

Security News

APRIL 2008

STALKERS: by Jim O'Donnell

STATEWIDE SECURITY manages the security for many local and internationally known person-ages. They regularly experience stalking activity because of their business prominence, celebrity, political stances or wealth. In 30 years of successful threat mitigation, most of the stalking cases we have handled involved well known individuals. That trend has shifted to include a broader range of persons. In the past three years our combined team has accepted over 30+ active stalking cases, with four cases so far this year. We cannot attribute any specific cause to this skyrocketing problem. These cases include wives and former husbands; former lovers who have broken up, personality fans, and Canadian organized criminals. Additionally, five have been secret stalkers, whose identities are not yet known, leave objects of affection, threats or move items to indicate they have been inside the victim's homes or businesses.

One client was presented with an unsolicited manuscript, delivered by a man who had telephoned their unlisted home phone number when she refused to accept the manuscript. Another was an ex-husband who we just videotaped stalking his ex-wife's home in the early morning hours, and a woman whose next door neighbor arbitrarily decided that he wanted her. If he could not have her, no one should, including her current boyfriend. We also have a case of corporate espionage or intimidation (we not sure which yet) and an indicted man who may have committed a homicide and is possibly seeking to harm potential witnesses.

The point of these real-life stories is that there is a significant variety of stalking cases and they are not all from unresolved domestic relationships. Regardless of the style of stalking, the review process of creating a safe environment is generally the same in all cases.

Men and women become clients when they realize that on their own *they cannot manage the potential for violence* or ensure the safety of them-

selves, their children, loved ones, or property from someone who wishes them harm. Often the situation is so volatile and dangerous that the victims must be removed to unknown locations to shield themselves and their families from violent predators. At some point these victims need to return to their jobs, homes and businesses. Once they adopt predictable patterns, they become easy targets for their psychopathic pursuers; who have shown amazing patience and prowess in finding their victims or in digging up private information from family members, utilities, telephone records, computer trespassing, electronic eavesdropping, sifting through victim's garbage cans as well as private and public records.

One of the most common denominators of these cases I find is that the stalker has been inside the residence of the victim without their knowledge or invitation. They may even have worked at the client's business. Stalkers have related phone and e-mail conversations that could only have been heard by an electronic bug or they have had a keystroke recorder loaded onto the victim's computer that was programmed to silently and invisibly send the recorded information to the stalker. Once we get the homes, businesses and vehicles swept of GPS tracking bugs and our protective team provides the appropriate level of physical protection, we move on to ensure that an adequate intrusion alarm, camera system and access controls are in place.

Our interaction with stalked clients has involved our "**Stalker Task Force**" that often includes Michael J. Canaan, CPP who heads a very experienced private investigative, threat assessment and protection team and Gordon L. Mitchell, CPP Ph.D. whose sweep team conducts the telephone, computer and electronic eavesdropping searches.

If we focus on domestic violence, stalkers can fall into very recognizable behavioral patterns that may vary in subtle ways, but regularly have these general commonalities:

Continued on Page 2



1. The stalker has previously had, or wants to have, a sexual relationship with the victim.
2. The stalker has a personality deficit and is dependant upon the victim to enhance his need for acceptance and power over another person.
3. The stalker can be a financially successful and accomplished person with a forceful personality, or they can be complete failures in most life affirming aspects. We've had both and generally they are one or the other with no middle ground.
4. Occasionally they are very charming and confident in face to face meetings. This may mask psychopathic behavior where the perpetrator has difficulty making and keeping relationships.
5. The stalker will often tell the victim before the breakup that she is worthless and ugly, that no other man would want her and that he is doing her a great favor by even staying with her. Women who hear this long enough often believe it is true and generally have poor self esteem. The twisted personalities in these cases become so enmeshed that neither performs well outside the relationship.
6. The men are often very hostile to other people and have few stable relationships, even within their own birth family structure. These men also will try, over time, to peel the victim away from her family, work, social and other support groups to make her even more isolated from reality and dependant upon her abuser.
7. The stalker who has had a consensual relationship with the victim has very strong feelings of abandonment if the victim doesn't want to continue the relationship. He has enjoyed being the dominant personality and often the woman has been dependant upon this man for decision making and life direction. Without proximity to the victim to blame for his failures or unhappiness in life, he has to either face up to his own foibles or will blame the victim for even more of his problems. This is not a psychologically acceptable option for him and the man will often feel the victim needs to be punished for abandoning him and more importantly, for disobeying him.
8. If there are children from the marriage, they easily become pawns and are subjected to intimidation by the man and used as levers in obtaining alarm pass codes, e-mail passwords, keys to the house and are expected to relate the victim's schedule of activities and meetings. This goes far beyond the normal divorce problems, where the children are forced to pick sides, in these cases the children fear they will be harmed if they do not comply.
9. Once the woman recognizes the danger this relationship poses to her or her children and is finally able to make the separation from this man, there is often a short period in which the man will try to cajole her into coming back. This may involve promises of reformed behavior on his part, greater respect for her and more stability. When it becomes clear that the woman is not going to return voluntarily to their toxic relationship, the man will often threaten bodily injury or death to the woman, her children and other family members. An acceleration of overtly dangerous behavior is often triggered by the woman obtaining a no-contact order against the man. This level of independent action by the victim is considered intolerable, and many men feel the challenge demands a strong response.

Not all counties or municipalities have prosecutors or trained staff to deal properly with stalker cases. It is important to understand that any protection order is simply a piece of paper that by itself is impotent. Unless the law enforcement system actively participates in the protection of the victim, the outcome for the victim is generally poor. Many stalkers will take the order as a challenge to their freedom to operate as they have in the past.

Our response to a stalking victim has a multi-pronged approach in mitigating the threat and assisting in the survival of our clients for at least the first 60 days. We facilitate finding the appropriate legal support, governmental and technological resources which allows our clients to return, in as much is possible, back to their prior way of life. There is no simple answer for protecting one's self from a stalking situation, but we have significant resources available for anyone who finds themselves in such a situation. If you know someone who thinks that they are being stalked, or who fears that a relationship they are in poses them some danger, we have the tools to help them break the cycle of abuse and fear; whether from a domestic partner or from an unknown person whose designs or demands are not clear. Make the call. WE CAN HELP.

Jim O'Donnell
Cell-206-510-9332,
Office: 425-558-4640
swidejimodonnell@aol.com