
**HISTORY OF THE LOS ANGELES POLICE DEPARTMENT'S
THREAT MANAGEMENT UNIT**

By
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Murder has a way of getting your attention if you are not used to seeing dead bodies, which I was not. The bridge of her nose had prevented the prongs of the barbecue fork from going deeper into her eye sockets, but they went far enough to kill her. I was, however, most disturbed by the bruises on her face. They were there earlier in the evening when two police officers mediated a “domestic disturbance” call and left without doing anything. I know because I was one of them.

In today’s world, that would be unforgivable. However, in 1966 that was the norm. “Domestic Violence” was a term yet to be invented, and if the victim didn’t want to make a physical arrest, the incident was logged as “mutual combat.” The system failed that woman that night, as it would many others, and I was part of that system. This case occurred almost 50 years ago, but the image is still with me. While driving the suspect to the station, two things troubled me. For the entire ride, all the suspect did was blame her; and, the system had let that woman down and I was part of that system. I will come back to this later.

In 1989, when Robert Bardo fired two bullets into Rebecca Schaeffer’s chest - killing her - he also catapulted the word “stalking” into the American consciousness. Before 1989, “stalking” was not a word that was used commonly in America, and when it was used it didn’t generally cause fear and anxiety. All that changed on July 18, 1989.

Rebecca Schaeffer was the co-star of a popular television sitcom called “My Sister Sam,” and television viewers across the nation felt like they had lost a little sister when she was murdered. The system failed another victim. Many in the Hollywood entertainment industry

were afraid, angry, and frustrated. Celebrities had endured inappropriate fan behavior for years, but most were unaware of how to manage these unpleasant, and sometimes hazardous, situations. Law enforcement offered little or no relief.

Seven years earlier, Arthur Richard Jackson's attempted to kill actress Theresa Saldana near her West Hollywood home. He accosted her in the street and stabbed her eleven times. She survived, but only because a passing water delivery man intervened. It wasn't the first time a celebrity had been attacked by a crazed fan, but this one briefly caught national attention. When the 1984 TV movie "Victims for Victims: The Theresa Saldana Story" came out, Jackson was the first of a small, but very identifiable, group of obsessive people that would soon become known as "stalkers."

In response to Rebecca Schaefer's murder, The Conference of Personal Managers hosted a panel discussion to address personal safety issues on October 18, 1989, in Beverly Hills. Over 600 people showed up, many whose names you would recognize. It was a "standing room only" crowd. The invited panelists included a representative from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), me from the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), and Gavin de Becker. The LAPD and FBI positions were simple: the behaviors that stalkers exhibited were annoying but they were not illegal. Combined, that took about ten minutes to communicate.

Then, security expert Gavin de Becker got up and spoke for an hour and a half and described concepts and strategies that his office had been using for years to keep clients safe. Throughout his presentation and the following question and answer period, it was clear that

effective strategies to prevent violence existed and that law enforcement was unaware of them.

When we went into the question and answer segment, the FBI agent and I both retreated to safe ground by rationalizing that we could not do anything because there were no laws that prohibited stalking behavior. The reality of what we were saying wasn't lost on the audience, and they knew we were just biding our time till the meeting was over. Then, a well-known producer directed a question to me: "I understand that you don't have the internal process or legal support to deal with this issue, so why don't you change that?"

Before I could answer, my mind flashed back 25 years to the domestic violence victim we couldn't save. At the same time, it dawned on me that now I was in a position to change things. After all, I was one of the senior commanding officers on the Los Angeles Police Department in charge of a detective division that included death investigations, mental health screening, and missing persons.

Yes, it was a good question: "why don't I change things?"

He must have sensed my hesitation because before I could answer, Gavin de Becker volunteered to help by providing training as well as access to his MOSAIC for Assessing Threats to Public-figures. I had no real idea of what that was, but it sounded like a good deal. The Los Angeles Police Department's Threat Management Unit (TMU) was conceived at that meeting.

Nothing in life occurs in a vacuum, and the Mental Evaluation Unit was no exception. Understanding the political context in which it was created is essential to understanding the context in which the Threat Management Unit was created. To do that we need to rewind almost six years to February 24, 1985, when bullets started bouncing off the paved playground of the 49th Street Elementary School without warning. The actual sound of the gunfire came a second later, followed by the screams of a hundred children and the adults frantically trying to hurry them to safety. When the shooting stopped, one ten-year-old girl was dead and eleven other people were critically wounded, nine of them children.

Tyrone Mitchell, a mentally ill person who was known to the Los Angeles Police Department and the community, fired rifle shots into the play yard of the elementary school across the street from his apartment. The reasons will never be fully known because Mitchell saved his last bullet for himself. He was dead when the police entered his apartment. Mitchell was no stranger to murder and suicide, he survived the massacre at the People's Temple in Guyana six years earlier, but only by chance.

Agony, shock, and disbelief almost always surround the violent or unexpected death of a child. Because the police department and the school were aware of Mitchell and his mental state, the Chief of Police, Darryl Gates, convened a board of inquiry to look into the shooting to learn why Mitchell was able to commit this crime. The board of inquiry determined that the police and the school had acted appropriately and had followed all existing laws, policies, and guidelines. Nonetheless, Chief Gates believed that more could be done in the future. As a

result, he directed that a unit be formed for the sole purpose of dealing with mentally ill people who came to the attention of the police. Their goal was to determine whether a subject should be diverted out of the criminal justice system and into the mental health system where they could get the specialized help they needed. People like Tyrone Mitchell.

The Mental Evaluation Unit was formed in response to that mandate, and it was staffed around the clock, seven days a week. The officer assigned to develop and staff the unit was Detective Walter De Cuir, and he soon became one of the most knowledgeable people in the state as to how the mental health system actually functioned.

At the same time, Los Angeles County formed the Psychiatric Emergency Coordinating Committee (PECC). The PECC established an inter-agency agreement with law enforcement, mental health, and health service entities to facilitate community response to psychiatric emergencies that were beyond the ability of any one agency to manage.

Detective De Cuir was bright and dedicated, not one to let the unfamiliar remain that way. His research over the next several years into the behaviors of those mentally ill who made their way to his unit ultimately led him to the work of Gavin de Becker. There were great parallels in de Becker's work and his, but De Cuir had taken de Becker's innovations as far as he could within the LAPD. He came to me and suggested that it would be a good idea for me to meet with de Becker. Being a typical, incestuous LAPD thinker, I couldn't see how a "civilian" could teach us anything, so I put him off. De Cuir's passion and persistence were persuasive, but it

wasn't until after Rebecca Schaeffer was murdered that I agreed to meet with de Becker on August 8, 1989. What was supposed to be a 20-minute meeting lasted two hours

During that meeting, de Becker shared with us concepts and strategies for dealing with cases of inappropriate pursuit (stalking) that were not taught anywhere in law enforcement that I was aware of. He also introduced us to the MOSAIC system for the first time. More importantly, I was reminded of the barbecue fork for the first time in twenty years – at least the first conscious thought. I also reflected on those other women we couldn't help as I was learning there were things that could be done if some changes were made. I couldn't visualize what those changes would need to be or where they should be made, so the whole experience faded from my consciousness in favor of the daily routine – until the panel discussion hosted by the Conference of Personal Managers

After that meeting, the more I thought about it, the more I realized that my own division, Detective Headquarters Division, was the logical place. It was logical because Detective De Cuir was the one who introduced me to Gavin de Becker in the first place, and his Mental Evaluation Unit was the only one that had any experience with “stalkers.”

Then I got a phone call from Captain Bob Donnalley of the California State Police (now part of the Highway Patrol). Captain Donnalley was a classmate of mine in the LAPD Academy in 1966 and had recently accepted a position with the California State Police, a position overseeing the unit that provided protective cover for the governor and other constitutional officials. He had learned that I was considering starting a unit to assess threats and adopting

MOSAIC as a method to assist. From their own research, they had learned of MOSAIC and were considering adopting it, too. He came to my office later that week to discuss the pros and cons of the idea. With him was the officer in charge of the Governor's protective detail, Sergeant Steve Weston. Quite by chance, the next day, I got a call from Detective Bill Zimmerman of the U.S. Capitol Police who was assigned to investigate threats to senators and congresspersons. He had more than heard of MOSAIC – the US Capitol Police were already using it. For readers who don't know, Steve Weston and Bill Zimmerman are two of the brightest threat assessment minds in the country and have both made huge contributions (and continue to do so) to the protection of judicial and elected officials.

Getting any large organization to make even small changes can be a monumental undertaking, and LAPD was no exception. I knew to be able to say the State Police were considering the same methods, and the U.S. Capitol Police were already using those methods would be a persuasive selling point. There was, however, a gigantic glacier that needed to be defrosted first – the one created by the disbanding of the LAPD Public Disorder Intelligence Division (PDID).

“Infiltrating the Public: Los Angeles Police Officers are Caught Undercover.” That was the headline in Time Magazine on December 26, 1983. It reported on a suit brought by the American Civil Liberties Union alleging that from 1970 to 1981 the LAPD engaged in a domestic spy operation that targeted people whose only crime was to be critical of the LAPD. As early as the mid-seventies, there were concerns expressed by the Police Commission that some of the activities of the PDID needed to be curtailed. After all, it was formed in response to

the public disruptions during the anti-Vietnam war protests of the late '60s and early '70s. But, the war was over and so were the protests. As a result, the Police Commission ordered that intelligence files on 50,000 people and organizations be destroyed and adopted new and stricter guidelines for gathering intelligence. But that didn't end the issue: a few old boxes stored in someone's garage were about to put the whole issue front and center again. The ACLU filed their suit after 150 boxes of intelligence files were found in the personal garage of one of PDID's detectives.

The investigations would go on for years. All of the issues had not been fully resolved in 1989 when I approached my boss, Deputy Chief Bernard Parks, to seek permission to create a unit that would, like PDID, keep records on people who had not committed crimes. Surprisingly, Parks gave me the go-ahead to develop the concept with the proviso that it would ultimately need to be approved by the Chief of Police. And he added one more caveat: I couldn't have any more cars, money, or people. If I could develop it with existing resources, I had the go ahead. On October 30, 1989, we were officially in business.

Over the next two months, the MOSAIC system was installed on a department computer and Gavin de Becker volunteered to provide training to the fledgling Threat Management Unit. Also volunteering to contribute to our training was Dr. Park Dietz, M.D., JD. Dr. Dietz conducted the pioneering research into attacks on public figures while with the University of Virginia.

Word of mouth is the best advertising, and the Conference of Personal Managers must have been working overtime because we had no shortage of new clients. What we had was a shortage of people to investigate them, since the unit consisted of two police officers and myself. So, in January 1990, Lt. Gene La Briola was assigned as the first Officer-in-Charge of the Threat Management Unit, which allowed Detective De Cuir to go back to the Mental Evaluation Unit full time and me to go back to running my division. Lt. La Briola was a true God-send. Under his leadership, he and his team started handling complex, hazardous situations involving powerful, influential people who were at risk. He was also the Department's liaison to the Alleged Offenders Committee of the PECC and he used that to get expert counsel when needed.

By July 1990, the Threat Management Unit had gained a substantial amount of expertise and a substantial amount of media attention. They had also gotten the blessing of the Chief of Police and acquired a dedicated computer for the unit (not an easy task in 1990) to track cases and assessments using MOSAIC. During this same six months, in response to five women being murdered in the upscale Newport Beach (CA), State Senator Ed Royce authored the first anti-stalking law in the country and it was quickly signed into law. Now, for the first time, law enforcement had a legal base from which to launch investigations involving stalking. Up until this point, TMU was a word-of-mouth business, but the timing seemed right so Chief Darryl Gates held a news conference to announce the existence of the unit.

"The ACLU called" are generally words police executives do not like to hear. But, those were the words written boldly on the top of one of those pink phone message pads placed squarely

in the middle of my desk when I got back from the news conference. And it wasn't just the ACLU, it was from their Executive Director. I had been around long enough to know that she wasn't going to go away, so I took a deep breath and called her. "Thank God you called so quickly, we have this stalker in the office and we need help." So, the TMU's first "official" client was the ACLU. While the call was quite by chance, the fact that the ACLU supported the TMU was not. From the very beginning, at the meeting of the Conference of Personal Managers, they had been providing input into the Unit's development.

There were also a number of other people who stepped up to provide support and help in developing the concept of TMU, but none more than Faye Mayo of Mayo Entertainment. Without her commitment and dedication to making it happen, it would not have happened. Serendipities, by definition, come in ways you don't expect. Faye Mayo being a member of the ACLU was a serendipity of large proportions. As we developed protocols and guidelines for handling cases, she was able to provide feedback when we got into muddy waters from their perspective. One of the key reasons it worked so well is that the protocols were all about what we could do FOR the victim, rather than TO the suspect. The files we that were kept were on the victim, not the suspect.

The Alliance for the Mentally Ill had been working for many years to improve the way law enforcement handled the mentally ill, so it was no surprise when its president, Dan Weisburd, attended a meeting of the PECC in June 1989 and made a passionate plea for what he called "compassionate intervention in lieu of lethal force." This was not a TMU issue, but one of his other recommendations ultimately was. Dan Weisburd recommended the PECC's Alleged

Offender Committee be expanded to include security representatives from movie studios because they seemed to attract a number of mentally ill, citing Rebecca Schaeffer and Theresa Saldana. The idea was tabled at that meeting because it some believed that involving private sector people not involved with mental health would be inappropriate. The idea was, however, the first seed planted that suggested there was value in a multi-disciplinary team of public and private organizations dedicated to assisting each other in handling difficult situations involving the mentally ill.

In the process of developing TMU, Lt. La Briola was promoted and transferred to another division. His vacancy was filled by Lt. John Lane who moved the unit through the budget process to a fully-funded entity. During that time, I convened what turned out to be a very fruitful meeting of various experts and stakeholders, as suggested by Dan Weisburd. By 1993, we had successfully nurtured Dan Weisburd's idea of a multi-disciplinary coalition until it formally became The Association of Threat Assessment Professionals (ATAP)

As TMU gained expertise, requests for guidance or insights were almost non-stop. This lead to TMU hosting the first Threat Management Conference in March 1991 at the Holiday Inn in Burbank (CA). There were two speakers: Dr. Park Dietz and Gavin de Becker. The following year (1992) the TMU Conference was held at the Getty Museum in Malibu and attendance had more than doubled. So did the list of speakers and topics. The two keynote speakers were still de Becker and Dietz.

The following year, TMU partnered with the newly formed ATAP to host the next conference at the Disneyland Hotel and has done so ever since. Currently, ATAP has fourteen chapters across the United State with counterparts in Europe, Canada, and Australia. As a result, people around the globe are now served by departments that have a greater understanding of threats and risk, and how to manage them. This understanding comes from the collaborative effort of dedicated practitioners and researchers from a wide spectrum of disciplines.
