

# This Week

## This WEEK in HISTORY:

- Canada's first television station, CBFT-TV, opened in Montreal in 1952.
- Thieves stole 18 paintings from the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts in what was, at the time, the largest art theft in North America in 1972.
- Mark Spitz won seven swimming gold medals at the 1972 Summer Olympics in Munich, the first Olympian to do so, setting world records in each event.
- Over 2.5 billion people watched Princess Diana be laid to rest in 1997.

Source: Wikipedia.com

## What is

## the

# MR. BIG Sting?

*Mr. Big* documentary explores RCMP operation used to catch Shawn Hennessey and Dennis Cheeseman

ADAM MALIK  
LEADER STAFF

It's considered entrapment in England and the United States, making it an illegal practise for police.

However, in Canada, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police are allowed to use a tactic known as the Mr. Big Sting. It's a controversial operation which has been used a number of times across the country.

Locally, there is concern that police used the questionable tactic to nail Barrhead residents Shawn Hennessey and Dennis Cheeseman. The brothers-in-law are accused by the RCMP to have somehow helped James Roszko kill four constables near Mayerthorpe in March 2005.

Hennessey and Cheeseman were arrested on July 8 in Barrhead. Just a few days later, reports surfaced of Mr. Big being used to apprehend the two men.

What exactly is the Mr. Big Sting? Why is it illegal in other countries? And what's the big deal about it? A new documentary set to make its world premiere at the end of the month explores those questions.

*Mr. Big* was spearheaded by Tiffany Burns. Her brother, Sebastian, was convicted of murder in Washington in 2004. Atif Rafay, a friend, was also found guilty of the crime. According to Burns, a sketchy video confession

convinced a jury, despite DNA evidence and witnesses pointing to other suspects.

"DNA at the crime scene pointed away from them. Hair found didn't match them. Their confessions were inconsistent with each other and with the evidence. Alibis said they were on the other side of town," Burns said.

It was during that time she was first introduced to the methods known as Mr. Big. Since then, Burns used her journalist background to dig up more information on the operation and learned that it has been used before and would be used again. The goal of the documentary is to open the eyes of Canadians so they understand what exactly is going on.

"What *Mr. Big* is, in a nutshell, it has to do with an undercover sting," Burns explained. "In it, it follows several people who have been targets ... all of whom have been wrongly jailed as a result of Mr. Big."

Describing the movie as a "starting point for discussion," Burns hopes people become concerned about these tactics and start looking for answers.

"This is probably the first in-depth look (at the Mr. Big Sting)," Burns said. "It's



(above) In a scene from the documentary, Patrick Fischer talks to an uncover RCMP officer. (left) Sebastian Burns is taken away by police in 2004 after a jury found him guilty on three counts of first-degree murder. (right) Tiffany Burns speaks out after her brother's conviction.

plained. "This issue is bigger than my brother. More people are suffering because of it."

Having a documentary made about a sting operation used on her brother may raise some concerns, but Burns understands.

"People are going to ask, 'Is it propaganda for my brother? Is it to prove his innocence?' If I was going to do something like that, it would be done differently," she said. "I understand people have concerns that it was made by the sister of someone convicted of murder. That's why I put myself in the movie. I am concerned about this."

The biggest question asked of Burns is that how can someone confess to a crime if they didn't do it? The simple answer, Burns said, is that they make you.

"People can't imagine it — they go to unreal lengths. You would never imagine our Mounties would be Tony Soprano," Burns explained. "Thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of dollars are handed out for drinking, drugs and other activities."

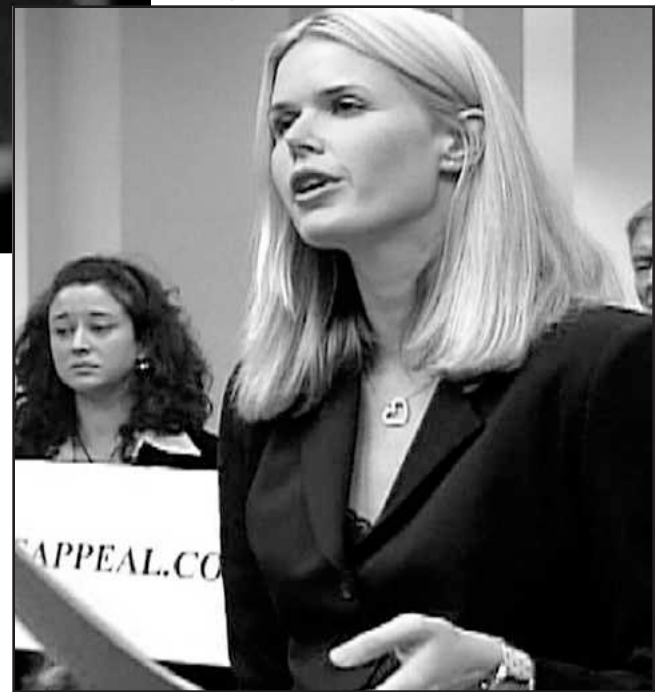
The relationship between the targets and the undercovers escalate, she continued, to the point where committing various crimes — from assault to rape to murder — are openly discussed.

"Jason Dix thought he saw a man get shot and dragged away because he wouldn't confess to a crime," Burns said, adding that the only way to gain trust and protection from the group is to confess to a crime so they have something that can be used against you.

"That's horrifying. People need to know that."

She continued to say that the sting covers phonetaps, so the undercovers know their targets' every move.

"If you're going to get a haircut, they know when and where so they can bump into you," she said.



"They know your likes and dislikes so they know what to talk to you about."

Another startling aspect of the sting for Burns is that it's paid for by the people.

"It's a taxpayer-funded operation with tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands of dollars spent on this," she said. "Once they spend that much money, there's lots of pressure on them to come up with a something they can use as a conviction."

### Reaction

Since word of the documentary spread, it has received a great deal of reaction from people. Most are eagerly waiting to see what the documentary has in store.

"So far, we've had great luck," Burns said, noting that the film has received attention. "We're thrilled about the coverage."

A website has been set up at [www.mrbigthemovie.com](http://www.mrbigthemovie.com) where a trailer has been posted. News stories, screening dates and other information is available.

The documentary will make its debut at the Vancouver International Film Festival. Burns has entered other film fests, hoping it gets picked up. She also is in talks to have it distributed.