

CRIMESTOPPERS – MY BABY

Friday afternoon couldn't come soon enough. The week had been tough and I looked forward to the weekend.

I sensed there was someone standing beside me. My boss stood gazing over my shoulder. 'You worked as a Detective, didn't you?' Why is he asking me that? He knows the answer. He must be up to something.

'Yes. What's this all about?'

'Go down and see Inspector Harrod*. He wants to talk to you about a new programme for the Police Department. I recommended you,' he said and walked away.

It must be a mistake. They are mates and I wouldn't be surprised if it's a set up. He added 'take this tape home and have a look at it. Start here Monday morning.' He dismissed me with a pointed finger toward the door.

I watched the videotape at home. It was the birth of *Crimestoppers*. Detective Alan Martin* had commenced the programme in America. Victoria and New South Wales Police adopted it and Queensland was next. What a challenge for me.

This opportunity only came along once in a lifetime. After I watched the videotape I walked outside for fresh air and to clear my head.

This was the most exciting programme I'd ever seen in my whole career of 20 years as a Police Officer.

Monday morning came with a surprise to find *Crimestoppers* was to be 'my baby'. I had total control over its conception and birth. Detective Mark Holloway*, whom I'd known for many years but had never worked with would assist me with its establishment. We had no office, no equipment, no staff, and no idea of what we were doing. I handed Mark the videotape hoping he'd feel the same as I did after he watched it. Another bombshell exploded, triggered by Inspector Harrod. In less than 24 hours I had to present to the Police Minister a proposal to develop and implement the new programme with a start and launch date.

Instinctively I wrote the best report I'd ever written. I made it up as I went along and allowed my thoughts to invent a lead-time of six months; write computer programmes; select and train staff; create television programmes; advertise and promote *Crimestoppers*. I knew I could do it.

Surprisingly, the Police Minister accepted the presentation, was satisfied with the document and understood the process and lead-time. He made one change to my proposal. 'You have three weeks instead of six months.'

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I took the bit between my teeth and said, ‘Yes Sir. If I can be left alone to do it without any red tape I’ll deliver it to you in three weeks.’

Imagine speaking to a Minister of the Crown that way, I thought later. ‘Don’t worry about red tape. I’ll send a memo to the Commissioner to give you everything you need,’ he assured me. True to his word he did cut the red tape. That afternoon I presented to Senior Management a ‘wish list’. It consisted of an office, motor vehicle, desks, telephone, and every other item I could think of.

Victoria Police designed their programme within two years. New South Wales Police in 18 months and Queensland Police had three weeks. I was lucky to have Mark as my partner. When I rambled on and expressed every thought in my mind, he made notes to help me. We didn’t have a plan, only a short time get the project up and running. Six staff members were needed to be as capable and excited as we were. We still had no idea what we were doing. Inspector Harrod didn’t waste time. He became Secretary to the Board of Directors, which was selectively chosen by the Government to administer *Crimestoppers*. They included representatives from business, law and banking. *Metway Bank* became the link between Crimestoppers and community to pay rewards.

Mark trained each new member in telephone communication, practice listening skills, recording information, and learning patience.

Autonomy became the driving force. Each member was responsible for working together to ‘get the project’ up and operating. It worked. They became a cog in a very large wheel to help drive it. Within the first week each had a desk and telephone. Computers were an issue. The police department didn’t have enough of them.

We had a breakthrough when Inspector Harrod who knew the Manager of Queensland Health Department, provided us with the latest technology software and programmes needed to record the information.

Word Perfect 4.1 software package linked with Corporate Retriever and a database to provide reports, became the design package for the project.

I designed a front cover template and made it up as I went along. I hoped it would be accepted. To keep the process simple, each caller was given a unique identification number. Testing the software and design information from the caller onto Word Perfect and recalling the information from Corporate Retriever to produce a weekly report, meant a perfect result to the correct data.

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Finally in week three an official launch date was set but we still had a long way to go. We needed to promote the programme to the public. Brochures were designed and produced to explain how it worked and to use a free 1800 telephone number.

Luck played a huge part when the *Brisbane Broncos*, the local Brisbane Rugby League Team, entering the National Rugby League competition in their first year. *Crimestoppers* jumped onto their bandwagon. Television promoted Crimestoppers at every opportunity. Radio helped spread the news. Links to the television programme '*Australia's Most Wanted*' advertised it and asked viewers to contact *Crimestoppers Queensland*. The project was up and running within the three weeks promised to the Police Minister. We'd done it but I was buggered.

That wasn't the end of it. *Crimestoppers Queensland* was officially launched at Queensland Police Headquarters in an array of glamour. Further government funding enabled *Crimestoppers* to have their own weekly television audience. '*Have you seen this person?*' splashed across television screens throughout Queensland and caused chaos at the office with telephones ringing, people talking and computers clattering.

Photographs of wanted persons appeared in daily newspapers throughout the State and asked people to contact *Crimestoppers* with any information. Many callers received a reward of up to \$1,000.00.

Crimestoppers spread throughout the state like a wild bush fire from the border of New South Wales to the tip of the Cape York. Information about criminal activities came in an uncontrollable flood into the centre.

Crimestoppers was alive and working.

I needed to have a break. Major work was now completed. My partner Detective Alan Martin wanted to leave. He'd had enough! Then I collapsed. I discovered why I'd suddenly felt faint after standing. My heart rate had slowed from 70 to 17 beats per minute. Within three days I had been hospitalised and a pacemaker was implanted to help my heart rate. I was medically discharged from the Queensland Police Department.

There were no regrets, or maybe some, but each time I hear *Crimestoppers* advertised on television or radio, I know my baby has grown up.

**Names changed for privacy.*