

TO CATCH A CRIMINAL

By Starr Gardinier Reina



HOMICIDE SCHOOL, SGT. DEREK PACIFICO

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A man walks into a store and robs it, killing the innocent cashier. The criminal doesn't leave behind any prints and his face has been concealed. There are plenty of witnesses, but not one of them tells the same story nor can they identify the robber/murderer. What are the detectives going to do? Can they solve this crime?

Personally, I don't know how, BUT I know someone who does! Come and meet Sgt. Derek Pacifico of the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department, detective and liaison between authors and cop schools. Anything you ever wanted to know about police procedurals will be revealed at Writers' Homicide School on June 2 and 3 in Santa Monica, California.

From what I hear, Pacifico will have an answer for everything. He is bringing with him his twenty-two-year career and two hundred murder investigations as evidence. But we're going to have him tell you about himself and the two-day crash course. Read on:

Starr Gardinier Reina (SGR): Before we get to the main event, I wanted to ask a few questions about you. You began your career on patrol and worked your way up to detective in six years. What criteria did you have to meet or how did you prove your abilities in order to become detective?

Sgt. Derek Pacifico (DP): *There is a testing process requiring a multiple choice test to make detective, which is then coupled with a station evaluation written collectively by the supervisors. If you receive a high station rating and write a decent test, then your name will fall higher on the list. The decision as to who gets promoted is then up to the sheriff's executive staff. Name recognition helps, having a good reputation for working hard, being known for conducting thorough street investigations, and writing good reports are what help build a good reputation. Every time there was a murder investigation, I would make sure I involved myself to some extent to assist the homicide detectives, doing whatever I could to learn from them and pick their brains. The two primary skills they told me to hone were my interviewing skills and report writing. That's what I did, and tried to conduct thorough investigations, in-depth interviews, and take extra care on writing my reports.*

SGR: According to information I've been able to obtain, you have investigated around two hundred murders. I know you cannot reveal certain details, but in a broad sense, could you tell us what your most challenging case was?

DP: *Overall, gang murders can be some of the toughest cases to solve. Nobody talks to the cops in fear of retribution. It can take as long to convince someone you believe to be an integral witness to tell you when she or he saw as it does to get a suspect to confess to the murder itself. But the most challenging case was the one I never solved. It involves millions of dollars of embezzlement, which in my theory is the partial reason the victims were killed. Many different people across the United States and in Europe were bamboozled into buying faulty products. Local, interstate, and international lawsuits were in progress and there were multiple victims with motive to want to kill the victims on the one hand, but their deaths would have not helped their litigation, so on the other hand, it didn't make sense they were killed by those who might be suing them. One of the victims was a childhood friend of a famous actor in Hollywood whose "people" called the homicide bureau to lend more stress to the investigation. I read thousands of documents and wrote literally dozens of search warrants tracking money around the globe, only to come to a mysterious dead end. While investigating it, two separate potential suspects died from natural causes making it even more intriguing. That case is still not solved and who knows, may never be.*

SGR: On **June 2-3**, you are hosting what seems to be a very promising event in Santa Monica, the Writers' Homicide School. I am eagerly anticipating this. I know this is not the first one you have offered. How long have you been doing this? And what prompted you to start this rigorous class for writers?

DP: *I got started with mystery writers almost by accident. I've been teaching law enforcement and lecturing to police and community service audiences for many years with the company I founded about eight years ago called Global Training Institute. So lecturing, writing courses, and teaching aren't new. What happened with writers is that my sister-in-law wrote a mystery novel and she called me several times to ask about police procedures. During her writing and publishing, she joined the Los Angeles chapter of Sisters in Crime. I was invited to speak to them at one of their monthly meetings and we all had a great time. From that hour lecture, they invited me to speak at the state writer's conference some months later. I gave a ninety-minute lecture on police interrogations and it was met with rave reviews. A small band of writers kept me from leaving at the end of the day and told me there was a need and market for me to bring my knowledge to the writing community. I put on a class and some folks from the class came to the course. So I put on another one and did a little bit of advertising and some more people came, even though it was in December and at a poor location. Somewhere along the line, I got invited to speak at the Screen Writer's Network in February this year at the CBS studios in Burbank. Lots of people came to that and the response at the end was the same as the conference. A group of writers and movie professionals were enthusiastically asking me to bring about my homicide school in a two-day seminar as soon as possible. One of those folks was Genevieve Jolliffe from Filmmaker Junction, who in conjunction with her partners, wanted to join forces to promote the event, so here we are.*

SGR: How has the reception for this homicide school been from writers and other detectives? That is, if other detectives participate or attend? I guess the latter would be a question all its own.

DP: *Writers so far have been exceptionally supportive and excited about the class. From my first class I had one writer come to the second course. I told her it was the same course and case review, but she said it was so good the first time, she wanted to come again. That was very flattering. After each class, I usually get about a dozen e-mails from people who decide to write and express their enthusiastic appreciation for the course. It really makes me feel great. I love the material, my career, and talking with writers who are very excited to learn. There are lots of laughs and I've earned some true friendships in the writing community already, some who have convinced me to start my own novel.*

Regarding cops, they don't come to this class and shouldn't; it's not for them. Much of what I tell is very basic information for cops, but all very new for true detectives. But this class is rendered down from the eighty-hour/two-week class that I wrote and implemented for California law enforcement some eight years ago now. It's still the only Advanced Homicide School of its kind in the country. That school has several instructors and is very intense. Eight to five every day for two weeks straight.

SGR: If an aspiring or even established author finds themselves in the middle of a murder in their story with no apparent way to move forward, do you offer yourself as a point of contact to writers, should they need it?

DP: *Funny you should ask. That's a new component many of the writers asked for. They want a consulting service. I've just created that service on my website, but honestly haven't announced it until now, so I guess you are getting the scoop on the news! A half-hour phone consultation is \$55 and a whole hour is just \$95. Once somebody has signed up for the service, we'll set a phone appointment and the writer/producer can ask any police-related question they want and I'll answer it. If I don't know the answer when they call, I'll surely get them the answer from one of my resources at no additional cost, of course.*

SGR: Other than its uniqueness, what makes your homicide school worth attending for writers? Can you give us a pre-impulse of what is to come in June's seminar?

DP: *My presentation is entertaining and informative. There is a lot that I can't do—I'm no mechanic, I couldn't sail your boat, and you don't want me doing anything that requires high math, but keeping an audience's attention and making it entertaining is something I enjoy, and from all my reviews, do pretty well I guess. My class will take you from basic law enforcement information and dispel some myths and give the writer insight into how murder investigations are truly conducted. Writers will learn about police procedures, crime scene investigations, scientific tests we use, laws that apply to interviews, and how cops really do interrogations. I dispel a lot of myths from what people think they know from television and movies, especially regarding the FBI. Lastly, throughout the course as questions come up, there are usually some fresh topics of discussion that create all kinds of fun buzz.*

I'm really looking forward to the June event. The first two Writer's Courses were very much in the testing phase to see if, a) anyone would actually come and like it, and b) to learn what writers were most interested about. I've learned my pace and timing as to how much I can present in two six-hour lectures. The first class I had WAY too much planned and didn't get to half of it; but now, I feel great about the amount of material I have to present and the chance to provide it to a larger audience and in a nice venue like Santa Monica. I promise you will like what you hear, see, and learn, and I guarantee you'll enjoy yourself.

Suspense Magazine will be covering this event live in Santa Monica on June 2 and 3. We look forward to bringing you more of an in-depth investigation into the detective himself and evaluate just how good his expertise and knowledge really are. So, stay tuned for our next on-location piece highlighting the course and Sgt. Pacifico. In the meantime, to find out more about this course and Pacifico and/or to sign up for this intense two-day seminar, please visit: <http://www.filmmakerjunction.com/events/writers-homicide-school/>. ■

Writers Homicide School Schedule

(subject to change)

SATURDAY

9:00 AM to 10:00 AM: Overview - Basic Police Procedures, Homicide Team. Composition / Military Time / Phonetic Alphabet

10:00 AM to 12:00 AM: Initial Investigation & Legal

Issues - Call-Out / Organization / Investigating / Controlling Your Case Load & Yourself / Search Warrants, exigency, exceptions, Miranda (4th, 5th, 6th, 14th)

1:00 PM to 3:00 PM: Crime Scene Investigations - Defining Evidence / Locard Principle / Photography / Evidence Collection / Bugs, Bones & Graves / Fingerprinting / Latents on Skin / DNA / Point of Origin / Glass Fracture / Point of Origin & Trajectory

SUNDAY

9:00 AM to 10:00 AM: Blood Spatter Interpretation - Blood Drop Characteristics / Blood in Motion / Contacts Stains, Swipes and Spatters / DNA

10:00 AM to 12:00 AM: Interview & Interrogation - Miranda Law and policies

1:00 PM to 2:00 PM: Case Presentation - Marine Murders

2:00 PM to 3:00 PM: Open Questions and Answer - Brainstorming!!