

## Bruce T. Sackman

Bruce Sackman served as the Special Agent in Charge, U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA), Office of Inspector General, Criminal Investigations Division, Northeast Field Office until May 2005 when he retired after 32 years' service. In this capacity, he was responsible for all major criminal investigations involving VA from West Virginia to Maine. During his tenure he was involved in hundreds of investigations involving allegations of fraud, corruption, false claims, thefts, patient assaults, pharmaceutical drug diversions and suspicious hospital deaths. He was also responsible for supervising the successful investigation of the nation's first homicide conviction in connection with pharmaceutical research. His cases involving medical professionals who have murdered their patients have been featured on the Discovery Health Channel, CNN, MSNBC, America's Most Wanted and on Home Box Office. He is the recipient of many awards for his investigations and for his efforts in encouraging the profession of forensic nursing. Mr. Sackman has lectured at several forensic related conferences, State police organizations, the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, universities and medical related symposia.

He is the co-author of the new book "Behind the Murder Curtain, Special Agent Bruce Sackman Hunts Doctors and Nurses Who Kill Our Veterans and the article "When the ICU becomes a Crime Scene" for Critical Care Nursing Quarterly.

Mr. Sackman is currently self-employed as a licensed private investigator in New York City specializing in healthcare related matters. Under contract he directs all major investigations for a major New York metropolitan regional healthcare system.

He is the President of the Society of Professional Investigators in New York City.

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# SPI ONLINE

## **NYPD CHIEF NILDA HOFMANN ON THE MANY REWARDS OF COMMUNITY AFFAIRS**

The newly appointed chief of the Community Affairs' department was the guest at our June 14 dinner at Forlini's and discussed school safety, body cams, the evolution of Stop-Question-and-Frisk and cultivating relationships with community advocates and faith leaders.



SPI President Bruce Sackman, NYPD Chief of Community Affairs Nilda Hofmann and Mitchell R. Weiss, Clergy/Community Liaison for 1st Deputy Commissioner

From listening to Nilda Hofmann's engaging account of her 28-year professional journey, it's apparent that the NYPD's new Chief of Community Affairs enjoys nothing more than working the streets: *"I started in in the Bronx, and most of my career has been on patrol in the Bronx,"* Chief Hofmann told a rapt audience at Forlini's, which included several retired NYPD detectives now working as investigators in the private sector.

A first-generation Puerto Rican from the Bronx, Hofmann worked in Precincts 23, 25, 42, 44 and 52, plus the Patrol Borough Bronx and the Bronx Task Force. Along the way she was promoted to Sergeant, Lieutenant, Captain, Deputy Inspector, Inspector, then Deputy Chief. While staffing the Risk Management Bureau at One Police Plaza (“1 PP”), Hofmann said that she missed *“being with the cops on the streets. This is what I know and what I’m comfortable with, where I’m happy.”*

When Chief Monahan summoned Hofmann to his office this January, she told him: *“Thank goodness, please tell me you’re sending me back to the Bronx.”* Monahan replied: *“I’ve got something better. What about chief of community affairs?”* *I nearly fell off my chair. I was a one-star and I was promoted to three-star!* In March, Nilda Hofmann made history [as the first Hispanic woman in the NYPD promoted to three-star Chief.](#)



*“When I was a commanding officer at the 25 precinct, if you had told me, at the peak of Stop, Question and Frisk in 2011, if you had told me in 2012-2013, if we stop SQF, is crime going to go up? I would have told you absolutely. But I was absolutely wrong. SPF went down, crime kept going down.”*

The NYPD’s Community Affairs Bureau oversees four divisions: The Community Outreach Division, Crime Prevention Division, Youth Strategies Division, and School Safety Division. Chief Hofmann says that one of her first tasks was to reach out to Community Affairs officers throughout the boroughs. With the rise of neighborhood policing, some had concerns, wondering what their roles were.

*“Community Affairs officers are picked because they work well with all types of communities,”* she explained. *“They are able to talk at meetings, speaking well, with respect. In fact, we want all cops to have the Community Affairs mentality.”* From her time at 1 PP, Chief Hofmann said that she *“learned a lot”* and can convey the perspective from headquarters to officers in the field: *“Lawyers get in and tell [the patrol cops] that you can’t do this or that, and it seems impossible to take 10 steps. But after spending time at 1 PP, I understood a lot of things better. You get it, and you work with it.”*

### Warning card

After the Parkland shooting in Florida, school safety became a topic of even greater interest than before. There are 5,600 school safety agents in New York City, 95% of whom are Hispanic or black. *“Which is incredible when 80% of our school students are minority,”* Chief Hofmann said, before adding: *“These are the right people to have in our schools, which are very diverse.”*

But as trained as they are, these agents lack the same equipment as street officers, and one of her tasks is to remedy to that. Chief Hofmann answered questions about marijuana in schools and shared her enthusiasm for a program that *“was only in place in certain schools, [but] I said it had to be in place all throughout the city.”* The controversial pilot program, launched in 2017, calls for students who are caught with a bag of marijuana on them to receive a “warning card” issued by the NYPD rather than a criminal summons. (School Safety Union officials have



criticized the program from the start.)

Hofmann, who has been married for 25 years and has three children, says that she's a strong proponent of this program: *"My 19-year-old boy, I struggled with him. I live upstate, and I told him: 'You know, if you lived in the City, you probably would have been locked up a lot of times!' A summons can destroy these kids' lives, all because of a dumb incident at age 16 or 17."* While they avoid a potentially crippling record, the students still face discipline and a requirement to undergo counseling.

## Bodycams

A project Chief Hofmann is particularly proud of having been part of is a plan to equip every NYPD officer and detective on patrol with body cameras. By the end of this year, there should be 20,000 active cameras throughout the 34,000-member department. *"For cops to wear it, you have to sell it to them, and I believe that we did a great job,"* she said. The body cam is a little black box that goes on the garment. It won't livestream events or film all of the time, much to the chagrin of some community advocates. Chief Hofmann says that she understands their point of view, but that, simply put, having the camera on at all times isn't realistic, in part because it grabs a bunch of irrelevant and/or private conversations.



*"The biggest change since my early days is that the murder rate has gone down so much since the early 90s. Another major change is that domestic violence is taken very seriously. Also, cops are encouraged to smile, say hello and talk to people."*

*"When the cop turns on the camera, they're supposed to tell you that you're being recorded,"* she said. *"At first, the cops didn't like that. But there are exceptions, in emergency situations, when you arrive to a chaotic crime scene. A lot of discretion is given to the officers in the field. The cameras have the advantage of capturing footage in the 30 seconds leading up to the moment the officer presses record."* (This March, the *New York Post* and 13 other media organizations [sued to keep NYPD body-cam footage public.](#))



Ultimately, Chief Hofmann thinks that body cams *"help with the cops' behavior, but also the behavior in the community, too. Once they are filmed, their behavior changes. It works."*

To conclude the evening, Hofmann praised the work of the clergy liaison and the support of some 300 faith leaders in the City, whom *"the NYPD can count on to share and relay information."* *"We can change the NYPD and ensure the safety of our cops, but this can only work if we get the communities on our side."*

All attendees received a NYPD-emblazoned journal

# Tony DeStefano On The Big Heist



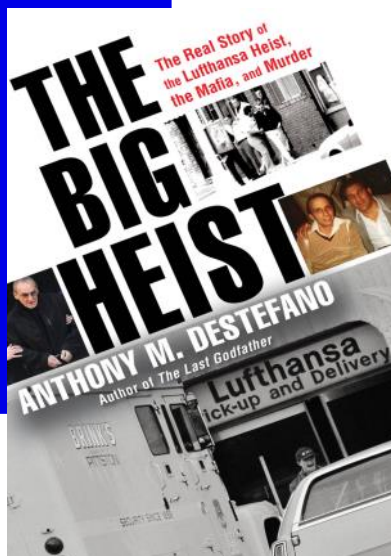
Newsday criminal justice reporter and true crime author [Tony DeStefano](#) came to SPI on May 24 to present *The Big Heist*, his book on the fabled Mob airport heist of 1978: A crime that has baffled law enforcement for decades and was best memorialized in the movie *Goodfellas*.

Tony DeStefano's and SPI Vice-President Ernie Lungaro

The government called it the biggest cash robbery in the history of the United States: A 6 Million Dollar cash and jewelry robbery from a Lufthansa Air cargo warehouse at JFK Airport, that took place on December 11, 1978. "The estimates vary," Tony DeStefano told the audience at Forlini's, "but what I can tell you is that, when it went down, it was amazing." Incredibly, the case is still unsolved. It

spurred a decades-long investigation that continues to this day. The case got a new life four years ago, when the feds arrested New York mob boss Vincent "Vinny" Asaros. The alleged Bonanno crime family captain was indicted on federal racketeering charges, went on trial in 2015 and was

acquitted. Still, Pulitzer-prize winning crime reporter DeStefano, who sat through the trial, couldn't believe what he was learning and immersed himself back into the case. To him, Asaro was found not guilty (even after being observed by the FBI for more than three decades) because, at 80, the broke and washed-up gangster didn't seem to be a threat: "He once was a big gangster, on trial for a 40-year-old crime and everybody else involved, to a greater level, had escaped and not been held accountable. Possibly, the jurors didn't think that he should bear responsibility." DeStefano said that the testimony of gangster-turned-informant Salvatore Vitale and Gaspar Valenti led him to new details on the heist's planning, and other insights into the Bonanno and Lucchese crime families. There was also the 2013 discovery of human bones in a Queens home belonging to a relative of a Jimmy Burke, a homicidal Lucchese associate who masterminded the heist and assembled the team. DeStefano







also reported on some disturbing claims made about how some

members of the NYPD leaked information to Burke. At the end, the perpetrators of the Lufthansa heist were never apprehended and thirteen people connected to the crime were murdered in homicides that remain unsolved to this day.

By revisiting an almost 40 year-old case, DeStefano reminded us that the Lufthansa heist wasn't the first major theft from JFK which might as well "just have neon signs directing criminals where to go." Considering how much was stolen, it would be hard to imagine in 2018, said the reporter: "It would be very difficult to pull off with today's sur-

veillance camera systems everywhere, a much quicker reaction time from the NYPD, license plate readers and such. In general, you have many more deterrents in place." This notwithstanding, New York's traditional crime families have gone into a decline. They got pushed out by Albanian and Russian crime networks. In the epilogue of the book, DeStefano showed up at Asaro's door and the aging gangster didn't disappoint, railing against "those who sang on the stand."

What did DeStefano think of the 1990 Martin Scorsese blockbuster Godfellas, that immortalized the Lufthansa heist? "It's pretty close, but a few details don't match. For instance, the guy in the meat locker: That didn't happen. His body was put in a trailer because it was during the Winter and the ground was too frozen to bury him."

**"The Lufthansa heist would be quite impossible to pull off today"**  
**Tony DeStefano**

## FRANK COSTELLO: TOP HOODLUM

DeStefano had a new book released since our dinner: A biography of legendary New York City mob boss Frank Costello, titled *Top Hoodlum*. On August 3, Destefano [sat down with](#)

[NY1](#) to talk about the "Prime Minister of the Mafia" who had big sway over the city's streets.

Follow DeStefano on Twitter ([@tonynewsday](#))



## NYCFE SEMINAR ON DATA MINING AND ANALYTICS

On May 22, the [New York Chapter of The Certified Fraud Examiners Association](#) hosted a very interesting seminar breakfast with Lacey Keller, Managing Director with

Gryphon Strategies. Formerly NY Attorney General Data Director, she showed many examples of successful use of Alternative Data & Analytics in investigations.

Methods ranged from looking for "middle of the night modifications made in a Word document" to building Python scripts to pull out data from thousands of invoices to uncover fraud.



## A WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT OF SPI

SPI president  
Bruce  
Sackman in  
The New  
Yorker Pre-  
sents:  
SNOOPS,  
Watch the  
video [here](#)



Greetings from the President of SPI,

George Gershwin wrote, "*Summertime and the living is easy*"....but for members of the SPI Board of Directors, Summer is a time to prepare for the numerous events that are scheduled for the fall season, beginning with the 62nd Annual Dinner. This year, we honor **Eric Gonzalez**, the Kings County District Attorney, NYPD Chief **Ruben Beltran**, and our favorite restaurant owner **Joe Forlini**. Last year we had over 160 people in attendance and we hope this year to have even more. It's the best investigative networking event of the year.

*Behind the Murder Curtain*, which I co-authored with Jerry Schmetterer and Michael Vecchione, will be released on 9/18/18. Our book signing will be held on September 27, 2018 at 6:30PM at the Mysterious Book Shop, 56 Warren Street, NY and you are all invited.

At the October SPI meeting I will be presenting a session on medical professionals who murder their patients and we end the year with a presentation on digital currency investigations.

As SPI members know, at least one Hollywood production company has expressed interest in televising the Real Stories of SPI and we are negotiating a possible deal with filming to begin in September.

So what are you waiting for? Now is the best time to join SPI and take advantage of all the wonderful opportunities available for SPI members to highlight their businesses and their investigations.

All best,

Bruce Sackman  
President, SPI





THE SOCIETY  
OF PROFESSIONAL  
INVESTIGATORS

You are cordially invited to the  
**62<sup>nd</sup> Annual Awards Gala**  
*Honoring*

***Eric Gonzalez***

**Kings County District Attorney**

***Ruben Beltran***

**Commanding Officer,  
Management and Budget**

***Joe Forlini***

**Forlini's Restaurant**



Hon. Eric Gonzalez



NYPD Chief  
Ruben Beltran



Joe Forlini

***September 20, 2018***

6 pm: open bar reception with panoramic Manhattan skyline views

7 pm: Awards Ceremony and Dinner

***Giando on the Water***, 400 Kent Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11211

The price for this event is \$140 per person. It includes a full sit-down dinner, appetizers, open bar and valet parking.

Table for 10 costs \$1400 and includes a full-page ad in the dinner journal and in SPI's newsletters into December 2019.

Tickets can be purchased by credit card, PayPal or by check at [spionline.info](http://spionline.info)

or call President Bruce Sackman at (718) 490-7288.



**Wednesday, September 5, 2018**  
***SPI SPECIAL EVENT ON PI LICENSING***  
***IN NEW YORK STATE***



***With Ernita Gantt,  
Chief Investigator for the New York State Department of  
State, Bureau of Licensing Services***

***Are you interested in becoming a licensed private investigator in New York State?***

***Ernita Gantt will present the work of the NYS DOS Licensing Services in charge of licensing private investigators in New York State. She will answer questions related to PI license obtention in New York State; maintaining good standing and addressing complaints; working with DOS to curb unlicensed activity and other topics of interest to future and current NYS Licensed Private Investigators.***

***Meeting starts at 6:30 p.m.***

***Location in Lower Manhattan to be announced shortly on our website***

***[Spionline.info](http://Spionline.info) and by e-mail.***

***Visit our website to join our mailing list by filling the black box at the bottom:***

Join our Mailing List

Enter your email address

***Coming to SPI on November 15, 2018***

***NICK HIMONIDIS ON INVESTIGATING  
BITCOIN AND CRYPTOCURRENCY TRANSACTIONS***



**In the past few years, cryptocurrency and token popularity has grown exponentially. While initially under the control of tech enthusiasts and outlaws, they have quickly become mainstream investments. The complexities and pseudo-anonymity of cryptocurrency makes it a difficult asset to understand and track. On November 15, Nick Himonidis of The NGH Group will come to SPI to discuss how to investigate bitcoin and other cryptocurrency transactions.**

Nicholas G. Himonidis has an extensive background in fraud investigations, computer forensics and law. He has been a private investigator for over 27 years and is currently the President /

CEO of [The NGH Group, Inc.](http://The NGH Group, Inc.), specializing in complex investigations, digital forensics and e-Discovery consulting and support.

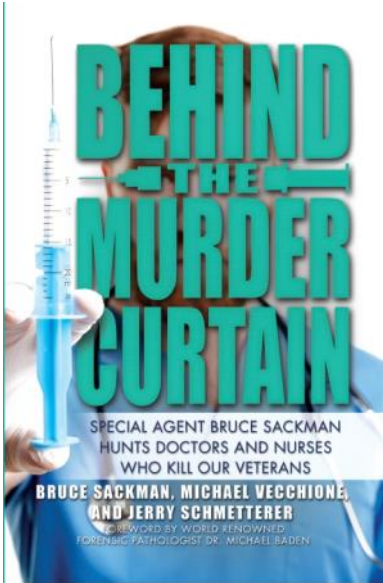
Nick Himonidis is an attorney, licensed to practice law in New York, a Certified Fraud Examiner (CFE) and is also a Certified Computer Forensic Specialist (CCFS). He has extensive training and expertise in financial fraud investigation, computer forensics, data recovery and analysis, electronic discovery and the handling, authentication and presentation of digital evidence. Nick Himonidis has litigated cases, and been an expert witness, in numerous cases in both state and federal court, and has conducted and supervised the investigation of hundreds of cases involving complex financial frauds and computer forensic and electronic discovery issues including, civil RICO claims, fraudulent asset transfers, bankruptcy and insurance fraud, embezzlement, and frauds against state and local governments and the U.S. government, as well as numerous matrimonial and custody matters. Nick Himonidis earned his Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice from St. John's University Cum Laude and his JD from St. John's University School of Law, graduating Magna Cum Laude in the top 2% of his class.

Dinner with Nick Himonidis will take place at Forlini's on Thursday November 15, 6 p.m. Register at [spionline.info](http://spionline.info)



# COMING TO SPI ON OCTOBER 25

## *SPI President Bruce Sackman on medical serial killers*



*“The most grievous cases involve doctors and nurses who murder their patients. And when I say murder, I’m not talking about mercy killings or malpractice,”* says the Ret. Federal agent, currently a full-time hospital investigator. In October, he will switch chairs at Forlini’s and be our presenter, along with the co-authors of his upcoming book, [\*Behind the Murder Curtain\*](#), Jerry Schmetterer and Michael Vecchione. Here is a primer for SPIOnline:

**Q: What drove you to write *Behind the Murder Curtain*?**

**BS:** For almost 20 years, I have been giving lectures on the investigation of suspicious deaths in medical centers. I would discuss my medical serial killer (MSK) cases with the audience and the universal reaction was, why don’t you author a book about these events? Still working as a full-time hospital investigator, it took my co-authors Jerry Schmetterer and Michael Vecchione to get the project going. Like members of my audiences, they too were shocked to learn of the MSKs that roamed the halls of the VA Medical Centers throughout the country and were convinced this was an important story to tell veterans, their families and the general public.

**JS:** It is a unique story about a type of crime that was hidden from the public until Bruce Sackman exposed it. Sackman’s work was groundbreaking.

**MV:** Simply put, this story had to be told! Bruce Sackman is nothing short of a hero. His expertise, his tenacity, his persistence and his never quit attitude resulted in justice for unsuspecting victims and their families and punishment for some of the worst killers I have ever run across in my 40 years in law enforcement. *Behind the Murder Curtain* will bring this great detective’s work and accomplishments to our veterans, their families, and to the general public. I am proud to be a part of it.

**Q: What is the biggest thing you hope people take away from this book?**

**BS:** The overwhelming majority of healthcare providers are honest, hardworking, dedicated employees; however, on rare occasions terrible things can happen. Never stop questioning the treatment you or a family member are receiving in the hospital. Never take for granted that every caregiver has your best interest in mind. Show the staff that you are an advocate for the patient and will be monitoring the care they receive.

**JS:** We make the case that cover-up and denial do not solve problems but make them worse. No one involved in life and death decisions should be above suspicion if something doesn’t seem right. Fast action, no matter what kind of heat it brought, would have saved many lives.

**MV:** My hope is that the book will alert people to be vigilant when a loved one is hospitalized. Never take anything for granted when it comes to the patient’s care and the dispensing of medication. Be persistent in asking questions of the medical personnel regarding diagnosis and treatment and be satisfied with the answers before agreeing to any course of conduct. Also, be mindful of changes in procedure or conduct when it comes to your loved one, don’t be intimidated by the white coats, and again never be afraid to question.

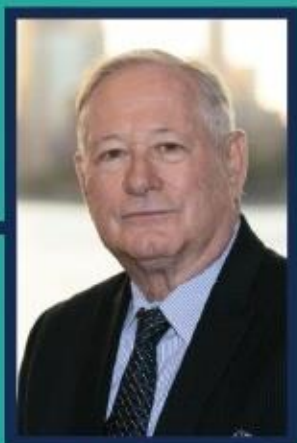




Bruce Sackman



Michael Vecchione



Jerry Schmetterer

**Q: Can you talk a little bit about a case that had a profound effect on you?**

**BS:** The Dr. Swango case had a profound effect, not only on me personally, but on the entire medical profession. How could someone who was incarcerated for poisoning his coworkers reenter society as a physician at a Veterans Hospital? Next there came a stream of cases of medical professionals murdering their patients. No longer just the white-collar crime investigator, my life had now taken a different and unexpected turn toward the investigation of homicides in hospitals.

**JS:** In my career (*Schmetterer was a Police Bureau Chief and editor for the New York Daily News—Ed*), I would say the case that most affected me was the disappearance of Etan Patz. I covered hundreds of murders, including the Son of Sam serial killings, but the one that sticks with me the most is the case of 6-year-old Etan, who was grabbed off the street on the first day he was allowed to walk to school alone. My work on the case led the NY Daily News to initiate a column about missing people, which I wrote for about 6 years. I received a special award from the NYPD for helping to find 123 missing persons during that time. I covered that case, as a reporter and editor at several different news organizations, intensely from day one to today. While it has been “solved” and someone has been convicted of kidnapping and killing Etan, I am still disturbed by the feelings of anguish and despair experienced by the Patz family. There is no more paralyzing emotion that knowing your child is in danger and you are helpless to do anything about it. As the father of an infant boy at the time I, and just about every other reporter who covered the case, shared the anxiety, moments of hope, moments of hopelessness and eventually the acceptance that Etan would never come home. I think about the Patz family often.

**MV:** When I was Chief of the Rackets Division in the Brooklyn District Attorney’s Office, I had a very important and significant case of judicial and political corruption. 6 years of intensive investigation and trials resulted in the conviction of 3 New York State Supreme Court Judges and 2 members of the New York State Assembly. This all began with a persistent young woman who was trying to retain custody of her children after a long and contentious divorce. The judge seemed to be favoring her husband in the custody battle and she had no answer as to why until she was approached by another litigant in court one day who told her he knew the judge had been paid off by her husband. He told the woman that for a fee he could fix it so she would win. Being skeptical, she went to several law enforcement agencies to report this corruption only to be turned away as a nut. She then came to my office for help because we had recently convicted a different Supreme Court Judge for taking a bribe. The woman was convincing enough for us to ask her to go speak to the man who offered to help, but we insisted she wear a recording device. This brave woman, several months pregnant, agreed without hesitation. Retaining custody of her kids was the most important thing in her life and she knew her only chance to do so was with our help. Ultimately, this woman’s courage and determination led to the arrest of several individuals, *including the judge, for corruption. And like dominoes falling, her case led to many others that rocked the judicial and political establishment in Brooklyn. I will never forget her.*

## ***SPI MEMBERS IN THE NEWS***

### ***Bill Golodner to play correction captain in TV pilot***



Private investigator Bill Golodner, president of [Golodner Group](#), specializes in Landlord & Tenant Investigations in New York City. He's the "Popeye Doyle of SPI" regaling the table with funny stories in the [The New Yorker Presents short film](#) about our group. But few SPI members know that Bill, a former NYPD detective and paramedic, is also a [SAG card-carrying actor](#) who has trained with such notables as Michael Beckett of HB Studios, Geraldine Baron, and John Strasberg, and has acted in series such as Law & Order. This summer, he will film the pilot episode for [Rockk Island](#), a

new prison television series written and produced by Robin K. Miller, a former correction guard and author of [Inside the Dark Underbelly of Rikers Island](#).

### ***Matt Spaier in the September issue of PI Magazine***

SPI member Matt Spaier, owner of [Satellite Investigations](#) with offices in The Bronx, Manhattan and Brooklyn, NY, will be published in PI magazine, in the September issue: *"I wrote about geotagging and geofencing and investigations in personal injury cases,"* he tells us. Geo-location can be described as the process of identifying the geographical location of a person by means of digital information, voluntarily shared via the Internet. Geo-tagging is the process of adding physical location data to various forms of media. *"The technology has helped me on several cases find direct eyewitness that did not show up on police reports or on canvassing by NYPD,"* says Spaier. *"There have been several where these witnesses actually took photos and/or video of the incident after it happened."*



### ***SPI TRIP TO LONDON POSTPONED TO SPRING 2019***



*Our proposed trip to London and visit of New Scotland Yard will now take place in the Spring of 2019. The Yard has requested that we postpone the trip, as the current political uncertainty in Great Britain that is very taxing on their resources. We're looking forward to welcoming representatives of Her Majesty's government at the September 20 SPI Annual Dinner and you can meet and greet them at that time. If you haven't purchased your seats yet, don't delay another moment!*

Announcing:

# "BEHIND THE MURDER CURTAIN"

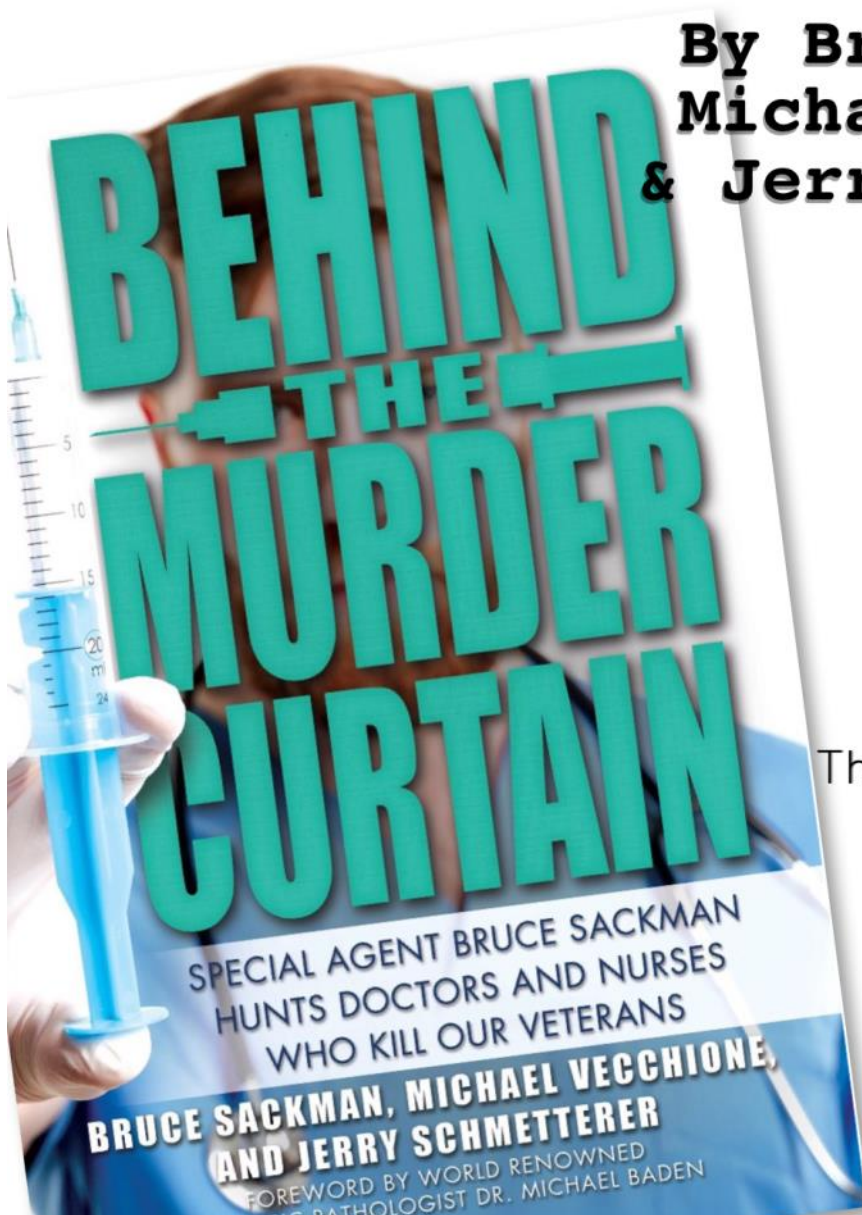
Special Agent Bruce Sackman  
Hunts Doctors and Nurses  
who KILL OUR VETERANS

**By Bruce Sackman,  
Michael Vecchione  
& Jerry Schmetterer**

Join Us!  
For a Signing  
& Celebration

Sept. 27, 2018  
6:30 PM

The Mysterious Bookshop  
58 Warren Street  
New York, NY 10007





# Genetic Genealogy: A Major Game-Changer in Investigations

SPI member [Liesa Healy-Miller](#), a licensed private investigator, is a forensic genealogist trained in DNA analysis, and the founder of [Healy-Miller Associates](#) in Boston, Massachusetts. A meticulous former investigative reporter, Miller is an expert at finding lost or missing heirs and witnesses, and analyzing DNA results in order to determine familial relationships. With Liesa coming to New York City often for her work, we caught up with her at a recent SPI dinner at Forlini's and asked her about the stunning April arrest of Joseph James DeAngelo as the alleged Golden State Killer. The 72 year-old California man was identified using an ingenious technique, through a publicly accessible genealogical DNA database, GEDMatch, that thrills investigators and disturbs privacy advocates. We asked Liesa for her take on this investigative landmark:

*SPIonline: How would you explain the method that led to the arrest of the suspected Golden State Killer?*

LHM: This was the brainchild of a very enterprising detective in California who definitely was thinking out of the box. He and his team took samples of DNA found at one of the Golden State killer crime scenes and there was no match in the CODIS database. CODIS is a major law enforcement database which has the DNA of typically those who have been



Forensic genealogist [Liesa Healy-Miller](#)

arrested and those who have been convicted of a crime. Law enforcement had hit a wall, basically. What the investigator did is that he took those DNA samples, took them to a lab and had them tested it on the same markers that one of the commercial DNA testing company would do. Then, he uploaded them to [GEDMatch](#), where people have the option to, for free, upload their DNA test results from consumer DNA services such as [Ancestry](#), or [Family Tree DNA](#), [23andMe](#)... He got back a few matches of distant relatives of the suspect, roughly the equivalent of third cousins. From there, he traced back the lineage until he could find a common ancestor with the Golden State Killer, and built family trees.

*SPIonline: It sounds very ingenious but some of us wonder why it came about only now!*

LHM: I'm surprised that it took so long, because in the genetic genealogic conferences that I have attended over the years, some of us have been talking about exactly that: "If only there was a way to get police departments to have a lab, test those DNA samples on the same markers and match them to one of these larger hobbyist databases that would be amazing." Because more than 12 million people have had their DNA tested by direct-to-consumer genetic DNA testing services, almost all of them in the U.S. and GEDmatch claims to have about 1 million users. That's an incredible resource for Law Enforcement. But if you remember, there was a case three years ago where Law Enforcement in Idaho took a stab at finding a suspect using DNA match, and unfortunately, that was a disaster. They ended up accusing the wrong man of murder and that police department got a lot a bad press and [the notion of using consumer data DNA databases in investigation got a lot of bad press](#).

*SPIonline: How did this disastrous experience unfold?*

LHM: They were dealing with DNA samples that had only been tested on a very limited number of markers. What happened is that the suspect's father, years ago, had voluntarily submitted a DNA sample to a publicly available database which is no longer online. It was taken off after this whole kerfuffle, in fact! So his father was curious about his origins and had submitted his sample to that database, and the police tried to match that with samples taken from the crime scene. And the samples were tested on a very few markers and, the fewer markers you test, the more vague the results are. The more markers you test, the more definitive the results are. And in this case, circumstantially, it looked like the young man was in the right place at the right time to commit the crime. He was also a producer of graphic slasher movies, unfortunately for him, and it was a complete coincidence. It ended up that he was completely



48 Hours: [HOW SAFE IS YOUR DNA?](#)

innocent and that it was a terrible mistake. The police department in this Idaho town took quite a pounding in the press for wrongly fingering this young man. That being said, the killing took place in 1996 and if investigators took DNA from the crime scene today, and tried to apply using some new technology, they would have a better chance of catching the right killer. Technology has advanced a great deal, even since 2015, which is when this case came to life.

*SPIonline: In your experience, how common is it for Law Enforcement and also investigators from the private sector to utilize those consumer genetic databases?*

LHM: It is still very uncommon but the tide is about to change on that. You're going to see an explosion of use in the court room by Law Enforcement and, in civil cases, using DNA as evidence. In criminal cases of course, they've been using it for years and years when they manage to get DNA sample from a crime scene, and that's the simple part. But what if you have a sample and you don't have a match? Now they can test that sample, apply it to publicly available genealogy DNA databases and come up with potentially close or distant relatives. Then, using public records, they can do the actual genealogy and figure out how the owner of that DNA sample is related to the matches in the DNA databases.



Joseph James DeAngelo in a composite sketch and 2018 arrest photo (source: FBI)

*SPIonline: Ethical questions were raised when, in the case of the Golden State Killer, it was revealed that Law Enforcement uploaded his samples using a false name and misleading potential relatives about the motivation behind it!*

LHM: Those in Law Enforcement cheered when the suspect was apprehended, but on the other hand, civil libertarians and some consumers who use these DNA databases were unhappy and quite concerned. Yes, it raises questions. What if I'm researching my family history and someone comes up to me and asks for a sample to see if we can come up with some distant cousins, and then it turns out that my DNA was just going to be used to catch a killer? And what if you are a killer? Personally, I'm very pro law enforcement. If someone in my extended family or even a relative that so distant that I don't know them and they've committed a crime and my DNA in a database was able to help finger that person, I'm absolutely happy to provide the information. But not everybody feels that way.

*SPionline: What about in a civil case? At what point does an investigator need an expert to assist to make the most of DNA information?*

LHM: There are two levels of people working on your DNA samples. You send the samples to the laboratory and the scientists bring you back the results and, right now, all what you get is results “within the range of possibility.” They say: This person who matches you is a very close family member. It could be your sister or your mother. Or it could be your second or third cousin. But it won’t give you an exact match like “This is your second cousin, definitely.” Not yet! But, certainly, it gives you a result close enough that you can then work the records. If you use a reliable lab, then it’s important to contract with a genetic genealogist, who has training in DNA analysis. This genealogist will then take the test results and, look at the possible degree of relationship, and using public records, will put together a family tree and narrow it down. I give you an example. I did an adoption case and this man’s father could have been one of three brothers. We didn’t know exactly, since none of the three brothers were in the database. You need to get circumstantial evidence. We knew some things about where this man lived, and his occupation at the time. And without contacting them, because the client wanted to be discreet, we were able to determine which one was his father. I’ve matched up birth parents and adoptees at their request, and it’s quite amazing when it happens. There are now Facebook groups who help families reunite using DNA. They say: Just be prepared. You might find out that you have a step sibling or step child you never knew about. I can see that, in cases on the civil side, it becomes common to save someone’s toothbrush or hairbrush for potential testing in the future.

*SPionline: And when times comes, investigators can contact you to do something with it. Where did you acquire your expertise?*

LHM: I completed the Boston University certificate in the genealogical research program and attended a number of conference and taken seminars and know how to look at DNA results from a lab and interpret it. As we often hear, and those of us in this business know, it’s not like an episode of CSI, solved in 20 minutes. As investigators move forward and they use DNA more and more as a tool, defense attorneys and civil libertarians will question this use. They’re going to ask how this DNA was collected, was stored, analyzed and whether it’s a true match. There have been cases where DNA was used by Law Enforcement and people were still wrongly imprisoned! I can’t speak to that, because several years ago, the methods were not that sophisticated. Perhaps the samples were corrupted and exposed to the elements... One thing for sure is that DNA analysis is growing by leaps and bound. There was just a case off the coast of Massachusetts, where scientists found bones and joint tissue in the wreckage of a pirate ship, that had been underwater for some 300 years. Historians were wondering if the remnants were from the famous pirate Samuel Bellamt. They were able to extract DNA, compare with the DNA of a descendant of Bellamy in England and could determine that the bone wasn’t a match with Bellamy after all. Disappointing in some way but the fact that they can do that it mind-blowing!

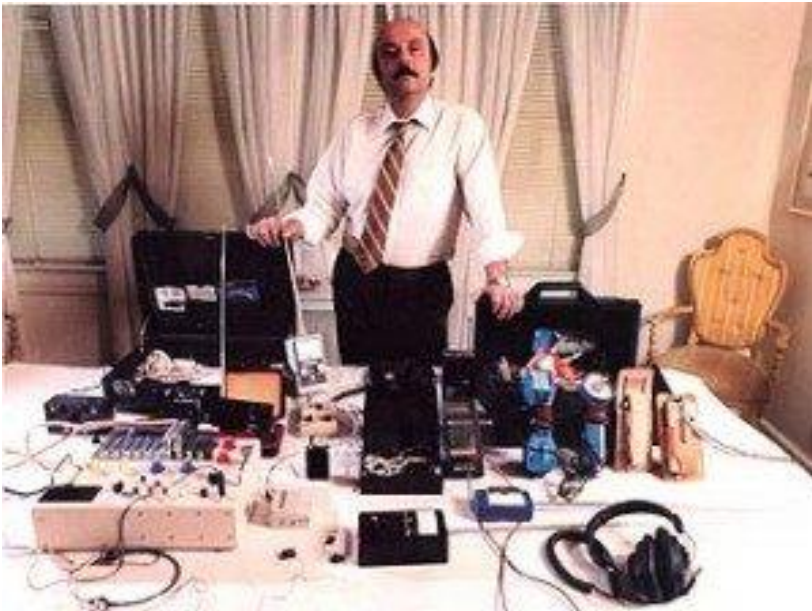


*SPionline: Is there an area where this level of DNA testing will be very important?*

LHM: A particular passion of mine is identifying unknown victims. People that have been victims of homicide, and Law Enforcement has their DNA results sitting in a laboratory, in a database and we have nothing to match it to. We don’t know who they are. People found by the side of the road. Maybe they are victims of a crime, maybe they died of natural causes, we don’t know. But the use of DNA can hopefully help alleviate the pain of families who want to know what happened to their loved ones and to notify these family and in a case of foul play, to get the information on who that person was and hopefully go after the person responsible. |



# RIP Rainier “Ray” Melucci



The Officers and Directors of the Society of Professional Investigators deeply regret the passing of Rainier “Ray” Melucci, Past President of SPI from 1992 -1994. The private investigator was also a past president of ALDONYS, Associated Licensed Detectives of New York State. He passed away on June 30th, 2018 at the age of 79.

After serving as a NYPD transit officer for 13 years, Ray became a private investigator, described as a “high-tech detective” by the New York Times because of his wide collection of bugging and debugging gadgets. “I don’t follow people anymore,” he told the Times [back in 1987](#), “I’m fully automated now.” SPI member Ruth J. Boody said in a [condolence message](#) that Ray was “a cherished friend, a mentor, a consummate professional, a source of guidance, someone from whom I sought assistance when needed and he was always there to give it.”

## 2018 Investigators Conference in New York City

Several SPI members and former SPI speakers will give presentations at the upcoming [2018 Investigators Conference in New York City](#). The conference is organized private investigator Steven Rambam and Jimmie Mesis, a private investigator and former PI Magazine publisher well-known to members of our organization.

The Investigators Conference will be held at the Hotel Pennsylvania, New York, NY, (near Penn Station) November 8-11, 2018. The goal of the conference is for participants to gain access to valuable resources that will expand their investigative skills, network with their peers and meet potential business associates. Instructors, sponsors and vendors will provide access to the latest services, tools, and technology to advance attendees’ careers and potential income.

Steven Rambam will provide training on “Hard-Core Computer-Aided Investigation, Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) and Digital Officer Safety. Former SPI speaker [James Nanos](#) will present on the use of Unmanned Aerial System (UAS) or *drone* in support of missions investigations. Another speaker will be long-time and far-away SPI member Ted Kavowras, retired NYPD, who became expert on intellectual property investigations in China. Ted has made presentations that detail the investigative methodology used in China and other operational details on how to successfully combat counterfeiting to a wide range of investigative and legislative bodies around the world. New York Times investigative reporter [Barry Meier](#), who came to Forlini’s in June 2017 to talk about “Missing Man” Robert Levinson, a former FBI agent and private investigator still missing in Iran, will share the latest in this puzzling case, among other topics.

Conference attendees have the opportunity to acquire up to 32 nationally-recognized CEUs and 8 New York CLEs, including recertification hours approved by a number of States’ licensing authorities. For more info, visit <http://www.2018investigators.com/>





## APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP IN THE SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL INVESTIGATORS

Please fill and return this form or fill it online at <http://spionline.info/join.php>— Member Application

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Employer \_\_\_\_\_

Employer Address \_\_\_\_\_

Employer's Telephone Number \_\_\_\_\_

**Work History:** Please describe your investigative experience for at least the last 5 years:

**Professional Organizations:** Please list your membership in all professional organizations

**References:** Please list the names, phone numbers and email addresses of three references that can corroborate your investigative experience:

1.

2.

3.

**Resume:** Please attach your current resume

**Payment:** Payment of \$125 is required. This covers the annual dues of \$75 and a one-time application fee of \$50. Payment can be made by check to SPI, 329 South Oyster Bay Rd., #161, Plainview, NY 11803 or by Paypal or credit card on this page: <http://spionline.info/join.php>

Thank you for your interest in becoming a member of SPI! We look forward to welcoming you.

## Society of Professional Investigators, Inc.

**Celebrating 62 years as NYC's Premiere Investigative Fraternal Organization**



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Editor: **Emmanuelle Welch**

We welcome comments regarding the newsletter and submissions from members.

## Free SPI Membership to WWP and Active Duty Personnel

The Society of Professional Investigators awards free membership in our organization to eligible members of the Active Duty Military and Wounded Warrior Project.

Although the requirements for full and associate membership remain the same, the application fee, (\$115) and yearly dues (currently \$65) are waived for these individuals. Just go the SPI website at [www.spionline.info](http://www.spionline.info) and fill out the application indicating you are a member of one of these groups of special status individuals.

