she tells the students that such stereotypes are misleading.

"I say, OK, get your smiles out of the way now. This is serious stuff," Murray said. "You're gathering information that may be used to exonerate people. You're investigating missing children."

The BU class gets a serious edge from its teacher, Thomas Shamshak, a retired Somerville police detective and former chief of the departments in Spencer and Winthrop. Now a private investigator who volunteers for the Molly Bish Center, Shamshak injects his lectures with tales of how he cracked notable cases.

Shamshak's students spend much of their class time gleaning information from different types of evidence, such as a smashed wristwatch or a store receipt,

practicing surveillance techniques on people in malls, and learning how to use the Internet to search for license plates and track missing persons. Shamshak and his guest lecturers focus on interactive classwork, such as diagramming crime scenes and cataloguing evidence.

Such attention to precision can shed light on how a crime occurred and allow investigators to recreate a crime scene so they have a record of where evidence was found, Shamshak explained. With a good diagram, investigators can return to crime scenes months later and effectively follow up, he said.

In one exercise, students learned that despite what they might see on TV, the right way to bag evidence is to use paper, not plastic. Plastic bags trap moisture, which can ruin the evidence inside.

While many of these students will never end up investigating murders, Shamshak said understanding the correct way to handle evidence is important knowledge for all investigators.

Students said they have found real-life inspiration in a classmate who has already made the jump from her old career to a new one as a private eye. Caroline Crescenzi, a 52-year-old Somerville resident who once owned a Harvard Square toy store, has spent the last three years working as a private investigator for public defenders, earning about \$25 an hour staking out elusive witnesses. A lot of her work is for defendants accused in assaults and

drug deals, and her task is to hunt down any evidence that might exonerate them. This kind of private eye work is relatively easy to find, but Crescenzi hopes to get better-paying jobs using the skills she is learning in Shamshak's class.

Crescenzi often tells the class stories about her escapades as an investigator. Her classmates listen intently as she describes approaching members of the Salvadoran street gang MS-13 to find out what they're going to say in court or learn more about how a crime unfolded.

She said she doesn't carry pepper spray, though she does bring a private detective friend along when approaching particularly hardened criminals. Still, Crescenzi said she thinks the key to success is being genuine.

"They're just humans," she said. "People are nice."

Crescenzi said that even when she's doing something as confrontational as serving a subpoena, she approaches subjects with sincerity. She said she has never had a problem.

The class's homework focuses on the importance of the paper trail to an investigator. A recent assignment asked students to probe a fictional report that the Mafia had infiltrated a local town zoning board.

David O'Brien, a human-resources consultant in his day job, searched the Wellesley Zoning Board for companies that might be getting a suspiciously high number of applications approved. He then cross-referenced those findings against other publicly available sources of information, such as newspaper archives and legal records. (His conclusion: Wellesley's board had not been infiltrated.)

"It is truly like putting a thousand-piece puzzle on your vacation table and trying to put all the pieces together," O'Brien said.

O'Brien, 55, of West Roxbury, hopes to employ the skills he learns in the course, combined with his 25 years of experience in human resources, to perform detective work for law firms arguing wrongful-termination lawsuits.

O'Brien said he wants to put "all the politics, the meetings, the tedium" behind him and "just become an investigator. . . . I want to do something that is really interesting and exciting."

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Ask the Teacher

ELLEN PETERSON

Making math stick

Q. My daughter is 6 years old, and I'm worried about her math skills. She doesn't seem to grasp the idea of addition and subtraction. A lot of time she guesses at the answers and has a very short attention span while she is sitting down with math homework. I hate math myself. I was never good at it and I am afraid she is the same way. Any suggestions on how to help her?

DUNIA JUAREZ,
Mother of first-grader, Saugus

A. Remember, 6-year-olds are just beginning to get a handle on school, and many stumble when first learning a concept. Your daughter's short attention span with math and guessing could simply be the struggles she must go through before succeeding. Her teacher and you may have to try a variety of teaching approaches before the right one clicks with your child.

Look over your daughter's work, talk to her teacher, and visit the classroom to see how students are taught. The teacher probably uses hands-on activities, a common approach to help beginners grasp a concept faster and more easily. At home, try some activities, including adding and subtracting with pennies or Cheerios.

Model how to solve a problem and frequently urge your daughter to show off her newfound knowledge. In the grocery store, have your daughter count a bunch of bananas and ask how many more you would need to take the family for breakfast. You can make up situations for almost anything. After your daughter shows signs of understanding, work with her to write equations on paper as you work with objects. Next, use the written form only, and finally, move on to practice addition and subtraction facts. If a student tries to memorize rote math facts or write answers without understanding the concept behind the numbers, chances are it won't work.

If your worries continue, set up a meeting with the teacher, who can guide you in the right direction. Above all, keep your disdain for math to yourself. Even rolling your eyes will give your daughter the impression that it's not worth the trouble. Feel free to talk about your struggles, but focus on the fact that math is necessary in life for everyone. Show her where these skills come in handy, help her practice, and she might become a math whiz right before your eyes.

Q. My child's birthday is near the cutoff date for kindergarten. How do I decide whether to send him to school this fall or wait a year?

PARENT, Boston

A. I empathize with your dilemma — my son's birthday fell around that same cutoff date. After weighing the pros and cons, I sent him to school when he was 5. Even though I second-guessed my decision many times, my successful senior will graduate in a few short months. On the other hand, my sister waited to enroll her daughter until she was 6. My niece now attends graduate school and is on her way to beginning her dream career. My point? Even though we both made different decisions, both of them worked out for the best. Your child is unique, and only you know his strengths and weaknesses. Some kids are ready that first year having just turned 5, but others need extra time.

Before you decide, think over a few questions. Is your child ready academically? Does he know his numbers and most of the alphabet? Can he recognize his name, colors, and shapes? Visit the school your child will attend and find out the expectations. Talk to his future teachers, and peek at the curriculum.

Also, be sure your child is ready physically, emotionally, and socially. He should be able to help get himself dressed and use the bathroom independently. The ability to use scissors, hold a pencil correctly, and even skip and hop should be taken into account too. Other important factors to consider: his ability to listen and follow directions and be independent of mom and dad at the same time. Teachers instruct children and guide students through the learning process, but if your son refuses to take part, school would be futile. Watch his interaction with other children. Is he capable of sharing or does he throw temper tantrums and have to get his own way all of the time? If you find it's the latter, perhaps he could use the extra year to tweak his socialization skills.

Check out these websites: <http://preschoolerstoday.com/resources/ready-kinder.htm> and www.parentcenter.babycenter.com/refcap/bigkid/gpreschool.

Family and friends will offer their opinions, but stick with your decision and don't constantly think, "Well, maybe if I would have done this differently. . ." It's a tough choice, but only you can make it.

Ellen Peterson teaches fourth grade at Thomas W. Hamilton School in Weymouth. To submit a question, e-mail asktheteacher@globe.com. Include your name, town, and e-mail address. Questions, upon request, can be printed anonymously. Ask the Teacher runs on alternate Sundays with Campus Insider, a higher-education column, in the City & Region section.

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