

Inside Jerry Seinfeld's intimate wedding

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People

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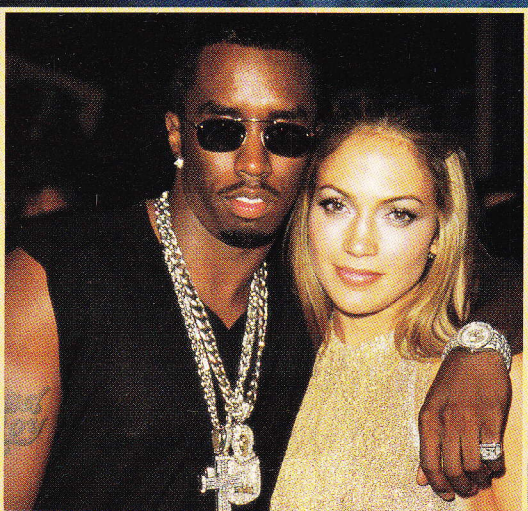
Jennifer Lopez
& Puff Daddy

HER HIGH-RISK ROMANCE

Their night out ends in
gunfire, a police chase, his
arrest—and lots of questions



Jerry and new bride Jessica S



Lopez (right) at the Grammy Awards in 1999
and (inset) with Sean "Puffy" Combs
last September in New York City



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AOL Keyword: People

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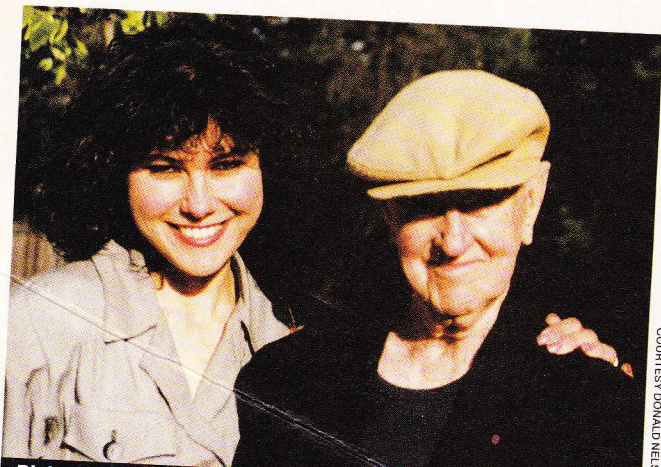
"She's just a good person,"
a pal says of Faron (at work).
"They don't come any better."

A Passion for Justice

Thanks to dogged private eye Fay Faron, clan members are charged in a murder plot

Priate detective Fay Faron had already concluded that Angela Bufford was a killer. But when she finally came face-to-face with the seductive brunette in 1993—at the home of an elderly man whom Faron feared Bufford was poisoning—she saw just how cool and controlled her suspect could be. "Bufford told me he

Now, presumably, Bufford is feeling the heat. Arrested in 1997—along with her boyfriend George Lama, 41, her brother Danny Tene, 37, and their 59-year-old mother, Mary Steiner—Bufford, 39, has spent the past two years in jail awaiting trial on charges of fraud, elder abuse and conspiracy to commit murder. And though it took years for San Francisco police to act on Faron's warnings, the



Richard Nelson (with Angela Bufford in 1993) didn't want to leave her, but his anxious family believed he was being poisoned.

COURTESY DONALD NELSON



Bufford preferred old men with expensive homes (like Hughes's).



Hughes told pals Bufford was his girlfriend.

COURTESY KOHMO TV



Bufford (with George Lama at Lake Tahoe) was "cool as a cucumber," says Faron.

COURTESY JERRY LAMA

Bufford's family belongs to the Tene-Bimbo Gypsy clan, whose penchant for larceny and violence was illuminated in Peter Maas's 1975 book *King of the Gypsies*. Faron began digging into the apparent Bufford scam in 1992, when an elderly San Francisco woman hired her to look into the past of Danny Tene, who had charmed her into putting his name on the deed to her home only months after he had befriended her. Faron's research led her to Tene's mother, Mary Steiner, who had gotten her last name—along with a \$300,000 duplex—from her husband of four years, Philip Steiner, who had died at 91 in 1987. By 1986, Mary had befriended Konstantin Liotweizen, an 88-year-old Russian immigrant who promptly took ill. Steiner became Liotweizen's caretaker, and when he died in 1989, her name was on the deed of his apartment house, now valued at more than \$1 million, in a leafy San Francisco neighborhood.

When public documents dating back to 1984 showed that Steiner's daughter Angela had followed the same pattern—acquiring the name Bufford, along with a \$225,000 home, from an 87-year-old husband who had died one month after their 1984 wedding—Faron felt a chill. "I thought, 'We've got a family of serial murderers on our hands,'" she says.

Determined to bring Bufford and her clan to justice, Faron had gotten in touch with Greg Ovanessian and Daniel Yawczak of the San Francisco Police Department fraud unit, which had been tracking the family since the early '90s. But the cops said they didn't have the evidence to make an arrest. "Nobody was doing anything," Faron says. "I just felt these old people needed to be protected, and I wasn't going to quit until they were."

Continuing her investigation on her own, Faron met Jocelyn Nash, 70, from nearby Richmond, Calif. Nash's 85-year-old mother, Helen Mitchell, had signed a document granting Bufford co-ownership of her home shortly after meeting her at a cafe. But when Nash confronted Bufford angrily, the younger woman backed off, agreeing to renounce her ownership claim. "My mother was a very sweet, lonely and vulnerable person," Nash says. "It really hurt Mom when Angela walked out of her life. She cried."

Mitchell fared much better than some of the others who allegedly became Bufford's marks. Bufford's boyfriend's brother Jerry Lama, 42, told Faron that once Bufford and pals had control of their victims' finances, he believed they were hastening the elderly men's demise by poisoning them. Police say they were poisoned with digitalis, a hard-to-trace medication that, in large doses, can be lethal. When Faron's trips to the legal archives revealed that Bufford and Lama were acquiring the property of Harry Glover Hughes, 93, and Richard Nelson, 93 (the man Faron had been trying to warn when she first encountered Bufford), she began

digging through the men's trash for evidence. "I knew two men were being poisoned," she says. "I couldn't sleep at night."

Always a restless soul, Faron, the younger child of an Arizona state official and his homemaker wife, had years before dropped out of Arizona State University to explore the U.S. Moving to San Francisco in 1976, Faron started a monogramming business, which she sold in the early '80s. But when she sued a man who had sold her a leaky houseboat, Faron saved on legal fees by doing her own investigating. She liked it so much she started a detective agency, named Rat Dog Dick after a particularly stubborn breed. "I'm very persistent," she explains.

By 1994, after months of poring over public records, questioning witnesses and collecting potentially incriminating food scraps, Faron had persuaded police to alert the relatives of the two men Bufford and Lama were relieving of cash and expensive presents. Nelson escaped with his life. Hughes (who allegedly had digitalis in his blood, though he had never been issued a prescription for it) suffered a stroke that would eventually kill him. And though the *Oakland Tribune* published a story on the case that June, three more years passed before San Francisco D.A. Terence Hallinan brought the case to a grand jury. "Faron," says John Shanley, who was spokesman for the D.A.'s office at the time, "played a key role in beating the

drum on this and tying the pieces together."

Now, though investigators say they have found traces of digitalis in the bodies of the three men the clan is accused of conspiring to murder, Shanley admits the years of delay have left the prosecution with a case that's "less than ideal." In fact, Bufford's defense attorney Robert Sheridan says the case is nonexistent. "It's supposed to be a murder-by-poisoning case," he scoffs. "But it's missing the poison and it's missing the murder."

Still, this much is incontestable: At least four elderly people, for one reason or another, surrendered their belongings to Bufford and her clan, and three of them soon lost their lives. "These people may have singled out elderly people and inveigled a way into their lives for the purpose of acquiring property," concedes Steiner's lawyer Douglas Schmidt. "Is that criminally wrong? No. Is it morally wrong? I don't know."

Faron, however, believes she does know—and is determined to do something about it. She recently founded a nonprofit group, ElderAngels, to investigate scams aimed at elderly victims. Author Jack Olsen, whose book *Hastened to the Grave: The Gypsy Murder Investigation* describes the Bufford case, believes Faron is perfectly cast in the role of protector. "She has a central neurosis," he says, "an abhorrence of injustice."

- Peter Ames Carlin
- Meg Grant in San Francisco



Faron (feeding pizza to Beans) writes a syndicated advice column ("It's a cross between Dear Abby and Nancy Drew," she says).