

Advocate Spotlight Award

Detective Don Howell



**Cancer InCytes Magazine
June 2015**

About Detective Don Howell

Don was born and raised in Southern California. When he was 15 years old, he knew he wanted to be a detective; not just a cop, but a detective. For the last 41 years, Don has been living his dream. Don started with the Monrovia (CA) Police Department (MPD) in 1973. This is where he learned all of his basic police skills. At MPD, patrol officers were encouraged to investigate a call-case from beginning to end. It was there, in 1974, that Don arrested his first rapist, as he fled the scene of the crime. The offender confessed to the rape and went to prison. Two decades later, when he was caught again, DNA technology identified him as a cross-country serial killer, who had killed a few months before Don's 1974 arrest.

This early arrest piqued Don's interest in sex offenders. He became intrigued by their behavior and wanted to learn everything he could about what motivates them.

In 1979, Don left Monrovia and went to Huntington Beach (CA) where he quickly moved up to the detective bureau. He volunteered for the child abuse, sex crimes desk and never looked back.

The Huntington Beach Police Department (HBPD) let Don stay at his detective desk for 22 years, learning more about sex offenders than he ever thought possible. Along the way he became a founding board member for the Adam Walsh Child Resource Center, which over time became the California presence for the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC). Don served in a variety of positions for NCMEC for over 20 years.

He attended every class he could find that dealt with sexually motivated crimes and took the theories back to his desk, where he was able to figure out which ones were accurate and which were not. In those early days there was no system in place for interviewing young children; there was a desperate need for one, so Don developed his own system. That system was the foundation for his first book and his secondary career as a lecturer. Many people said that sex crimes became his life, at least professionally.

Don retired from full-time police work some years ago, but continued working for HBPD as a part-time detective, still chasing sex offenders. A few months ago HBPD loaned him to the Orange County Homicide Task Force (OCHTF), a cold case unit responsible for over 1,100 cold case murders.

A year ago, Don teamed up with his long time self-defense teacher to develop a class for women. Using his knowledge of sex offenders and his mentor's knowledge of self-defense, they have developed a class specific to sexual assault. Knowing the enemy is key; without this knowledge any system will fall short of its stated goal. This scenario based system allows women to enter the mind of the offender, assess the threat and create an opportunity to escape. This unique combination of expertise will be a big step in the reduction of sexual assaults.

When lecturing, Don tells his audience that understanding sex offenders is a necessary step to defeating what they 'do'. Fear gets us nowhere, knowledge is what we need. With this in mind, his second book addresses the issues that produce sex offenders and victims, *Two Sides of the Same Coin*, if you will. It's his hope that the fundamental information in this work will stop a lot of sexually motivated crimes before they start.

Don is divorced, with three children and four grandchildren; they bring much joy to his life.

Don Howell is the author of:

Sex Crime Interviews Simplified and, the soon to be released, *Beyond Stranger Danger: Smart Parents Raising Safe Kids*

Q&A

What is the most rewarding aspect of your work?

I think the kids, themselves, have been the most rewarding aspect of my work. This may sound odd, but to me, molested kids are just kids who had something bad happen to them. So, I learned to treat them, well, like kids. I can't count the number of little ones that have crawled up on my lap to draw pictures and tell me how they were touched. They were not afraid or shy, just kids telling their story in their own way.

What has been the greatest challenge to your work?

The lack of accurate information about sex crimes and sex offenders has been the greatest challenge to me. Don't get me wrong, there is a lot of information out there, but you have to search to find it, and you have to find a way to verify that it is accurate. Remember the mid-1980s when all the talk shows were interviewing satanic cult survivors and we feared that every pre-school in America had been infiltrated by these cults? This was a lot like believing in crop-circles and the aliens that created them. I hate to say it, but law enforcement went down the satanic cult road and it bit us in the butt many times. Fear is the enemy. Accurate information is essential.

What message do you have for the readers?

Fill your kids up with self-esteem. Sex offenders run from kids that are filled to the brim with self-esteem. Remember, I said self-esteem, not self-indulgence. These are two totally different things. The first will prevent child molestation, the second will promote it.