

Real life not like TV portrayal, say local private investigators

By Peter Meier
Of the Emerald

Tom Selleck may draw big ratings for "Magnum, P.I.," but according to local private detectives, television portrayals of the profession are more fiction than truth.

Eugene private detective Mike Whitney said of television detective shows: "They're good entertainment."

Being a private eye does not mean chasing down criminals in helicopters or dodging bullets in dark alleys, Whitney said. It does mean handling people delicately, gaining their trust and getting information, and putting it all together for a courtroom victory for the client.

As a detective, Whitney relies more on communication than he does on good aim.

"I don't even own a gun. I don't carry one. I don't need one," Whitney said. "Eighty percent of investigation involves interviewing."

Eugene investigator Martin DeForest said the first source of information in a case is the person involved. Rather than searching in garbage cans for clues, DeForest confronts the source.

If the source refuses to cooperate, often relatives or friends of the source will, DeForest said.

"Often getting the information means going to the person's parents. Parents often provide evidence the person is trying to hide," he said.

When a source not only resists the investigator, but threatens him, the solution is not to draw a gun, DeForest said.

"I've had to disarm people before, but the key is in avoiding those situations. You try not to surprise people, or make them feel threatened. If it is night, I shine a flashlight on my face and let people see who I am. Much of my protection is in recognition. Many of the aggressive people on the streets know me and know I am fair and honest," he said.

Whitney said he has never been threatened.

"I avoid those situations by knowing how to handle angry people," he said.

DeForest believes the key to being a successful private detective is maintaining a good reputation, he said. He added that he is careful to document cases thoroughly, and his credibility helps win cases.

Detectives must not be biased in their investigations, DeForest said. They must be open-minded and must search for the truth, which may be different than what the client wants to see revealed, he said.

Whitney has a slightly different view. "Detectives can't claim to be biased. We are hired to serve our clients; we have to be biased because of that," he said.

Police detectives are too one-sided in their investigations and do not cooperate enough with private investigators, DeForest said.

Whitney pointed out that both private investigators and police detectives do not always share all of their information.

Investigators are frequently hired by lawyers to assist in criminal defense cases. Whitney also works child custody and personal injury cases and investigates truancy cases. He is sometimes hired by the state attorney general and Children's Services Division. He recently investigated a day care center



for reports of sexual abuse.

Both Whitney and DeForest said they are not involved in surveillance, though some detectives are.

"I get called all the time by someone who wants me to watch their wife's activities, but this is an extremely expensive and unproductive method of investigation," Whitney said.

Many investigators go out of business by undertaking such methods, he said.

"I am sometimes called in to help a detective out with a case and find they have already spent way too much money on the case and have not even documented their facts. These businesses don't last long," he said.

Whitney agreed that many agencies fail because of poor management. Detectives first need the right skills but also need the means to market those skills, he said.

"It seems the list of detectives in the phone book is constantly changing, new detectives are coming in, and just as many go out of business," Whitney said.

DeForest is often called by truck drivers or people of other professions looking for a new way to make money, he said. Most successful detectives are former policemen like he and Whitney, however, he added.

While many investigators do not stay in business for long, Whitney said there always will be a need for them, despite the fact that more lawyers are undertaking their own investigative work than in the past.

"It's a growth industry," Whitney said. "Some lawyers have been trying to do their own investigating, but the good attorneys know how to use an investigator."

Soviets Continued from Page 8

preserved as historical monuments. The same girl, when asked if she believed in God, laughed and said, "Of course not. I'm a member of the Komsomol (the youth branch of the Communist Party)."

The Komsomol compares with American Boy Scouts, Schull said, noting he doesn't have a single scout in his class while all Soviet teenagers belong to the Komsomol.

Schull's students didn't notice that Soviet teens expressed greater commitment to the community and the country as a whole, he said. Soviet teens would do "what's best for (their) country," whether that means having children or going off to war, he noted.

The Springfield High students also didn't see military involvement as a patriotic thing, Schull said. Most of his class are opposed to or don't care about U.S. involvement in Nicaragua, and the Soviet

teenagers' willingness to fight for their country, no questions asked, surprised them, he said.

When asked whether they had problems with parents or school, Donahue's audience gave no response.

"You mean there's no controversy with your parents? None of you? Everything is wonderful in the Soviet Union for teenagers?" Donahue asked.

One youth replied, "What can we do if everything is all right? Do you want us to create problems?"

"Sometimes they didn't want to express their feelings... it seemed like they were reluctant," Ewing said. "I think they said what they were told to say," said Shawn Nolte, another student.

"The state controls it too much. I think they should be allowed more freedom," Ewing said, admitting the broadcast did aid freedom of speech, however.

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