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IB Working



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Interview by LAKESHIA ARTIS

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NAME: Cina Wong

JOB TITLE: Self-employed, board-certified document examiner/forensic handwriting expert

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TIME ON JOB: 18 years

How did you get started?

“I graduated from San Jose State University, San Jose CA, with a degree in communications. I specialized in advertising. Back then, everything was done by hand. I used to be in charge of paste-up forgery. This is where someone would cut out your signature and photocopy it to a document that said you were giving that employee a raise. In a way, it provided me training as a handwriting expert.”

What type of education is involved?

“Actually you can go to school to become a document examiner. You have to be fortunate enough to find someone who is practicing as a document examiner to mentor and train you. I started my training in San Francisco and I moved to Norfolk for advanced training. I went through a three-year advanced training program. I also enrolled in various document examination organizations and after taking required written and oral tests, I became board-certified. I looked at a number of things when examining handwriting. At a young age we are taught how to write certain letters. I

looked at how the handwriting deviates from the copy book letter formation we were taught. If I were to forge your signature, I would have difficulty making it look like yours.”

What types of cases do you handle?

“I’m involved in a number of cases including check fraud, contract disputes, land deeds, anonymous notes, questionable documents and wills. In the state of Virginia, individuals are allowed to write a holographic will, which is a handwritten will. Not all states allow this. Most states require an attorney to draw up a will. In Virginia, you can write a will on a paper towel and it can be considered a valid will. Elderly abuse cases have a significant amount of fraudulent activities concerning wills. People who are taking care of them tend to forge their checks and in some cases, these elderly people may end up leaving everything to their home health care provider.”

What has been your most high-profile case?

“I was one of two people involved in the JonBenet Ramsey case. We were called upon to examine the ransom note that was left at the crime scene. The other handwriting expert was in Maryland. Both of us were kept separate so our opinions would be independent. In my opinion, I found that it was highly probable that Patsy Ramsey [JonBenet’s mother] was the person who wrote the note. I found over 243 similarities between her handwriting and the ransom note. The other handwriting expert said that he was 100 positive that Patsy wrote the note. I want to be clear on one thing. Just because someone wrote the note does not mean they committed the murder. The Ramsey’s hired their own handwriting expert who was favorable to their case. That case has been left up in the air. It has been one of the biggest mysteries of the century. This month is the 11th anniversary of the JonBenet murder.”

What about local forgery jobs?

“One alleged forgery job dealt with an estate. The father of three sons had passed away. After his death a will surfaced stating that he had left everything to one son who was an attorney. I was called in to examine the document to find out if it was valid. To the naked eye, the signature looks as though it was signed with blue ink. After I put the document underneath a microscope, I saw that the ink was composed of blue, yellow and red dots. The signature was made with an inkjet printer. I couldn’t say that the

letter was authentic. We can only say that it wasn't the original signature. When I stated to the gentleman that the signature wasn't authentic, he said that he received a second will in the mail with a Post-It note saying that this is the real document. I asked for the envelope that the will came in because when the mail goes through the post office, the postmark will leave an imprint on the inside the envelope. Just to be clear, the postmark doesn't always show. His document didn't have a postmark and he didn't have the Post-It note. The second will was a traced forgery document. This is where you trace over someone's signature with a tipped object, such as a knitting needle or pen cap and then fill in the signature later, or you can trace over the signature with a pen. Unfortunately, a lot of evidence was not discussed in this case and the son walked away with the entire estate."

What's the worst part of the job?

"When I don't see justice served due to legal technicalities that have nothing to do with the real issues involved. For example, I was called in for a real estate alleged fraud case in Virginia Beach. This man had sold a plot of land to a family for a moderate price. A few months later the property he sold had skyrocketed in value and he wanted it back. The family said no because it was sold to them. He sued the family and said he never signed the contract and that they forged his name. I testified in court that the signature was his and he did indeed sell the land to the family. The judge agreed that his signature was authentic but according to the Virginia contract law, the contract had to be clear and precise. On the document it read that the land was sold for X amount of dollars. Unfortunately, when someone wrote in the dollar amount they added three zeros behind the dollar amount. For example, instead of writing \$250,000.00, someone wrote \$250,000.000 adding an extra zero. The judge said it wasn't clear what the land sold for because of the extra zero. He nullified the contract and the man got his land back."

What's the best part of the job?

"The best part is helping people. I remember helping this woman whose husband tried to swindle her and her children out of millions stating that she signed a prenuptial agreement. She won her case."