



## Our Forgotten Friend By: Lawrence E. Stringham

To be completely honest, I have only been a Forensic Technician for about 10 years. So, what I am about to write is just a single opinion on today's most valuable, but also, most forgotten tool to the crime scene technician. Let's talk about the fiberglass brush and black powder for a moment.

As crimes get worse and death and destruction increase, we as scientists have been developing new and improved methods to process scenes - from super glue to RUVIS systems, where no processing is needed at all. We have advanced our skills to heights that cops who started 25 years ago could not even imagine. Quincy, a wonderful fairytale in its day, has been replaced with CSI (which is a wonderful fairytale in our day). Yet, through all the glory and advancements, we still pull out our print kits, just as technicians did 25 years ago, to look for the mysterious and wonderful latent print.

Yes, it is true that black powder is messy. Well ok, it's down right dirty. How many times have you come back from the field to blow your nose, and you could not tell what the original color of the Kleenex was. Or, you wake up the next morning and take a shower and you still have black on your hands, wrists, and elbows. My favorite

is when you drive up to a recovered stolen vehicle on a nice breezy day, and the officer says that "the bad guy touched everything". I feel like a golf pro. First, I check for wind direction, and then ask the officer to stand down wind (a little forensic humor). When I find the latent, I wait for the wind to die down so I can get the tape onto the card. "There has to be a better way" is always said, and then you realize you got great prints off of the point of entry. So you go on and gripe, but you know this is the real deal.

Black powder has been improved over the years. Black/Gray Powder is my favorite improvement. Let us not forget the magnetic powder and wand. Not one counter top or piece of paper is safe when I have that in my arsenal. Florescent powder and the alternate light source are finding a place in most labs and large crime scenes. And then there is, the unwanted child by most, the white powder to be used on black surfaces. I find that only crime scene technicians who do not look at latents like this method. Personally, I took all the white powder I had but one jar, and threw it away. I kept the one jar to be put in a police museum one day.

But let's be serious for a mo-

ment. I have talked to many of my peers regarding the processing of burglary crime scenes and have found that the responsibility has fallen mostly on the road officer. The dedicated officer is delegated to throwing powder and finding prints with the only tool we trust him with, Black Powder. But, with this excellent collection method of developing fingerprints, we hardly give the zone jockey any training in the advance techniques of retrieving latent prints. For instance, they need training in such methods as the double lift off of dirty and messy print areas or using the pencil eraser on porous areas to get that tape on the surface, or the rebreathing technique so that the faint print will be clear and be of better quality. Black Powder is a friend of all, but the way you use it is the enemy of the bad guy.

In conclusion, all this can be summed up quite simply. The new equipment and training are great for the lab and for major crime scenes, but for 90% of our workload, Black Powder with a brush is the KING of the forensic mountain.

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Carol F. Smith was the 2001 recipient of the Frank A. Reinhart Scholarship award. She was presented with a \$500.00 check for her educational endeavors.

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**Congratulations to Carol on her outstanding educational accomplishments and best wishes for a very successful future.**