

Stalkers

**By Reg P. Wydeven
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Some of my favorite television series are the 'Law & Order' dramas. The original, which features police investigations of crimes and subsequent prosecutions by district attorneys, premiered in 1990 and is still going strong. 'Law & Order: Special Victims Unit', which focuses on a police squad specializing in sexually based crimes, debuted in 1999 and is still on the air. 'Law & Order: Criminal Intent' has been on since 2001 and involves the Major Crime Squad, which investigates high-profile cases.

'Law & Order: Crime & Punishment', which ran from 2002-2004, was the franchise's first reality series revolving around real-life crimes. The short-lived 'Law & Order: Trial by Jury' centered around trials from a jury's perspective. 'Law & Order: SVU' even had a spin-off, 'Conviction', which was cancelled after one season.

Needless to say, the New York City crime dramas must be popular to have so many incarnations and to have been on TV for so long. In Los Angeles, an actual special police squad sounds like the perfect candidate for the next Law & Order expansion series: Threat Management Unit.

The LAPD's one-of-a-kind team comprised of highly trained detectives specializes in celebrity stalker cases. I can just hear the voice-over now:

"In the criminal justice system, celebrity-obsessed fans are considered especially dangerous. In Los Angeles, the dedicated detectives who investigate these fanatical stalkers are members of an elite squad known as the Threat Management Unit. These are their stories."

The unit was created as a result of the violent murder in 1989 of Rebecca Schaffer, star of the hit TV show "My Sister Sam," who was gunned down at her front door by an obsessed fan named Robert Bardo. At the time, there were no stalking laws in California or any other states.

As a group, celebrity stalkers tend to suffer from mental illness more frequently and severely than other stalkers, and are hence, more dangerous. According to experts, the frequency of homicidal celebrity stalking has increased significantly since 1980.

Many celebrities, including Jennifer Garner, Uma Thurman, Steven Spielberg, Brad Pitt and Britney Spears have all been stalked, but they either successfully obtained restraining orders against their stalkers or they have been arrested.

Not all celebrities have been so lucky. In addition to Schaeffer, John Lennon and BBC personality Jill Dando were murdered by their stalkers. Jerry Lewis, George Harrison and Monica Seles were stabbed by their stalkers. Paula Abdul's and David Letterman's stalkers both committed suicide. Michael Landon's stalker killed two security guards, while Olivia Newton John's stalker killed five members of his own family. Madonna's security guard shot a stalker who was breaking into her estate.

Probably the most famous stalker with violent tendencies was John Hinckley, Jr., who attempted to assassinate President Ronald Reagan in 1981 to impress Jodie Foster.

In college, a man who lived down the hall from some of my buddies was arrested for stalking 1980s pop icon Debbie Gibson. We all knew he was a little different, but we had no idea that he was actually dangerous and making threats to the singer.

Tabloids magazines and television shows, along with the Internet, make celebrities more accessible than ever before, increasing the likelihood of violent stalkers. Accordingly, the Threat Management Unit is more necessary, and busier, than it has ever been before.

Thankfully, local newspaper columnists must have just enough of a low profile that stalking isn't a problem.

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