

WRITER'S BLOG



BLOG ARCHIVE: 

OCTOBER 11, 2007 SEEDS

by **Peter Blauner**

My relatively modest contribution to the episode "Seeds" began to take shape a couple of years ago, when I read a newspaper story about the yearnings of children born from anonymous donors to find their real biological fathers.

Any story that has a child looking for a parent is compelling, but this seemed a particularly modern twist on a very old idea. It's only been about a generation since women started becoming pregnant by using specimens deposited at sperm banks by men whose names they'll never know. But now, some of those children are coming of age and wondering from whence they came.

I was particularly intrigued by the story of one 15-year-old boy, who actually was able to track down his biological father with a level of patience and determination that would impress even the most hardened detective. It got me thinking about the nature of identity and the way most societies define their citizens by lineage. What if you were cut off from that, denied any sense of biological connection to one side of your family? How far would you be willing to go to make that connection if you really had to?

Eventually, that notion melded with another story I'd been thinking about for a while: Back in the mid-nineties, a story hit the media about a peculiar Virginia fertility doctor with a very unusual practice. It seemed a number of babies who'd been conceived there by means of artificial insemination turned out to have a striking resemblance to the doctor. The reason was ? you guessed it ? he was using his own sperm to impregnate these women without telling them. The doctor was convicted of fraud, lost his medical license and spent five years in prison, but for some reason the story always stuck in my head. Maybe it was wonder at the monstrous narcissism that must have been at work. Or maybe it was just curiosity about what happened to all these kids wandering around the same geographic area with no apparent connection, who just happened to find that they look like one another.

On its own, though, a story bringing those kids together seemed too flimsy and dependent on coincidence. But when we began to experiment with the idea of making one of those kids a child on a quest to find his real father ? and then discovering to his horror, that he's just the issue of a modern-day **Johnny Appleseed** ? the beginnings of a mystery began to take hold and it became a case worth investigating on **Criminal Intent**.

A number of unusual things happened during the making of this episode. I learned never to write a scene involving babies, if I can help it. After the set designers managed to construct a convincing maternity ward in a waiting room at the **Bronx VA**, most of the infant actors hired to be part of the background while our detectives interrogate a suspect became so distraught at being swaddled under hot lights that they had to be evacuated from the set because their squalling made it impossible to hear the actors. Other issues of temperament afflicted a different scene, one involving a dog ? though the Dutch shepherd that appears in the final version gives a very persuasive **Brando**-like performance that goes from bridled ferocity to barely-restrained face-licking in a matter of seconds ? no doubt the result of Method-training.

But for me, the most memorable moment of the shoot had nothing to do with the script or the story. It happened around lunchtime one day as we were getting ready to film a scene outside the **Belnord**, the landmark apartment house on the Upper West Side. One of those bright red double-decker sight-seeing buses happened by, the kind that clog up some of **Manhattan's** busier intersections and occasionally mow down its slower-moving pedestrians. The passengers up top in their polo shirts and straw hats looked tanned and a little dazed,

having probably spent most of a beautiful September morning taking in a few of the city's famous locales ? **Wall Street, City Hall, Rockefeller Center.**

But when the bus came to a halt right by our set, the tourists began to point and shout with great excitement. They weren't, as I might have hoped, spontaneously expressing their enthusiasm for the Belnord's Italian Renaissance architecture or the works of the great Yiddish author, **Isaac Bashevis Singer**, who once lived upstairs. Rather, they had spotted **Chris Noth**, who through his roles as Detective **Mike Logan** and yes, **Mr. Big** on that other show, has probably become as recognizable to people from outside the city as the Chrysler Building.

Being the consummate professional and gracious soul that he is, Chris smiled and nodded in acknowledgement. And then he did something that for me helped sum up the spirit not only of **Law and Order: Criminal Intent** but of the town in which it's filmed. He took out his prop gun and waved it at the sightseers just as their bus pulled away.

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