

NEWS OF THE WEIRD

BY CHUCK SHEPHERD
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Watch what you tell the cops

Aggressive police questioning of a weak-willed suspect can produce an occasional false confession, but experts now believe that six men in a single case, and four in another, confessed to group crimes they did not commit, even though some described their roles in vivid detail. Recent DNA evidence in a 1989 Beatrice, Neb., murder case implicated only a seventh man, and similar evidence in a 1997 Norfolk, Va., murder case implicated only a fifth man, who

insists he acted alone. (Governors in both states are currently mulling pardons for the men.) It is still possible that the six, or the four, are guilty as charged and that the DNA was left in completely separate attacks on the victims, but the more likely explanation, say psychologists, is that people with low self-esteem or mental problems, or who are drug- or alcohol-addled, are more easily convinced of fantasy ■

Least competent criminals

► April Westfall, 40, was arrested in Reno, Nev., in December for DUI. An ambulance crew called the Highway Patrol after spotting her driving down U.S. 395 at 4:30 a.m. with a service station's nozzle and severed hose protruding from her gas tank.

► Jeremy Aron, 33, was arrested for DUI on Thanksgiving night in Portsmouth, N.H., when an off-duty police officer spotted him driving down Lafayette Road with a fire hydrant stuck to his bumper. ■

The continuing crisis

► Maryland lobbyist and former state assemblyman Gilbert Genn was attacked by a deer outside his home in November, butted the ground and repeatedly stabbed by the buck's antlers in the chest and groin. Mr. Genn told WTOP Radio that after finally realizing he was in a life-or-death struggle, he managed to subdue the animal by the antlers long enough to tire it and cause it to flee. Bleeding badly, Genn said he disregarded his wife's admonitions to get to the hospital and instead dressed the wound himself and headed off for a scheduled meeting in Annapolis with Speaker of the House Michael Busch. He told the

reporter, "There was no way I could miss this meeting." Only afterward did he report to the emergency room.

► In November, the Great American Insurance Co. (Cincinnati, Ohio) sought a declaration in federal court in Houston that it was not liable to pay death benefits from a 2007 office fire because the three victims did not die from "fire." The company pointed to an exclusion in the policy for death by "pollution" (thought by most people to cover only toxic industrial discharges) and argued that the three victims were actually asphyxiated by smoke, which is "air pollution." ■

Yikes!

► Officials in South Africa, where government only recently came to accept the connection between HIV and AIDS after years of denial that provoked the country's epidemic of cases. It was revealed in December that supplies of retroviral drugs are being used recreationally as hallucinogens smoked by schoolchildren. Health officials told BBC News that the drugs are prescribed to those at risk for AIDS, but are not taken seriously by symptom-free, HIV-diagnosed South Africans who are just now starting to

understand the decades-old disease.

► According to a November sheriff's department report, an 11-year-old, Fort Pierce, Fla., boy hit his mother with a saw during an argument, lacerating her skull, and then, as she threatened to call police, offered her a \$5 bribe not to. The mother said the kid had previously threatened to cut his 19-year-old pregnant sister's abdomen, "to give her a C-section," and once tried to use hair spray and a cigarette lighter to torch the family's cat. ■

New frontiers of self-defense law

Eugene Falle, 35, was acquitted of murder in Edmonton, Alberta, in December, as jurors apparently accepted his claim of self-defense even though the victim had 39 stab wounds. Mr. Falle said he was forced to keep stabbing the man because of previous threats by the victim and his gang and that the victim "wouldn't bleed prop-

erly the way he should've bled, according to the movies." And in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Sydney Teerhuis, on trial for killing a man, claimed self-defense even though he admitted not only stabbing the man 68 times but having sex with the body during the spree. However, unlike Mr. Falle, Mr. Teerhuis was convicted. ■

Undignified deaths

► In October, an armed-robbery suspect died during his getaway from a restaurant in Fresno, Calif., when he fell and impaled himself on his weapon (a screwdriver), severing an artery in his thigh.

► A 33-year-old man in Conway, Ark., was electrocuted in August when (after having his power cut off for non-payment) he misapplied jumper cables

while attempting to illicitly hook his house back up.

► A 65-year-old woman was killed after driving up to an outdoor ATM in Port Angeles, Wash., in December. She opened the car door to retrieve something from the ground, but the car inched forward, causing a protective post to squeeze the door against her head. ■

Creme de la weird

Peter Trigger, 59, was "adamant," according to England's Kettering Evening Telegraph, that he had the right to wear whatever outfits he wanted, even though his favorite hangout was in front of Woodvale Primary school in the morn-

ings, where he usually wore schoolgirl-like short skirts but with nothing underneath. In December, after numerous complaints, a Northampton magistrate issued Trigger a five-year Anti-Social Behavior Order commanding him to stop. ■



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