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Heavenly peaks,
stunning views

A watercolorist
who fights crime

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The home of Tom and Jeannie Davis, designed by Jon Sayler, was built on top of enormous boulders.
-Photo by Alan Bisson

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The fine art of fighting crime

Carrie Stuart Parks shares insights with law enforcement



Forensic artist Carrie Stuart Parks has taught at FBI headquarters.

By ASA MARIA BRADLEY

Crime runs in Carrie Stuart Parks' family, but don't confuse her with Carmela Soprano; she works the other side of the law.

Stuart Parks still lives on the sprawling property in Cataldo, Idaho, where she grew up. Her family can trace its Idaho roots as far back as the 1800s. As a girl, Stuart Parks spent most of her time riding horses and playing with the Great Pyrenees dogs that her family bred.

"If you were found inside watching TV or something like that, it meant you were available for chores like cleaning out the dog kennels," Stuart Parks chuckles.

In 1981, her father Edwin Z. "Ned" Stuart, then director of North Idaho Regional Crime Lab, founded a company to examine physical evidence on civil and criminal cases.

Stuart Parks, a Lewis-Clark State College graduate with double majors in fine art and social science, started working for him as an artist for court preparations. In 1984, the FBI held its first forensic artist training, and she signed up as a student for the following year. There, she met Rick Parks, an FBI forensic artist.

The couple married in 1989 and continued the family business when Edwin Stuart passed away in 1993. The company, called Stuart Parks Forensics Consultants, offers services such as composite drawings, image modification, facial reconstruction, and crime-scene sketching. It also provides training and certification in forensic art to law-enforcement departments all over the country, including the FBI.

Ten years after being a student there herself, Stuart Parks returned to the FBI Academy in Quantico, Va., to teach.

There are no prerequisites for her classes.

"We can start at the level where we assume you don't know how to draw blood, show you which end of the pencil to sharpen, and go from there," she says.

Spotting deception

While working on a Spokane murder case in the late 1990s, Stuart Parks became fascinated by signs of deception.



Above, Stuart Parks and her husband, Rick Parks, have written how-to drawing books. Right, Stuart Parks demonstrates facial reconstruction technique.

Tom DiBartolo, a Spokane County sheriff's deputy whose wife had been killed, didn't behave as expected when giving her details for the composite sketches of the two men he claimed had shot his wife. She reported these inconsistencies to the deputies working the case, she says.

When DiBartolo was accused of the murder and tried, Stuart Parks served as a witness. She turned to previous teachers and mentors to prepare for her testimony. In 1997, a jury convicted DiBartolo of killing his wife.

Stuart Parks says signs of stress or deception include a change of behavior and "clustered" or "timely" responses to a stimulus, such as a question.

For example, "So, if I asked my teenage son, 'Did you put the scratch on the car?' and he answers, 'Um, no, no, no! Why are you asking me?' his answer was timely in response to my question, and clustered: a significant pause, multiple denials and answering a question with a question," Stuart Parks says. "The first thing I tell my LW (law enforcement) students on deception is that a composite that has no corrections, or few corrections, is probably made up. In written signs (called statement analysis), I look for a change in language."

Fraud investigators, court personnel, and business leaders often invite her to conduct workshops, and she's developed DVD-based materials that teach how to recognize signs of deception.

Artist as writer

The author of several books on drawing techniques, Stuart Parks also writes

fiction. She is friends with Frank Peretti, a best-selling Christian novelist, and his wife, Barbara Jean, who also wrote a book that Parks illustrated. Frank Peretti offered to mentor Stuart Parks after reading one of her stories. This led to her developing a series of mysteries featuring a forensic artist.

Her writing often takes a backseat to other creative outlets. Her paintings are part of corporate and private collections

as far away as Hawaii. She has received numerous awards for her work, enough to be a "signature member" of the Idaho Water Color Society.

While her fine art can be viewed locally at the Coeur d'Alene Resort, Kootenai Medical Center, and the Frame of Mind Gallery, in Coeur d'Alene, her forensic insight helps put away criminals all over the country. □



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