



Topic: Crime Scene Investigation: Reality versus TV

Oral History Interviewees: Dr. Joseph Warren, Dr. Bruce Budowle, Dr. Arthur Eisenberg

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Dr. Joseph Warren:

. I'm not as negative as some of my colleagues are. Y'know the CSI type programs. Some of them just don't like them at all because they think it gives a too unrealistic expectation. You know it's a trade-off. Life's pay as you go. So yeah, you have now a public that first didn't know anything about forensics, and now they might know too much. And what they know might not be totally correct. So it's up to us to educate them. And while that doesn't seem like a serious problem, it could be when you testify in front of a jury. Cause that they might expect to hear something that you just can't give them or they might misunderstand something you tell them based on what they've seen on the TV show. On the other hand, it has increased the public's interest. I don't think that programs like ours would be very successful unless people watch these shows and say, "Hey, that'd be a cool way to make a living." So it's helped us out. It's helped us out with grant funding. Now there's a lot more money available to do research on. So that's been the plus.

Again, the minus has been in the fact that it does give unrealistic expectations for the timeframes involved. The fact that there are times where you just get evidence that you just can't do anything at all with it--no matter how sophisticated testing, no matter how good the analyst is. Evidence sometimes just, there's nothing there to work with. Or whatever's there to work with is just so badly damaged we can't help you out. And I think that these shows give the impression that they can work with almost anything in a very short period of time and come up with the definitive answer. Sometimes it might come up to an inconclusive result or just a partial answer. Other than that, you know the usual Hollywood stuff. We don't carry guns. We don't interrogate people. We don't... we might go to crime scenes. But we don't we don't typically go and arrest people go on investigations. We definitely don't interrogate anybody. I've never interrogated anyone in my life.

Dr. Bruce Budowle:

When they were first put on my wife and my children threw me out of the room. They said I wasn't allowed to watch anymore because I kept saying, "This won't work. That won't work. That's not true. If we had that machine that would be fantastic but it doesn't exist." But you have to look at the entertainment side of it, and the general value. So I've watched some of them. I've probably lost more interest after many years now, but they're entertaining. They're not quite realistic cause in 44 min, there are commercials involved, they can find a button and with that button, they'll analyze it, and determine what the person looks like, where he lives, what he did, and all of this. And that's sort of unrealistic because science doesn't often give you the absolute answer. It gives you a piece of a puzzle that you add to other information to help determine whether or not a crime has been committed and whom may or may not have committed that crime. If you take a step back and just to take it for entertainment, they can be rather enjoyable. I think the real value is that they've alerted the community that science has a place. And that some of my colleagues in these forensic science and legal fields have felt that this CSI effect has been a negative one. That there are these unrealistic expectations. I have a different opinion than... it's actually very positive because I think jurors and the public now have grown to expect science

to be part of it. And when they don't have science they wonder if something's been wrong. That raises their respect for the scientists and the process, then they give more credence to the scientists when they're hearing evidence. So I see it as a benefit. The other is that it has a tremendous impact on the students and the number of students are interested in forensic science. So there's a real value in the process and I kind of welcome the whole thing.

Dr. Joseph Warren:

Of course while I majored as an undergraduate in biology, I actually had a minor or what was considered a minor in the theatrical arts. So I wanted to be an actor at one point, and I kind of had that background in talking to the public--not being afraid of public speaking and then developing a persona to communicate with someone. I gotta retire and then work for CSI later on in my career. [laughter]

Dr. Arthur Eisenberg:

. I don't think we thought that far back in the 80s. We were just so excited about this opportunity to be part of something that now you can't turn on the TV or you can't open any newspaper or any kind of talk show where it's not being applied for something.