

# Where Evidence Comes Alive: *Inside Crime Scene*

Review by Dr Chong Yik Yan

Picture this. It is 10 pm at night, and you have just attended a dinner party. What are your options for the journey home?

Many times, I find myself opting for public transport to save money, even though it includes a ten-minute walk home from the bus stop. The fact that I can include public transport as one of my options at night speaks volumes of the sense of safety that we feel in Singapore. In a 2024 survey by Gallup,<sup>1</sup> Singapore ranked safest in the world for the 12th consecutive time, boasting 98% of surveyed Singaporeans reporting feeling safe walking alone at night.

But what did it take to bring us to this state? What were the incidents in our history that played pivotal roles in improving our security?

*Inside Crime Scene* is a short series of 11 episodes packaged in two seasons, exploring iconic crimes from Singapore's past. It offers an immersive look into the world of crime investigation from the Singaporean perspective, dissecting local cases with a multidisciplinary approach. Cases come to life through the lenses of the various stakeholders – police, forensic scientists, forensic pathologists, forensic psychologists, journalists and even the victims themselves. In this piece, I write about three episodes that struck a chord with me.

## **S1E2: In Cold Blood – Geylang Bahru Murders**

*Something cold*

Decades ago, Singapore saw its fair share of violent crimes. Yet nothing could prepare Singaporeans for the morning where four young children were slain in cold blood.



Still from *Inside Crime Scene* (August Pictures, 2022)

A regular weekday morning, school bus driver Tan Kuen Chai and his bus attendant wife Lee Mei Ying set off for work early in the morning at 6.35 am as usual, reminding their eldest child to wake the rest of his three siblings for school. At 7.10 am, Mei Ying dialled three wake-up calls home and requested a neighbour to check in on the children, all yielding no response. When the couple returned home at 10 am, the four children, ages 10, 8, 6, and 5, were found lifeless, with multiple slash wounds each, and stacked on top of each other in the unit toilet.

Details of the case were illustrated with vivid detail through interviews and reenactments of the scene. The police investigator repeatedly described the scene as one of the worst he has seen. The heart-wrenching discovery of the slain children and the subsequent public outrage was palpable as various neighbours recalled the incident. The fear was further highlighted by a neighbour with young children of similar ages, who recounted how her children used to play with the Tan family and how she thought it was a near miss that her children were temporarily living elsewhere when the murders happened.

To aid understanding of the case, a walkthrough of the crime scene was used to explain the investigation that

followed, with models depicting the house layout, allowing the viewers to visualise the macabre scene that greeted the Tan parents. Current forensic scientists were invited to weigh in on key points of the crime scene, and to expand further on how different the case might have been if investigated with current available technology. Till today, the case remains a cold one.

Another important stakeholder interviewed in this episode is the Crime Library Singapore – a non-profit organisation working on public crime awareness and prevention. They religiously broadcast and publicise the case on its anniversary, hoping that people with information can come forward to help solve the crime. Ultimately, when the evidence is scarce, we resort to the old-fashioned way of investigative journalism, continuing to hold on to the hope that the case may be solved one day.

## **S1E5: Guns and Violence**

*Something resolved*

Gun violence is virtually unheard of in Singapore these days. But did you know that the Arms Offences Act was only enacted in 1973, a little over 50 years ago? This episode explored Singapore's history with firearm crimes – most rampant in

the post-war era, and most frequently used in kidnapping and robberies. Through interviews with the then law enforcers, era-appropriate re-enactment of the crimes, and an exploration of the regional history, viewers can get a better understanding of what Singapore was dealing with fifty years ago.

A highlight of this episode was the baffling case of seamstress Chan Chee Chan, who was shot to death while walking along Queenstown in 1972. The source of the shot was unknown, but there were three main hypotheses – (1) a sniper shot taken from a nearby HDB block, (2) a bullet accidentally discharged by flying fox hunters returning home from a night out, and (3) a stray bullet from a nearby shooting range. This was against the background of an era where gangs ran rampant, shootouts were common and citizens could hold firearms easily.

This episode was a reflection on the importance of severe punishment and strict enforcement in the maintenance of order in Singapore. Although the Act was enacted in 1973, gun violence was still common, and many citizens still possessed firearms. The situation improved only after the penal code was amended in 1974, to include the death sentence for firearm discharge without a need to prove intent to shoot. Moreover, with strict gun control laws, gun crime is largely resolved, with the most recent gun injuries sustained only in the course of law enforcement.

## S2E5: Burden of Proof

*Something relevant*

With advancements in technology, crime in Singapore has also shifted to

the digital world. Something closer to home would be white collar crimes such as scams and credit fraud. In 2024, cases of scams and cybercrime continued to increase, up 10.8% from 2023.<sup>2</sup> Appropriately, an episode in this series is dedicated to such crimes.

A good example from the episode would be that of serial fraudster Jerald Low who was involved in a variety of scams, including that of property, telco and job scams. One of his victims was Terrence, his ex-classmate from secondary school. This is a story that may even sound familiar to any viewer – an old friend approaches you and speaks to you about a business opportunity, requiring a small financial investment with minimal effort for substantial returns. Despite feeling suspicious about the circumstances, Terrence decided to trust Jerald and proceeded to invest in six mobile phone lines, ultimately losing up to ten thousand dollars in telco termination penalties without getting anything in return.

Hindsight is always 20-20. The setting of the stories mentioned in this episode remind us that such scams can happen to anyone. Even young, seasoned digital surfers may be caught in a moment of weakness and fall prey to such schemes.

## Conclusion

In summary, *Inside Crime Scene* offers an intimate look at local crimes that many Singaporeans may not be aware of. The series was both educational in creating awareness of events that have passed, and thought-provoking in evaluating the response and subsequent management of the aftermath. By interviewing people who were originally involved in the case,

the emotional weight of the crimes was well balanced with fresh perspectives and hypotheses brought in by present-day forensic scientists.

For medical professionals and learners, it sheds light on how the various sciences come into play, and how medical knowledge is used in the setting of law enforcement. For anyone curious to learn more about crime investigation with a Singaporean twist, *Inside Crime Scene* is an immersive watch to learn more about our past and to explore the techniques shaping the future of forensic investigation. ♦

## References

1. Gallup, Inc. *Global Safety Report*. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3MhXJkO>.
2. Singapore Police Force. *Singapore Police Force Annual 2024*. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3ZSoXSg>.

Dr Chong is a medical officer with a keen interest in forensic science and medicine. She enjoys bridging medical knowledge and science with real-world applications, particularly in the realm of healthcare and crime investigation. When not working, she enjoys true crime media such as podcasts and documentaries.



Still from *Inside Crime Scene* (August Pictures, 2022)



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