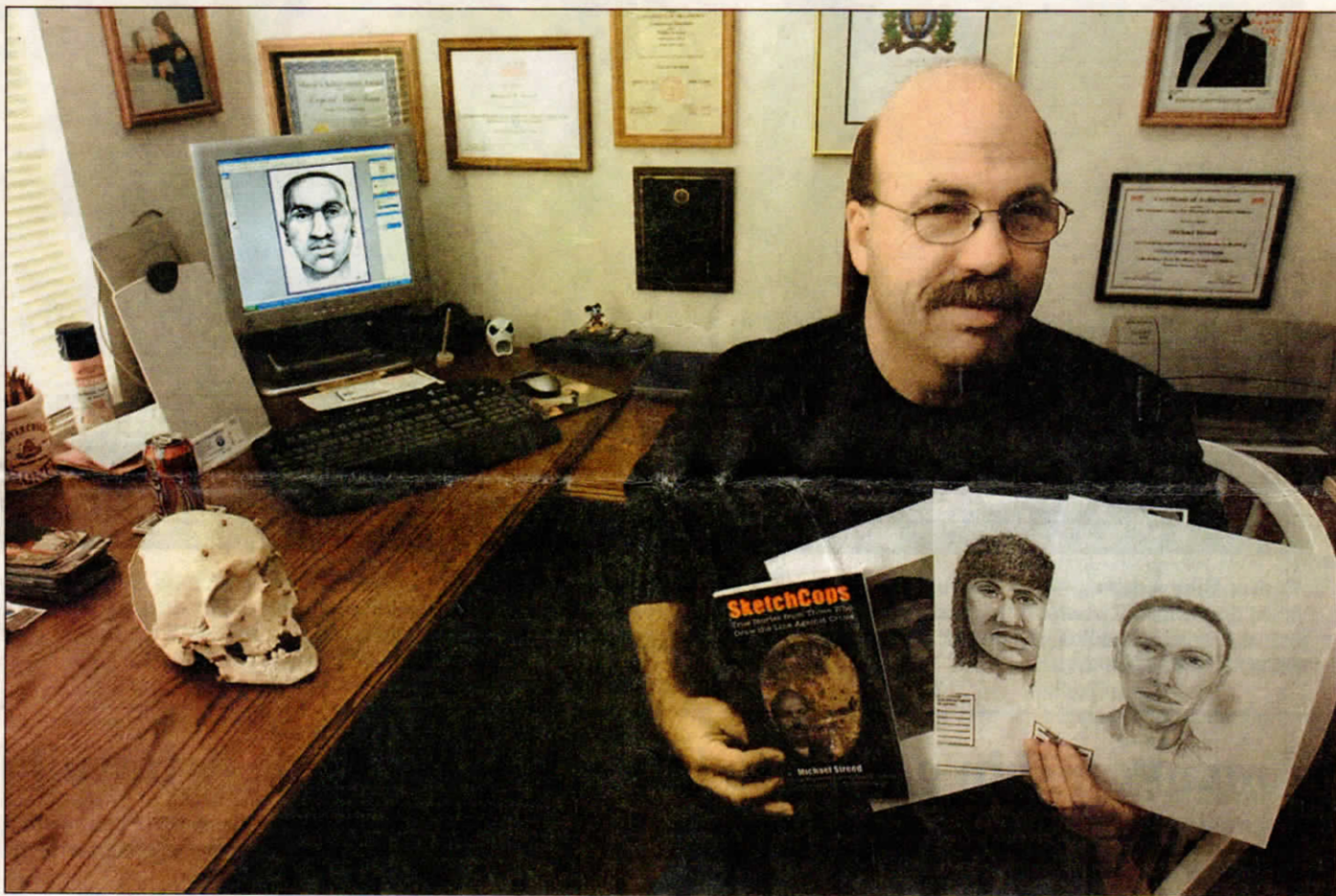


The art of crime-solving

Michael Streed's sketches have broken some big cases



Orange Police Officer Michael Streed, author of the new book "SketchCops: True Stories From Those Who Draw the Line Against Crime," shows off some of his work. Streed, a 26-year police veteran, is considered one of the best in the business.

Brittany Murray / Press-Telegram

By Tracy Manzer

Staff writer

When 5-year-old Samantha Runnion was snatched from her Garden Grove home and later found sexually assaulted and murdered, the only evidence investigators had to go on was the image of the killer etched in the memory of her 5-year-old playmate.

So detectives turned to Michael Streed, a 26-year law enforcement veteran who has worked as a patrolman for the Orange Police Department for almost his whole career, and who is known throughout law enforcement circles for his ability to sketch uncanny likenesses of some of Southern California's most

high-profile criminals.

Authorities have widely credited Streed's sketch as the key in identifying and capturing Samantha's alleged killer, Alejandro Avila.

Several people who saw the sketch broadcast on television and splashed across newspapers flooded the Orange County Sheriff's Department with calls identifying Avila, and telling authorities where they could find him. He was arrested and is currently awaiting trial.

Streed is now announcing the release of his first book "SketchCops: True Stories From Those Who Draw the Line Against Crime."

The book takes readers from the crackle of

the first call on police radios, to the arrests and trials of countless cases he has worked on. Streed, who worked on the "Belmont Shore Rapist" case with detectives in the Long Beach Police Department, spares his readers no details, and writes for those who work in the industry as well as true-crime buffs.

Readers are given a crash course in the field of police sketch artists, and Streed chronicles his own crude beginnings through his extensive training with the FBI and the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children in both artistic and forensic science

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BOOK: Sketch artist's tales

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studies. Streed even helped the FBI establish one of its sketch artist training courses in Quantico, Va., then went back to graduate from the course.

Also included are some of his highly honed recent works, such as the drawing that Orange County Sheriff Michael Carona credited with being key to Avila's capture.

"Such a case portrays but one example of the significance of sketch artists," Carona writes in his foreword for the book. "What's amazing is that a profession that can still conjure days long past when the law rode on horseback, sketch artists made wanted posters, and the good guys always won (at least in the movies)... now combines forensic science and cutting-edge graphics software to enhance the sketch artist's work, adding ever-expanding benefits to the law enforcement community."

Criticisms of the sketch artist field are discussed, and Streed details the talents of many of the people he fondly refers to as the "Draw Squad," who he said provided valuable training and mentored him.

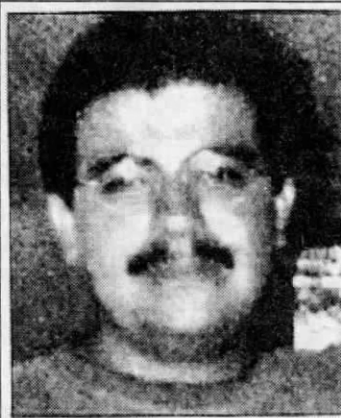
A portion of the book is dedicated to helping readers avoid becoming victims, and to be the best possible witnesses to help police if they find themselves in a bad situation.

"I wanted the book to provide something that a lot of other books out there never have," Streed said.

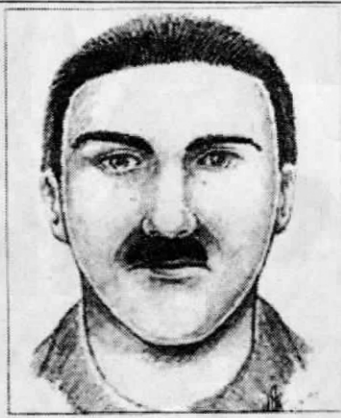
Writing the book, while stressful, also provided Streed with some much needed distraction, he said.

The bulk of it was written during days he spent at home with his wife, who is battling cancer. With one son serving in Iraq, and a second son preparing for graduation from high school and moving on to college — and most likely a law enforcement career — the creative process provided some sorely needed meditation.

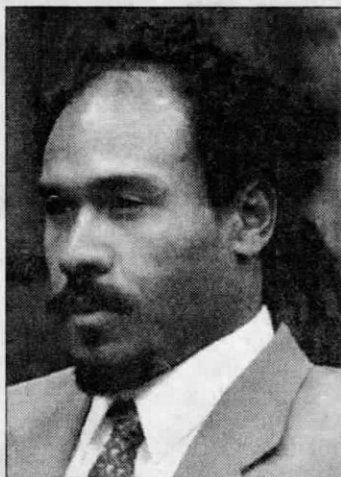
Cases Streed has worked on span the United States. They



Streed's sketch is credited with the capture of murder suspect Alejandro Avila in the Samantha Runnion case.



Streed's sketch of the so-called "Belmont Shore Rapist," and defendant Mark Rathbun.



include everything from sketching the likenesses of rapists and killers using the memories of often emotionally shattered victims to taking the skeletal remains of human bodies and coming up with a drawing that would help police identify their victims — as was done in the case of two Huntington Beach brothers murdered by an Orange County motorcycle gang.

The latter case is among one of many local investigations laid out in Streed's book.

In 1993, Streed was presented with the skulls of two victims

washed out of shallow graves during the El Niño rains. Two boys discovered the bones as they were riding their bikes in their hometown of Winchester, in Riverside County. Local authorities were at a loss to explain who the remains once belonged to, or when they were killed.

Coroner's investigators were able to determine that the bones belonged to two young men who had been shot — a bullet still rattled around in one of the skulls, and that they had been buried and lay in the secret grave for seven to

17 years. Streed went about building the victim's faces from information gleaned from the two hollow skulls. When he presented the investigator with the finished product sketch, the detective said the pictures looked like the same guy.

Streed said he replied somewhat flippantly that maybe they were brothers.

It turned that they were indeed related.

It was the girlfriend of one of the young men, who had known in her heart he was murdered those many years ago, who saw the sketches and knew it was her old boyfriend and his little brother. And she also knew who the likely killers were, and that they were still walking the streets as free men.

Streed follows the case to its somewhat surprising conclusion; not all of the detailed cases in the book have successful or happy outcomes.

"I want people to get a real sense of all of the work that goes into an investigation," he said. "You know, this isn't just to say 'Hey look at me. Look at what I've done.' I want to give people some insight into a process that I've always found fascinating, and that a lot of other people seem to be fascinated by as well."

DETAILS AT A GLANCE

- "SketchCops: True Stories From Those Who Draw the Line Against Crime"

- Written by Orange Police Department Patrol Officer Michael Streed

- Retail on Amazon.com for \$24.95

- Released last month by PublishAmerica, the book can also be ordered by any retail book seller, such as Barnes & Noble and Borders Books