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**First Person Singular  
Deborah Aylward - Private Investigator, Falls Church**

By Tyler Currie  
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The general public watches television and movies and believes that private investigators drive red Ferraris and commit felonious acts with wild abandon. Private investigators have no more powers than the average citizen. We just have a license to snoop.



(Photograph by David Deal)

We constantly have to be actors and actresses. As a female, I get away with different types of persona, like the cosmetics rep. I have the makeup bag to misdirect people's attention. Or you just sit there with maps on your dashboard. Or you look lost. Or, Where's my Realtor? I'm an excellent actress. I get out and start waxing my car. We're very resourceful. You hope your tinted windows don't give you away and nobody sees you with a video camera.

You never know where you're going to end up. I once followed a subject to the top of a mountain in rural Virginia. I didn't know where I was. I had to call a sheriff to come get me off the mountain. Or walk into a 7-Eleven and go, "Where am I?" "Well, where are you trying to get to, Miss?" "No, you don't understand. Where am I?" So it's very thrilling, but it takes an immense amount of patience, concentration. You almost get into an altered state of consciousness when you're on surveillance.

When I go to career day at schools, I ask them to take an object out and look at it without interruption or becoming distracted for five minutes. Within a minute and a half they're fidgeting, and I'm like, "Well, imagine looking at that object for 14 hours straight, literally, without break." We live for micro-rushes of adrenaline. After 14 hours, we might get three minutes of video that document an activity. Quite frankly, this business is no fun -- surveillance is no fun when nothing's happening.

I tell my clients that they're paying me to be their best friend through this very dark time. There's no support system for that period when you think your husband or wife is cheating. People are devastated psychologically, and they can't eat, sleep, think, work, tend to their health. In a way, that's where I come in.