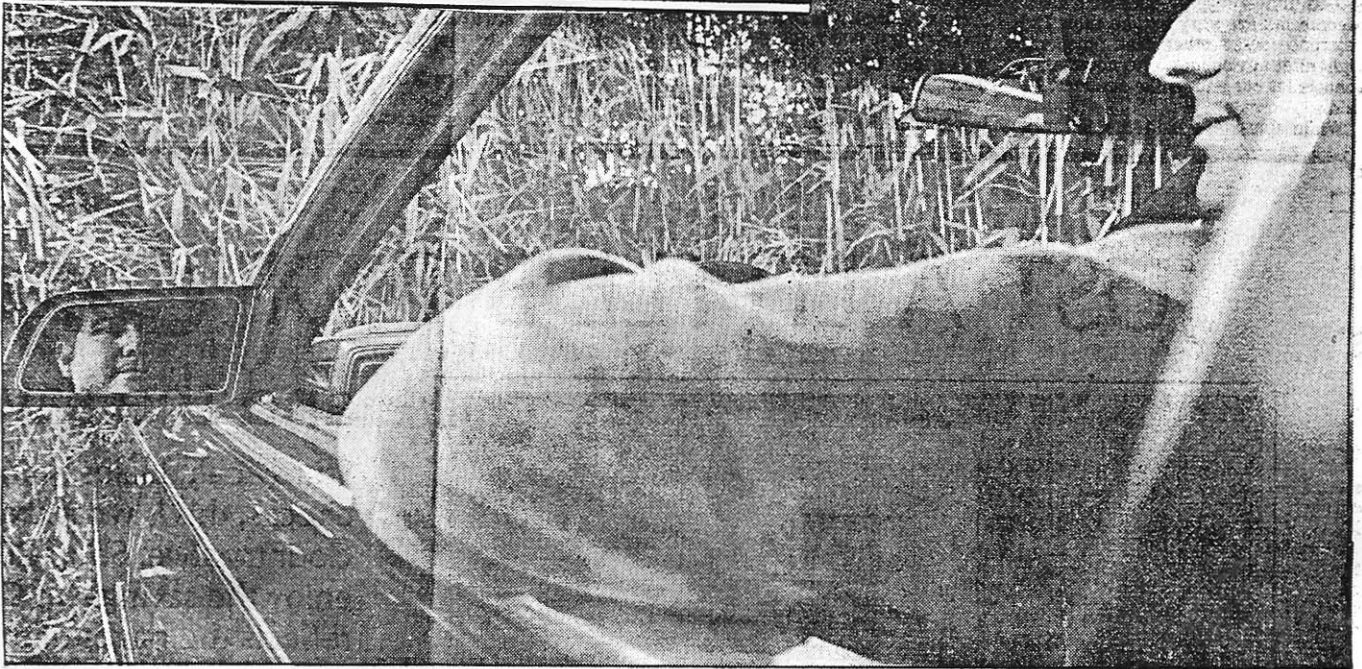


THE STOCKTON RECORD

# LIFE STYLE



Robert Archuleta finds detective work fascinating, but different from fictional private eyes

Record photos by CALIXTRO ROMIAS

## Real-life private eye no Sam Spade

By STANLEY P. KLEVAN  
Of the Record Staff

Fictional private detectives — the likes of Phillip Marlowe or Sam Spade — can have their broods, booze and cracked noggins. That's not the real world of Robert Archuleta, a San Joaquin County homegrown version of a private eye.

Access to fast cars, fast women and shoot-'em-up adventures are fine for tough guy Mike Hammer, but temptations for Archuleta run more to being able to knock off work when he wants and go watch his young son play soccer.

Fact is, one of the real-life bonuses of being a self-employed detective is family man Archuleta's freedom to enjoy his home life on most weekends. He didn't have such a luxury when he was a Lodi police sergeant or a Stockton deputy marshal.

He is his own man now, having built a thriving business over the past year as the operator of an investigative service. He is for hire by anyone, but his clients primarily are attorneys.

Writers and film makers have always been fascinated by the detective business, choosing to glorify their characters by such colorful titles as private eye, private investigator (P.I.), hawkshaw and shamus. Their heroes, from Sherlock Holmes to the brothers Simon, have been romanticized and given almost magical gifts for solving the most baffling of crimes.

For such supersleuths as hawk-nosed Holmes and heavily-pomaded Hercule Poirot, it is their powers of deductive reasoning. And, with Dashiell Hammett's hard-boiled and ruggedly handsome heroes, it's the ability to knock enemies aside to achieve their brand of justice.

There isn't too much to romanticize about the 36-year-old Archuleta.

If it wasn't for his burly build, he'd hardly pass for the ex-policeman that he is. It's probably his boyish face and disarming grin that throw people



Robert Archuleta

off the track about his line of work. He doesn't even "pack a piece," although he knows very well how to use firearms if necessary.

Archuleta's kind of detective usually doesn't solve the crime. He is more interested in re-investigating the case from the defendant's point of view. Defense attorneys are the ones who most often hire Archuleta's services, hoping that his police expertise will turn up a flaw or unseen clues in an earlier investigation.

"Lots of times the attorney just wants to know what you think about a case — after you look over the police officer's report — and whether it's worth taking the case to trial," he says.

Archuleta doesn't limit himself to criminal cases. Civil suits also need investigating by a trained eye. So do traffic accident cases. He also specializes in advising merchants and others eager to protect valuables on security measures.

As for some kind of detective's "magical gift," it may be Archuleta's talent for using the new technology in police work — computers, electronic communicators and video cameras.

"I'm a very technical person," says Archuleta. His affection for the electronic tools of the trade was heightened during his 10½ years with Lodi police. He was the sergeant in charge of the department's planning, research and training, a role that introduced him to many of the devices he now uses in private investigations.

Archuleta's role in training other Lodi officers also gave him valuable insight into how policemen "tick" and how errors can creep into official investigations. It is the kind of knowledge that defense

attorneys prize — another reason why Archuleta's services are in demand.

That talent, he says, is what paid off in some private sleuthing for Frank Freni, an old acquaintance. Freni, a Stockton building contractor, faced a charge of arson in connection with the New Year's Day 1983 torching of his Morada area home.

Someone had doused the expensive residence with diesel oil and then set it aflame, causing an estimated \$850,000 damage. The house was empty. Freni was returning by bus from a trip to South Lake Tahoe at the time. Two and a half months later, sheriff's detectives arrested one man for the crime and the following day arrested Freni for allegedly hiring the man to commit arson.

Archuleta says his contribution to Freni's defense was to discover that officers had failed to check out accounts given them by key witnesses. Archuleta says those accounts were riddled with errors.

A jury was deadlocked during a July trial, and a second attempt at prosecution ended the same way in October. The prosecution decided later that month to dismiss the charges against Freni.

Archuleta's training in police matters came early. Born and raised in Stockton, he joined the local Police Cadets as a teen-ager and rose to the rank of lieutenant, often getting advice from the late Jack O'Keefe, then police chief, and the late Jerry Mackey, then deputy chief. Among his other teachers were current Chief Julio A. Cecchetti and current Deputy Chief P.F. "Jack" Calkins. "They all helped quite a bit," says Archuleta.

He graduated from Franklin High School in 1966 and enrolled in criminal justice classes at Delta College, where he came under the influence of another teacher with a top-notch background, former FBI agent Joe Daly.

"I've been very lucky in this work to have been trained by men such as these," he says.

Despite his prospects with the Stockton Police

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## Detective

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Department, Archuleta turned toward Lodi. "It was smaller and gave you a better opportunity to learn and grow," he says. Archuleta scored strongly when he joined Lodi police in 1969. As a rookie cop he went undercover for six weeks, surfacing with the arrest of seven youthful drug dealers.

Later, while still with the Lodi department, he earned his bachelor's degree in criminal justice from Sacramento State University. By 1980, however, his ardor for official police work — in Lodi — had cooled despite his being a sergeant.

"At first I fit pretty well, but I made the mistake of becoming president of the Police Association ... during negotiations I probably bumped and grveled a few persons ... I felt it (the effects) later," he says.

Archuleta became a deputy marshal in Stockton's courts and while there was asked by a friend to do some research in a civil suit. "I said OK; I'll run it down in my spare time."

The result not only helped his friend, it also awakened something that Archuleta thought had ended with his days in police work — the thrill of investigative work.

"If I would have thought you could go into it, I would have done it a lot sooner," he says of his new career.