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Reading tips for true-crime addicts

By Julia Smillie-Carey
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02/21/2002

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I'd like to plead guilty. It's true. I like crime. Before you string me up, let me make a plea for leniency. I don't enjoy the fact that crime is committed — and I certainly don't indulge myself, save for the odd vehicular violation here and there.

I do confess, however, to being intrigued by crime details, the motivation and psyche of offenders, the tools of investigation and the hunt for justice. (As long as it doesn't involve John Walsh and his leather jacket.) My husband even bought me my very own Luminol for Christmas to check for bloodstains hidden from the human eye.

I'm certain I'm not the only one who likes the virtual rubbernecking of crimes via true crime movies. Books and shows like *Law & Order* with its many anagrammed spin-offs wouldn't be as popular as they are if that wasn't the case. And while I'd certainly be flattered if it were true, I somehow doubt that Court TV was developed just for me. (I'll know I'm in serious trouble if I ever find Bill Curtis narrating my life story.)

If, like me, you suspected you weren't getting the full rundown of local crime on the evening news, you're right. Don't worry! You have options!

The *St. Louis Metro Evening Whirl* and the *Midnight X-Tra* are weekly publications whose modus operandi is to raise awareness of crime and criminals, by running short snippets of solved and unsolved mysteries, accompanied by mug shots of the perpetrators.

Just one shiny half dollar buys you the *Whirl*, definitely a more sophisticated operation than its counterpart. As it should be, since it bills itself as "an uninterrupted crime fighting publication since 1938."

The front page of the *Whirl* is in crisp color, featuring largely unflattering photos of the suspected and convicted accompanied by a few paragraphs on their crime. The ensuing pages follow suit, with straightforward news items about crime in the Metro St. Louis area combined, oddly enough, with a couple of pages of entertainment news.

Where else are you going to find a detailed "Crime Ticker" summary followed by a review of

Britney Spears' new movie? (Although, in fairness, some may consider the making of the latter a crime against humanity.)

A dime less gets you the *Midnight X-Tra*, yet in this writer's humble opinion, you get a whole lot more. With its old-fashioned cut 'n paste method, *X-Tra* screams of the grassroots dedication of citizens working to claim back their city.

The articles are short and often slightly disjointed, accompanied by enticing headlines such as "Dope wasn't enough so he beat woman" or "Another sucker caught." For a spicy little bite of local flavor, *X-Tra* includes nicknames of local cops, such as "The Sting," "The Creeper" and "The Roadrunner." Who knew?

"The Alleged Dopers Caught with Drugs" column lists arrests conveniently categorized by drug, complete with the name, age and location of arrest for each perp. *X-Tra* also publishes details of unsolved crimes, presumably to alert area residents and solicit any tips that could lead to an arrest.

These publications beg the question: what would happen if each of our neighborhoods published a crime rag, cranked out on a mimeograph machine in someone's basement (okay, photocopied at OfficeMax) revealing those endangering our safety?

I'm certainly toying with the idea. Could I eradicate crime as we know it in the City of Maplewood? I've already got my first headline: Maplewood Man Leaves Dirty Dishes In Sink —Again. And even without lifting latents or consulting a dishwasher splatter expert, I've got a pretty good line on the perp.

Julia Smillie-Carey will soon be joining *STLtoday.com* as a staff writer! In the meantime, check out her always-entertaining advice column, [*Ask Julia*](#), every Tuesday on our front page.

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