

Guest Speaker Gary Dias, Retired Homicide Detective
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Retired HPD Homicide Detective Gary Dias kept his audience rapt with fascinating accounts of specific murder investigations and techniques of police procedure. Mr. Dias was with the Honolulu Police Department for 27 years. He served on Patrol from 1971 to 1979. After being shot at three times, he transferred to Criminal Investigations, where he spent six years in Burglary and Robbery and six years in Homicide. He also worked in the Hostage Negotiation Unit and the Scientific Investigation Division. After a promotion to major in charge of Traffic, he wanted to go back to Criminal Investigation, but then-Chief Nakamura appointed him to Negligent Homicide in the Traffic Division.

After 27 years with HPD, he retired to serve as the Director of Emergency Preparedness for Queen's Hospital Security. He also teaches management and criminal justice at UH West Oahu, Chaminade University, and HPU. His first book, *Honolulu Cop*, was published with Bess Press in 2002, and told the story of his HPD days. This book included a lot of the mistakes he'd made as a police officer, and Dias related some funny stories, including a hilarious one about how he and his partner nearly burned down the Kaneohe Police Station with gasoline they'd confiscated from a siphoning burglar.

Dias' second book, *Honolulu Homicide*, chronicles famous homicide cases on which he worked, and his third book, *Honolulu CSI*, parallels the classes he teaches at local universities.

Dias spoke to us of his belief in *kino 'ole*, a term that refers to the belief that every case needed to be treated as if it was the most important case the police had. Each victim is someone's child, and needs to be treated with the utmost respect. The idea is whatever you do, do it right the first time, because you can't go back. In a murder investigation, this is extremely important. Dias still keeps his hands in his pockets, a habit he developed so that he wouldn't inadvertently leave fingerprints at a scene. He told us about how the brakes on a gurney holding the decomposing body of a young woman found in the woods weren't set properly and the gurney began to roll and tip over. He grabbed the body from the falling stretcher as if it were a child, and got covered in maggots and putrid flesh in the process. He felt it was necessary to do, though, and trained the officers under him to have the same compassion.

Dias talked to us about police reports, and the need for a large crime scene boundary, and what happened when the first patrol cops on the scene didn't use proper search procedure. In one of Dias' cases, a patrol cop "hinted" that the homicide cops needed a warrant to search the trunk of a car for the gun used in a shooting death. The patrol cop had already looked, which was illegal. The homicide cops had to work to leave this "hint" out of their reports, or the case would have been discredited in court.

During interrogation, police are required to let a suspect have food, rest, and a bathroom break. But they don't have to give a suspect his methadone. And the drink can be water, not coffee or something that will help a suspect overcome the discomfort of withdrawal. Addicts get so needy for a fix that they'll volunteer information in order to hurry the interrogation process.

Dias talked about how Homicide detectives have to be careful politically. A homicide investigation belongs to the police department, not to the prosecutor (who is

elected), or to the Medical Examiner. Dias gave an example that showed the importance of keeping an investigation with the police department. Fingerprints can be taken off a dead body, especially if it's someone with little body hair, like a woman. But this needs to be done quickly. If the ME (or one of his assistants) takes custody of a body, it's no longer the property of the police department. The ME doesn't like the police to dust the body for prints, because they want to see the body in the position left by the perpetrator. That is, the ME wants to see blood in the mouth or the blood pooling patterns. If the media gets to a crime scene, this further complicates the investigation because the ME's people will cover the body with a sheet, then a body bag, then a heavy tarpaulin. This causes condensation on the body. Once, the drivers of a morgue wagon went from a murder scene to Zippy's because they hadn't had breakfast. Chances of getting fingerprints were ruined.

Motive is a big deal in murder. Dias said that 85-90% of murderers know their victims and those murders are predominantly crimes of passion. Most of these people will never do it again—they are not a danger to society in general. And most murders are easy to solve.

Dias gave us an example of a famous case he'd worked on, where State Representative Roland Kotani was killed in an alleged burglary. They could tell by the scene that the burglary was faked, and the wife finally confessed to bludgeoning him with a hammer because he'd rejected her. When the cops took her down to the police station to book her, she told them that she had her period and asked to use the women's rest room. Her purse had been searched upon her arrest, but no one had checked the sanitary napkin bag. In it, she'd concealed a 357 Magnum with a two-inch barrel. And sure enough, she shot herself in the head in the toilet stall. Dias talked about what a mess that was, how the press got hold of some of the details, and in one case, hinted that someone in the police department had murdered her.

Honolulu has 30 to 40 murder cases per year, which is comparable to Seattle's murder rate. HPD's solution rate is above 80%. Dias says it's easier to solve murder cases on an island, where perpetrators can't escape as easily as on the mainland. We could easily have listened to Gary Dias for an hour longer, and the questions kept coming—including how to commit the "perfect murder." And Dias said if he were to do it, he'd use a twelve-gauge shotgun with a clear bore barrel, as it would be untraceable. Interesting!