

# Forensic Photography

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Criminalists in forensic photography are holders of Associate to B.S. degrees in various disciplines but have demonstrated an exceptional ability to use various photographic techniques to visually enhance and photographically document items of evidentiary importance. These criminalists also develop and make available photographic illustrations to be used in courts of law.

Lieutenant Rita Y. Shuler (Retired) was the supervisory special agent of the Forensic Photography Department with the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED) for twenty-four years. She interfaced with the Attorney General's office, solicitors, and law enforcement investigators providing photographic evidence assistance in the prosecution of thousands of criminal cases. Shuler shares some of her work as Forensic Photographer in her book, *Carolina Crimes, Case Files of a Forensic Photographer* published by History Press in Charleston, South Carolina, August 2006. Her book is available at major book stores such as Amazon.com, Barnes and Noble, Waldenbooks.com, and Books A Million.

Forensic Photography is an essential tool for criminal investigations. It records the visible and in some cases, the invisible evidence discovered at the crime scene. Photographic evidence can be stored indefinitely and retrieved when needed. Photographs of the crime scene are documented records of the scene as it was first observed. Forensic Photographers take the crime scene into the courtroom and graphically depict the same conditions in which the suspect/assailant left it.

The forensic photographer works in conjunction with the crime scene investigators assisting with photographic documentation of evidence. In essence, the forensic photographer's work begins at the crime scene, working as the 'middleman' between the crime scene investigators and the court system.

Forensic photography is not simple point and shoot photography. It is the application of specialized photographic equipment, techniques, lighting and exact exposures to capture maximum quality details of evidence. The developed negative or digital image will sometimes reveal even more detailed definition of the evidence than what is seen through the lens of the camera.

Basic evidence photography protocol is a good starting point for the preliminary photography set-up, but the forensic photographer's personal creativity is essential in achieving the maximum quality details of the evidence.

Forensic photographers may never have personal contact with the victims or suspects, or be recognized in the media coverage of a case but their work behind the scenes with the physical evidence proves vital to criminal investigations.

More about author Rita Y. Shuler:

She grew up in a small rural community in South Carolina. Her interest in photography started as a hobby at the age of nine with a Kodak brownie camera. Before her career as a forensic photographer, she worked in the medical field as an x-ray technologist for twelve years. Her interest in forensic science evolved and grew over the years when she x-rayed homicide victims to assist with criminal investigations. Twelve years into her x-ray career, she attended an x-ray seminar in San Francisco, California and enrolled in a two-day course, forensic pathology. This seminar's tools were photographs and radiographs of physical evidence graphically presented in the court and legal system. It was then she knew she had to be a part of this incredible forensic science that puts together the truth of such horrendous acts of crime.

In her book, *Carolina Crimes, Case Files of a Forensic Photographer* Shuler combined analysis of court transcripts and official statements and confessions from murderers such as Pee Wee Gaskins and Larry Gene Bell with her own personal interactions with some of the key players. She takes the reader through the dark twists and turns of twelve homicide cases that gripped the state of South Carolina during her career. She records her experience of a double-homicide that she was exposed to at the age of eight and her encounter when she came face to face with twenty-four years later on her first day of work as a forensic photographer.

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