

San Diego's Own Mystery Man Is Award-Winning Sleuth



San Diego Report Jim Kelly

San Diego is a hard town for a mug to catch a break in, especially when flatfoots like Todd Schwede are pounding the beat.

Over the years, Schwede has built a fair reputation as an insurance sleuth, and he's a tough but sensitive one according to rumors around the docks. I heard he was doing some important things and getting the attention of an international cartel, or association, or something like that, so I did a little snooping of my own.

All my leads were cold but the one from my editor. It led me to Shelter Island.

There are three islands in the great harbor of San Diego, and all of them are connected by land. I guess the mapmakers haven't figured out how to spell "peninsula" yet. I put some feelers out, and Schwede called me the next day.

He was a man of few words. "How can I help you?" he asked.

"I'd like to put a few questions to you," I said, "and I'd like to do it in person."

He agreed to meet me in an hour.

Schwede's office was large, but imposing. Odd trophies from his years as a PI cluttered tables, and one wall was filled with photographs from his biggest hunts. There were no people in the pictures.

The boats told their own agonizing stories.

Almost Smell the Fear

A fire was captured engulfing a cabin cruiser in a remote Mexican cove. A crane appeared to have dropped on a yacht, crushing it as if it were made of nothing but wood and fiberglass.

Someone, who ran afoul of the law, had marooned a sloop on Dog Beach. I could almost smell the fear in that photo — and something else.

"I've come across evidence that you may have won an award," I said after I sat down at his desk. I knew he had.

Before I left the *The Log's* office, my editor had slipped a piece of paper in my hand.

It told me the International Association of Marine Investi-

gators had honored Schwede and three other investigators in early April for helping to smash a multi-country theft ring involving 30 vessels. Twenty-six miscreants had been indicted.

I picked up a harnacle-encrusted ring and quickly put it down. A core sample from a fiberglass hull caught my eye.

He nodded his head, affirming my suspicions that he actually had received the award, but his eyes avoided mine.

"I hear you were one of four people honored, and you helped indict 26 people," I probed. What could he say? I had him dead to rights. But, he still seemed to be hiding something.

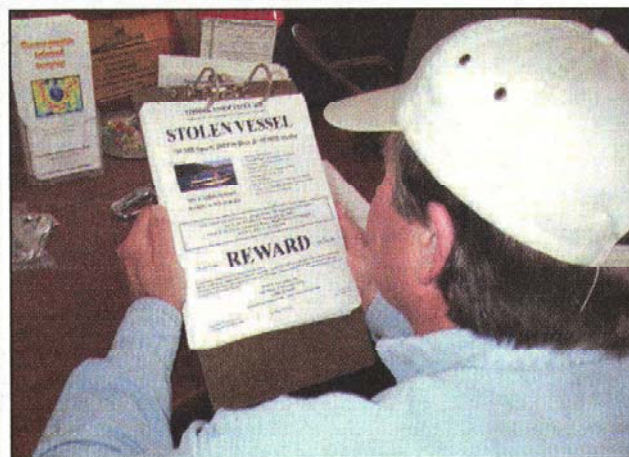
When he didn't break down and confess to whatever it was he was holding back on, I changed my line of questioning.

An Odd Coincidence

"I have other information suggesting you hung out with sailors and worked in the boat yards when you were young," I said.

"I grew up in a place called Rocky River, Ohio," he said, "and, during the summers, worked in the Eichenlaub/Mueller boat factory in Cleveland building one-design sailboats. You know, Lightnings and Snipes and OK Dinghies."

"An odd coincidence." I interrupted. "We had an Eichenlaub who used to built sailboats here."



Jim Kelly

CMI EXTRAORDINAIRE — Todd Schwede, Certified Marine Investigator, has an intriguing past and present, currently as an award-winning insurance sleuth. For security reasons, we have purposefully not shown his face.

He looked confused. "On Shelter Island," I explained.

Schwede opened a drawer of his desk and rummaged around for something. I was hoping it wasn't a club.

"Yes," he finally said with a sigh, "It's the same person. In 1973, after I graduated from college, I was asked by his partner John Mueller if I would transport two foam/composite sailboats to San Diego."

"An odd coincidence," I repeated.

"You keep saying that." I have no idea what you're talking about."

"Never mind." I took another tack. "So you came to San Diego?" He seemed to relax a little.

"Yes, it was in December 1973, and there were 9 inches of snow on the ground in Cleveland when I left. When I got to San Diego, the

temperature was 82 degrees, and Carl Eichenlaub asked me if I wanted to build boats here.

"There wasn't much to talk about, really."

"So your story is you once built boats. How did you get to be a PI?"

A CMI and a Poet

"Actually, I'm a Certified Marine Investigator," he replied. He was a wily one.

"Anyway, I worked for Carl for a few years and left to write a poetry book when he sold the business."

He seemed to have a problem staying with the conversation. But, I had him hooked and wasn't going to let him go. "So how did you get to be a CMI," I asked.

"After I had the poetry book published, I worked as a disc

SD Report *From Page A23*

jockey and a television director for awhile until Carl came to me again and asked if I would go to the SORC and race with him."

"The Scottish Off Road Championships?" I asked.

"No, the Southern Ocean Racing Conference in Miami," he replied. At this time, I noticed Schwede was having a difficult time trying to keep from sighing.

"During our six weeks in Florida, Carl asked me if I would go into business with him. He had decided to stop building boats and turn the yard into a modification and repair business."

Schwede told me how he had worked with Eichenlaub for a number of years until he had to leave the business because he developed health problems working around the chemicals in the yard. "I found a guy down at the Tenth Avenue Terminal named Capt. Tony Tillit who was the Lloyds of London agent in town.

Reputation Packs a Punch

"He agreed to take me in and teach me the trade. Our deal was he would teach me all about big ships and cargo, and I would develop a yacht business for him," Schwede explained.

Anyway, Schwede explained how one thing led to another, and he became one of the top marine-insurance investigators in the country. Not much of what he said about his business made sense to a layman like me, but he seemed to be quite proud of his expertise at finding cracks in the composite hulls of yachts.

He also appeared to get excited when he talked about some of the crimes he'd uncovered.

All I know is Schwede's reputation packs enough punch to attract associates like Bill Trenkle, America's Cup former manager and marine engineer, to his team. Trenkle's experience in yacht and spar construction in composites and aluminum makes him almost as dangerous as an international man of mystery as Schwede is.

Anyone who dares can contact Schwede (or Trenkle) at (619) 226-1895 or visit Todd & Associates' Web site at www.boatman.com. But, don't mention me.

I'm still trying to figure out how the Scottish Off Road Championships figure into all this.