

AN IMPERFECT MATCH

Tom Basinski's 'No Good Deed' details a local murder investigation

Reviewed by Caitlin Rother

In the wee hours of Dec. 23, 1998, the San Diego Fire Department was called to La Jolla to extinguish flames shooting out of a Chrysler LeBaron convertible with Kansas license plates.

Investigators found the charred remains of a body that was later identified as David Stevens, the vehicle's owner. The 38-year-old son of a Nebraska farmer, Stevens worked at a dating service known as Perfect Match, but seemed to look in all the wrong places for his own dating prospects. Homicide detectives later learned that the former bodybuilder and high school wrestling champion had described himself to strippers and co-workers as "a California virgin."

Detectives initially suspected that

Stevens' murder was tied to the woman whose long dark hairs they found in his bathroom and whose handprints they pulled off his bed's headboard. But they couldn't prove it. They spent the next three years trying to figure out who killed this tragic figure.

In "No Good Deed," Tom Basinski, a former investigator with the San Diego County District Attorney's Office, tells the story behind the investigation that ultimately leads to the successful prosecution of two defendants.

The story earned a bit of coverage in the local media, but would not be considered one of the region's high-profile cases. That said, it does have a unique mix of interesting and sometimes comical facets: It delves into the underworld of strippers, the exotic practice of Santeria, a publication called *Testosterone*, a murder for hire and a defendant who insists on repre-

senting himself at trial. Basinski's wry humor is an undercurrent that runs throughout.

Basinski is an investigator by trade, not a journalist, although, as he tells readers, he has published "over one hundred murder stories for now-defunct various true crime pulp magazines over the years." This is his first book.

He doesn't hide his pro-law-enforcement point of view, and it is obvious that he knows his subject matter well. He also clearly has a working knowledge of the detectives, prosecutor and judge involved in this case. Readers, however, may find they are left wanting more in the way of biographical backstory for the two defendants.

The first third of the book focuses primarily on dead ends homicide detectives pursue while dealing with the

victim's unhappy family, and a conspiracy-minded private-eye writer the family hires to intercede. Some readers may find it tedious to wade through the ins and outs of so many leads that go nowhere. Also, because this section of the book is so loaded with details that don't advance the case, it can be difficult to follow the storyline. Although Basinski can turn a clever phrase, his prose is at times overwritten.

But "No Good Deed" significantly improves as it progresses. Some of the most interesting information — including several psychological evaluations of one of the defendants that prove important in her defense — comes in the closing chapters. Plus, for those who enjoy books on true crime cases, it's always more fun to read about a local one.

Caitlin Rother is the author of "Poisoned Love," the story of the Kristin Rossum "American Beauty" murder case, and a staff writer for the *Union-Tribune*.

NO GOOD DEED

A Shocking True Story of Jealousy, Rage and Murder

Tom Basinski
Berkeley, 293 pages, \$7.99

