

## NEWS

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For 37 years Charlie Bezzina worked tirelessly to solve some of the state's most

# The dark side of

Keith Moor

**F**ORMER Det Sen-Sgt Charlie Bezzina was one of Victoria's most successful and longest-serving homicide squad detectives.

He was moved out of the squad against his will in May 2008 as a result of a police command decision to rotate inspectors and senior sergeants to other areas of the force.

Mr Bezzina said he believed the real reason police command, led by the now Chief Commissioner Simon Overland, wanted to move him and other long-serving homicide squad detectives was to distance the crime department from the old-school style of policing he and the other veterans of the homicide squad represented.

"I got the impression Overland, who was responsible directly for major crime, felt we had too much power," Mr Bezzina said.

He said he and four other experienced homicide squad detective senior-sergeants were ordered to appear before a Victoria Police board of management and each was asked "can you give us any personal or professional reason why you should not be moved".

Mr Bezzina said he spent the next 35 minutes fighting for his career and his way of life.

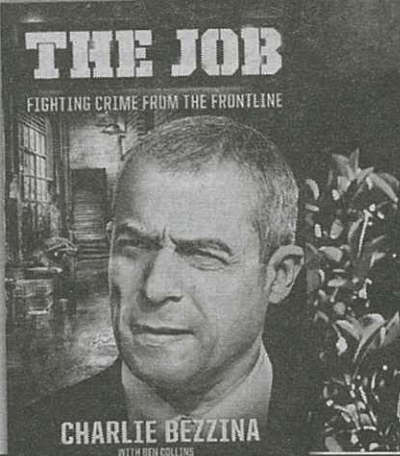
"I don't want to be moved. I'm a homicide squad specialist. Why can't I stay here?" he asked the board.

The board did decide to shift him out of homicide and it was dissatisfaction over that decision that prompted Mr Bezzina to resign in November last year.

Only one of the five homicide detective senior-sergeants interviewed by the board in 2008 is still in the squad.

Mr Bezzina, a 37-year Victoria Police veteran, investigated some of Victoria's most high-profile murders during his 17 years in the homicide squad.

His new book, *The Job - Fighting Crime From the Inside*, which is being published next month by the Slatery Media Group, provides a fascinating account of many of the crimes that shocked Victorians.



## PAUL DENYER

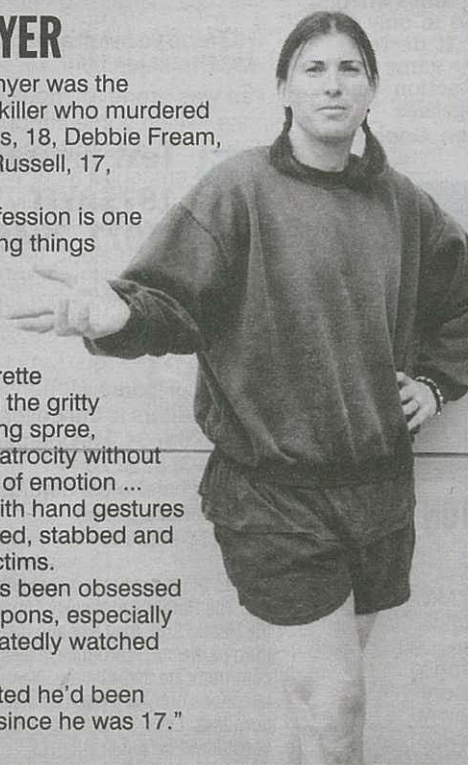
Paul Charles Denyer was the Frankston serial killer who murdered Elizabeth Stevens, 18, Debbie Fream, 22, and Natalie Russell, 17, in 1993.

"Denyer's confession is one of the most chilling things I've witnessed," Mr Bezzina said.

"He casually puffed on a cigarette as he exhaled all the gritty details of his killing spree, describing each atrocity without the slightest hint of emotion ... demonstrating with hand gestures how he'd strangled, stabbed and tormented his victims.

"He had always been obsessed with making weapons, especially knives, and repeatedly watched horror movies.

"Denyer admitted he'd been stalking women since he was 17."



## COLD CASES

"Victoria Police desperately needs to address its handling of cold cases," Mr Bezzina said.

"The force had cold case and missing persons units for a few years, before the hierarchy, in its wisdom, dissolved these very important squads.

These days, little is being done to actively investigate old unsolved cases. And it simply isn't good enough.

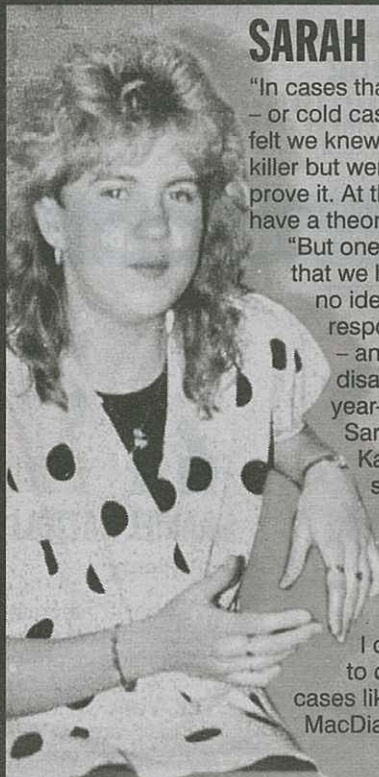
"It frustrates the hell out of me that such scant regard is being paid to the families of victims whose killers are still walking the streets. There is no statute of limitations when it comes to laying a murder charge. It never goes away - and neither should those investigating such crimes."

## SARAH MacDIARMID

"In cases that remained unsolved - or cold cases - we generally felt we knew the identity of the killer but were just unable to prove it. At the very least, we'd have a theory," Mr Bezzina said.

"But one case was so baffling that we had absolutely no idea who was responsible - still don't - and that was the 1990 disappearance of 23-year-old Scottish woman Sarah MacDiarmid from Kananook railway station.

"When I was moved out of homicide in May 2008, I was devastated that I couldn't continue to chip away at cold cases like that of Sarah MacDiarmid."



## THE DEATH OF DAVID HOOKES

"One of the most shattering cases of my career was the investigation of the tragic death of cricket great David Hookes in January 2004," Mr Bezzina said.

"The failed prosecution of hotel bouncer Zdravko Micevic for manslaughter, and its aftermath, left emotional scars that took some time to heal. It was one of the most disappointing verdicts of my career."

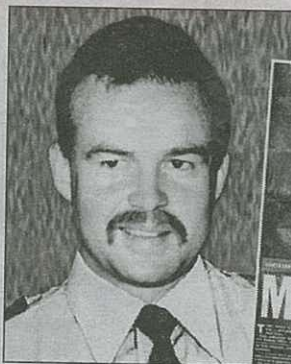
shocking crimes. His new book reveals the heartbreak and hardships.

# life exposed

## THE 1998 MURDER OF GARY SILK AND RODNEY MILLER

"The gravity of the crime hit home when I later saw Sgt Silk's body at the Coroner's Court," Mr Bezzina said.

"As hardened as I was, I couldn't bring myself to watch the post mortem because it was like a family member - a brother-in-law - was lying dead on the table in front of me. It actually strengthened my resolve to catch the mongrels who committed such atrocities."



Killed: Rodney Miller and Gary Silk (left)

## THE SOCIETY MURDERS

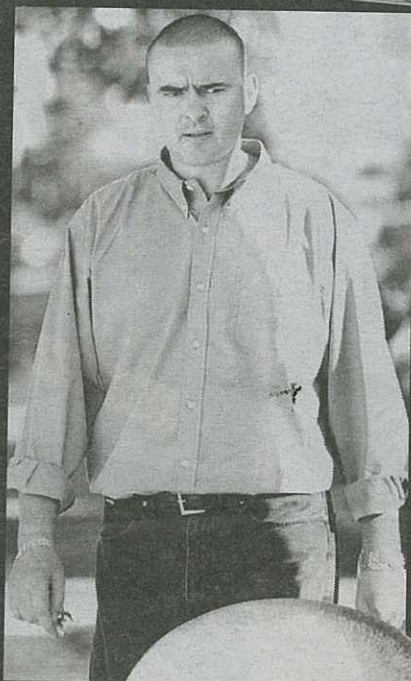
Millionaire socialite Margaret Wales-King, 68, and her husband Paul King, 74, were murdered by their son Matthew (left) in 2002. Matthew's wife Maritza faced lesser charges over the deaths.

"We were contacted by Maritza's lawyer, Philip Dunn, QC. Phil asked us if we could guarantee a non-custodial sentence if Maritza were to provide certain information," Mr Bezzina said.

"We didn't need Maritza's evidence to convict Matthew anyway, and at the very least we had her stone cold for giving a false statement about events on the night of the double murder.

"We came to an agreement whereby she made another statement, which further implicated Matthew, in exchange for a lesser charge of attempting to pervert the course of justice by making a false statement.

"Matthew pleaded guilty and received 20 years' jail for each count of murder. Maritza also pleaded guilty and received a two-year suspended sentence."



## JASON MORAN

"Moran was prone to impulsive acts of violence, which some attributed to a brain injury he suffered some years earlier when Gangitano smashed a car windscreen with an iron bar and accidentally struck Moran in the head," Mr Bezzina said.

"As we walked along the footpath on the other side of the street, Jason wandered outside and yelled out to us 'hey, Mr Bezzina, I'm over here. You don't still think I killed Alphonse, do you?'"

"Jason, I said, not only do we think you killed him, but we're going to prove it."



## THE 1998 MURDER OF ALPHONSE GANGITANO

"The bloodied, spread-eagled body before me didn't match the mental image I'd had of this feared gangster who had pretensions to underworld domination," Mr Bezzina said.

"He didn't look anything like the fresh-faced, debonair figure that appeared in newspaper photographs and TV news footage ... no one is going to look their best when they've just been shot in the back, head and face and they're lying face down in their underwear in a laundry.

"The image-conscious, cop-hating Gangitano would have been horrified at the thought of a detective being in his private domain and seeing him as I did at that moment."

## DRUGS

"For whatever reason, it appeared the police hierarchy couldn't deliver on their promise to go hard on drugs and claim some big scalps," Mr Bezzina said.

"We were too limited and inflexible in how far we could take our investigations and that prevented us from infiltrating the top level of traffickers and breaking up the big drug rings.

"There were times when we felt we could actually elevate ourselves to that level, and potentially beyond that to the importer and perhaps even the supplier overseas, but we were forced to wrap up our investigation and apprehend lesser criminals instead."

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CONFESSIONS OF A COP  
Blog with Charlie Bezzina between 11am and noon