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## MURDER IN SPOKANE ASESINATO EN ESPOKANE

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**By Mark Fuhrman (New York: Avalon/Harper Collins, 2001. Pp. 372)**

In his book, *Murder in Spokane*, Mark Fuhrman explains his, and his partner's, investigation and coverage of a series of unsolved prostitute homicides. These took place over the course of one and one-half decades in the environs of Spokane, Washington. It is believed that the murders began about 1984; and although the evidence to arrest and convict the perpetrator was available to the police in August of 1997, the serial murders did not end until the police arrest of Robert Yates on April 18, 2000.

In the Fall of 1997, Mike Fitzsimmons, a radio talk show host in Spokane, Washington, invited Mark Fuhrman, a retired and eminently successful Los Angeles police homicide investigator, to have breakfast with him in a popular Spokane

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restaurant. During the meal, Fitzsimmons asked Fuhrman to join him in co-hosting a series of radio talk shows focusing upon crime and related issues.

Fitzsimmons wished to begin their work by taking a closer look at the series of at least ten known but unsolved prostitute homicides in the Spokane area dating back to at least 1984. Three of the homicides which took place in 1990 were attributed to an uncaught serial murderer. However, two women's bodies had been discovered in August of 1997, and it seemed that either the serial murderer might be back, or that another killer was victimizing prostitutes in Spokane.

Rather than working in competition with the police in the investigations of the murders, the co-hosts wished to work with the police and share their knowledge, skills, and discoveries: But during the ensuing three years, the unsophisticated small-town law enforcement turned down each of their offers of help; and ironically, leads which they passed on to the police were simply placed in a stack without follow-up.

The author wanted to support the police and struggled to uphold their investigations of the murders; but as evidence continued to build leading toward tentative conclusions of weak and incomplete murder investigations, Fuhrman began to critically analyze the police investigations. Fuhrman and Fitzsimmons continued to aid the police by making reports, providing leads and evidence, and offering guidance. The police response, seemingly as a turf-protection mechanism, was deafness and muteness.

In *Murder in Spokane* Mark Fuhrman provides a valuable resource for the police training, planning, and management of homicide and serial murder investigations. Some of the issues Fuhrman emphasizes are:

- 1) Many small-city police departments lack the training, experience, and sophistication to solve complex murder cases.
- 2) This lack of sophistication is compounded by the common tendency to either avoid bringing in expert consultants, or to bring them in only as a token gesture in order to appease the local public and media. In essence, due to the territorialism of the police, help from outside is often not welcome. Points 1 and 2 are also made obvious in Fuhrman's study of the October 30, 1975 murder of Martha Moxley in Greenwich, Connecticut explained in his book, *Murder in Greenwich* (1999).
- 3) Serial murders are best solved by the police investigators doing their utmost to concentrate on and solve the most recent murder (or the more recent with the most evidence available). It was shown that the Spokane police had sufficient evidence at hand in the August 1997 slaying of Jennifer Joseph to both identify the perpetrator and to win a murder conviction against him. But the police task force was so obsessed with letting technology and science solve the murders for them, that they failed to follow proper murder investigation protocol. They became so preoccupied with building computer data bases and requesting the state crime lab to do myriad DNA tests, that they did not have time to pursue the solid leads in the Jennifer Joseph murder.
- 4) The police must rely upon traditional and proven homicide investigation techniques. In depending almost solely upon DNA testing and computer data banks, at least nine more women were murdered after the police knew of the solvable Jennifer Joseph murder.

Mark Fuhrman's expectations of how an organized serial murder investigation would be handled were truncated in the following six ways:

- 1) Police presence and follow up was nearly absent in the area of East Sprague Street -- center of the prostitution district. In fact, Fuhrman and Fitzsimmons were never conscious of a police presence in all of their wanderings through the district and through their multiple interviews with the sex workers.
- 2) Those citizens of Spokane, who were aware that several women's bodies had been found, did not appear to be overly upset or fearful. Some openly stated that since the victims were prostitutes, the murders had no impact upon their own lives.
- 3) Police treated the crime scenes with nonchalance: First, when the police could not complete their investigation of a homicide dump site by nightfall, they would post guards for the night and not return to complete their investigation until morning. Second, while canvassing the neighborhood for possible clues is an integral part of traditional homicide investigations, Spokane police omitted this step at most crime scenes. Third, the police were not thorough in their crime scene investigations. In one case, days after the police had completed their investigation of a crime scene in which one woman's body was partially buried atop a second woman's body; the co-authors found two trash bags full of discarded clothing nearby which the police had neither opened nor taken into evidence.
- 4) The police either were unaware of or chose to ignore the scientific literature of serial murder. They ignored the fact that serial murderers often leave obvious clues to bait the police: That is, serial murderers tend to overestimate their own brilliance, and underestimate the intelligence and abilities of the police; thus at some point the murders are enhanced or extended in their minds as a game they are playing with the police.
- 5) The police also were hesitant to inform the citizenry of details of the crimes, and publicly avoided calling the continuous and multiple rash of murders in Spokane *serial murders*. Yet the literature suggests that the citizens should be kept informed and tend to volunteer valuable clues when kept informed.
- 6) Solving the serial murder cases was not a top priority of the Spokane Police Department or of the Spokane County Sheriff's Office. This was made obvious by the fact that only two officers were assigned to the murders part-time during most of the years of the serial murderer's crimes. When a full time serial murder task force was named, it still consisted of only those same two officers.

The author sums up his and Fitzsimmons' study of the murders in Spokane in the following paragraph:

What (Sheriff) Sterk had revealed was that the task force had sat on a couple of clues for two years. During that time, at least nine women had died. Whether it was laziness, incompetence, or just simple human error, the task force could have caught Yates back in September 1997. (p., 304)

This failure to follow solid leads gave the malefactor more than 2 ½ years in which to continue his murderous rampage, for the perpetrator *Yates* was not arrested

until April of 2000. Yates pled guilty in October of 2000 in order to avoid the death penalty.

*Murder in Spokane* should be required reading for police who aspire to become murder investigators and for those who wish to be police managers and administrators. It is, in a sense, a text book on both what to avoid and what to pursue in conducting murder investigations and serial murder investigations. Well written and perceptibly expressed, the book rivets the attention of the reader. Mark Fuhrman has produced a work which is a valuable contribution to the police murder investigation literature.