

Private eye impressed by tabloid's pros

RW. "Pete" Peterson paces the floor of his Capitol Hill office in white shirt sleeves. His suit coat hangs on a wooden stand next to the bookcase, which holds several volumes, including Plato's "Republic."

File cabinets crowd the corners. His desk calendar bears a cryptic entry — "Trump in Aspen" — scribbled across Thanksgiving week.

The butt-end of a pistol peeks from a holster tucked inside his trousers.

Eternally suave behind the thick brown hair, mustache and blue saucer eyes that conceal several of his 44 years, Peterson leaps from the pages of "True Detective" — a real-life private eye who unabashedly embraces both his job and its romantic trappings.

He drives a Corvette, holds a black belt in karate, packs serious heat and comfortably practices deception and disguise.

He has tailed perpetrators of industrial espionage, worked undercover



in oil fields and charmed women to obtain information.

Some say he's Denver's best. Peterson doesn't argue.

"I'd venture to say I wasn't any good for two years," he allows, recalling a career that began in 1973. "It took me four or five years to develop the tricks of the trade. But the last four or five, I've gotten really good at it."

The federal government hired him to conduct asset searches related to the savings and loan bailout. A wealthy industrialist paid him to find a daughter who vanished shortly after enrolling at the University of Colorado. Some clients adopted as children retained him to track down their natural father.

THEN LAST APRIL, inquiring minds asked him to pursue a rumor that TV star Roseanne Barr might have given birth to a child out of wedlock almost 18 years ago — and that the child might have been adopted in Denver.

So, Peterson took on a new client. The National Enquirer.

Less than a week later he'd not only tracked down the child — a young woman now living in Texas — but compiled a dossier of information on her adoptive family, despite the fact that the parents had divorced and the mother had moved out of state eight years ago.

Barr, he recounts, became pregnant in 1971 while she lived in Salt Lake City, but apparently came to Denver to deliver the child at a Salvation Army facility — on May 19, to be precise.

The child, who she named Elisia, later was placed through Jewish family services with adoptive parents who renamed her Brandi. Dad was an architect. Mom was in real estate.

The girl attended a private preschool, McKeen Elementary and Place Middle School in Denver before moving to Texas with her mother and an adopted brother in 1981. She swam, played soccer and piano and sang in a choir.

Eventually, Peterson tracked her to the University of Texas in Austin, where she majors in communications.

The Enquirer, Peterson recalls, seemed troubled by the fact that he'd uncovered the information so quickly. The tabloid verified it meticulously.

"THEY'RE GOOD ENOUGH that they would have found the information themselves eventually, but it might have taken them a year or so," he figures. "I'm not saying People magazine or the Los Angeles Times or The Denver Post could have found this stuff, but I think (the National Enquirer) could."

"They really are good — devious, you might say. But I was impressed with the things they did to verify my information."

He was less impressed that the paper assured him it wouldn't break the story until after Brandi had turned 18 — and then jumped the gun. He says the paper agreed he could give his information to Barr but later reversed its position.

He gave it to her anyway. Although some of the Enquirer's dealings struck him as slightly unscrupulous, Peterson wouldn't rule out working for the paper again — "if the money was good enough."

He acknowledges that private eyes ply a mercenary trade and sometimes tread the shadowy ground between profit and propriety. Colorado hasn't licensed private detectives since 1977. Their canon of professional ethics fits easily on the back of a matchbook.

Don't break the law.
Don't double-cross a client.

But even purveyors of personal secrets have to draw the ethical line somewhere. Peterson flashes his baby blues and draws it right here.

"I don't do work for lawyers."

Kevin Simpson's column appears in Denver & The West on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday.