



Breakfast Seminars – 2018

BS2 My Experiences as a Forensic Science Consultant for Crime Drama Television Series

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The goal of this presentation is to educate attendees on the processes that occur in the creation of a crime drama episode and why certain aspects of the “reality” of forensic science do not necessarily get translated to the screen. This presentation will discuss the real-life experiences of a forensic science consultant for such television shows as: *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation; CSI: Miami; Law and Order; BONES; Killer Instinct; Vanished; The Mob Doctor; Rizzoli and Isles; Drop Dead Diva; The Blacklist; and Rosewood*. Clips from various episodes of these shows will be presented with a discussion on what is real and what is “Hollywood Real.” Attendees will be taken on a virtual tour of what happens in the writers’ room and on the set.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing attendees with a better understanding of the reason forensic science is portrayed in a certain manner on television crime dramas.

Forensic science flew under the radar for a number of decades. A brief spike in interest of the discipline occurred for a span of seven years from 1976 to 1983. *Quincy ME* was a very popular television show. It was Quincy played by Jack Klugman that fostered the career interest of this presenter. It was not until October of 2000 that the breakout television series *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* hit the television airwaves. This megahit show took the world by storm. At one point, *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* was the number-one rated show in the world and/or the most-watched television crime drama. Soon after, the television series led to a number of spinoffs: *CSI: Miami, CSI: New York*, and the much less-known *CSI: Cyber*, gathering number-one ratings for the CBS television network. Not to be outdone, the Fox Television Network launched its own hit forensic science series, *BONES*. On the cable networks, docudrama series such as *Forensic Files* aka *Medical Detectives, Cold Case Files*, and *Extreme Forensics* became extremely popular, with the HLN network broadcasting multiple episode reruns of *Forensic Files* nightly for six years after the original series ended. This presenter has had the distinct honor of having been featured in three episodes. Another hit television show, *NCIS*, and its spinoffs, *NCIS: Los Angeles*, and *NCIS: New Orleans*, feature forensic science components.

For the disciplines of forensic science, these television shows created a wave — perhaps a tsunami — of interest. Young people suddenly began to seriously look at career paths in forensic science. Colleges and universities began seriously looking at either creating or expanding programs in forensic science. During the 2000s, forensic science was in vogue. It was cool to work in a crime lab or be a crime scene investigator. Crime labs were seeing a tremendous uptick in applications for criminalist positions. Colleges and universities began to develop curricula to meet Forensic Science Education Program Accreditation Commission (FEPAC) guidelines. With success comes criticism, and, not surprisingly, the legal community and its allies in the legal educational community began their quest to diminish forensic science. The specter of the “CSI Effect” was raised because it was felt that forensic scientists, when testifying as expert witnesses, were seen as too believable by juries. Juries had unreasonable expectations when forensic science was not introduced in certain trials. Then, many disciplines were being questioned as to whether they were scientific or employing valid scientific techniques. Forensic science was now under the microscope.

For the past 17 years, I have served as a forensic consultant to such television shows as *CSI: Crime Scene Investigations, CSI: Miami, BONES, Rizzoli and Isles, Law and Order, Rosewood*, and *The Blacklist*, in addition to appearing on several forensic science-themed docudramas. As a television consultant, I would either respond to email questions from writers and producers, review scripts, work on-set advising the director or the set dresser, or explain how to perform a technique to the actors. While most of these shows have now been canceled, they do appear on cable television networks and appear to have a strong following. Binge watching these shows can be accomplished by live streaming or DVD rental. While no longer in the forefront of television series lineups, forensic science appears as an ancillary subject in television crime dramas, such as *The Blacklist* and *Lucifer*. So, to an extent, I still keep somewhat busy. Through the use of personal stories and video clips from some of these shows, this presentation will reveal both the real and farcical aspects of television crime dramas.

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