



**Threat Assessment and
Management Associates Inc.**
Workplace Violence Specialist

Journal Interview with Threat Assessment Specialist Heather Gray of TAMA Inc.

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Don't Even Answer the Phone

Heather Gray was a police officer in Moose Jaw and Regina for more than 20 years. After retirement, she trained in the United States with Gavin de Becker, author of *The Gift of Fear* and one of the world's leading experts on predicting violent behaviour. Gray moved to Edmonton this summer to open her own threat management consulting company, Tama Inc.

Journal: **How common is a case like this one?**

Heather Gray: These are fairly rare, these ones that go on and on. Many stalking situations that we see are typically where people have dated one another or been in some sort of relationship, even a short relationship. Most don't go this far.

Journal: **What can a victim do to try to stop this early on?**

Gray: Cutting off the contact really early on is the key. If, hypothetically, someone is phoning 40 times a day and leaving messages and 40 times a day they don't call back, but on the 41st call this person calls back to say, "Don't call me," all that tells them is that it takes 41 phone calls to get them to call me back. I think we're teaching children, especially girl children, that we need to be nice to people and kind, and when you break up with someone you have to let them down easy. I think it's OK to tell our children, our girl children too, that it is sometimes OK to be very firm with someone and end it. You don't have to be nice.

Journal: **What, if anything, could Katherine have done to stop this?**

Gray: I don't know that there's a whole lot she could've done. If I was there to advise her, it would be to make no contact with him. Don't even answer the phone. One thing people do is they'll change their number, and then the

person will get their new number, of course. Don't change your number, get another number. They won't be looking for another number because they think they still have your current number. And then what you do is you get another number that you give to your friends and family who you want to talk to.

Journal: **Is there any way people could potentially see stalkers coming?**

Gray: What we need to do is educate people in looking for the early warning signs. Some of the same things people look for on first dates: Is this person obsessed with an ex-relationship? Are they moving this relationship forward much too quickly? Are they talking about marriage and children on the first date? Are they questioning me as to who I spoke to, where I went, who phoned me? That indicates obsessiveness, obsessive entitlement, and that's when you've got to sever the ties very early.

Journal: **Can the current law protect people?**

Gray: For the whole justice system there's a steep learning curve here. No one taught me in police college or anywhere else about the dynamics of (stalking). I think just education of judges, in particular, of prosecutors, of police, helping them appreciate how dangerous this can be. Right now, it really is a crap shoot as to how it's going to be handled. And I think a lot of times victims come away absolutely bewildered because they've gone to the police expecting some tools or advice or something and they come away with nothing.

Journal: **Is the current law strong enough?**

Gray: The trouble is there's a maximum sentence of five years. The criminal harassment sentences I've seen in Saskatchewan are more in the range of six months. I think that there's a difference between justice and safety and you may not always get justice but you've got to get safety. As unfair as it may seem, if the justice system isn't working out for you, you still need to do all these things and take ownership over the outcome by making yourself as safe as possible.