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Lunch with private eye Snowdy: Guergis fallout 'could have been a lot worse'

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WATCH ABOVE: Derrick Snowdy talks about the fallout from the Helena Guergis affair.

TORONTO – Derrick Snowdy is the private investigator who was thrust into the public eye during the “busty hookers” scandal allegedly involving former Conservative MP Helena Guergis.

But he’s also a connoisseur of corned beef.

So when he has the time – when he’s not stuck doing surveillance

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in his Chevy Tahoe, eating emergency granola while he waits with a Warren Zevon biography – he tries to get to Moe Pancer’s Deli in North York.

An imposing yet gregarious presence in a black Adidas shirt, with a salt-and-pepper goatee and clear blue eyes, Snowdy orders a corned beef sandwich, medium-fatty, with double potato salad, hold the coleslaw, and a jar of Keen’s hot mustard on the side.

He looks at his guest across the table. “She can have my pickle,” he informs the waitress.

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A few days earlier, Snowdy had asked if I had a curfew – only slightly worrying, considering we meet at 11 a.m.

But this is how he rolls, never quite knowing.

“Some days you’re shadowing an individual, you’re living their life and their schedule,” says Snowdy, 42, a divorced dad of two who lives in the affluent Toronto suburb of Oakville, Ont.

“You’re at their mercy.”

Snowdy does not focus on politics per se. He’s more interested in “process investigations” involving regulations and oversight – mostly for corporate clients. One of Snowdy’s current cases

revolves around rail safety, but a court-ordered injunction prevents him from saying much.

What he doesn't do is "the typical cheating spouse crap."

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“Half the time what they want is a hit man,” he says, in a tone that suggests he is only half-joking.

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On this particular blistering summer's day, Snowdy will visit a downtown courthouse, witness an ill patient's dying declaration, and drive by what seems like an endless number of parking lots – including that of Rob Ford's campaign office.

Some of his tasks are routine private investigator stuff. He's not above rifling through trash – dumpster diving – to access documents, or trailing someone for days on end.

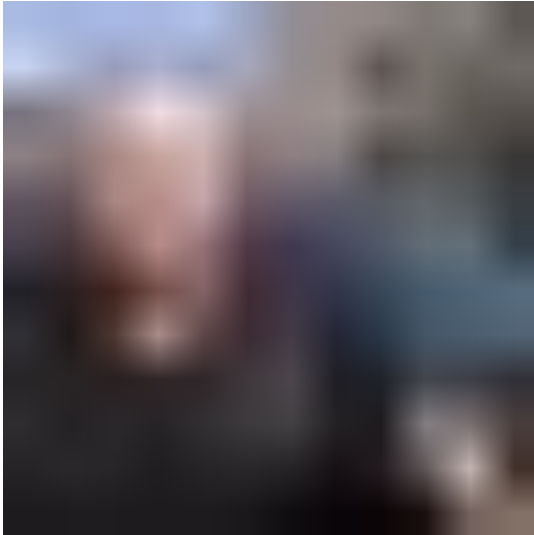
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But he does get caught up in some controversial cases from time to time.

“A lot of people won't go near certain files because they think that the person they're investigating is either too connected, too

powerful,” Snowdy says.

“I’ve never let that stop me.”



Derrick Snowdy poses with his Chevy Tahoe in downtown Toronto. (Laura Stone/Global News).

‘Extremely troubling circumstances’

It has been more than four years since the Guergis affair, which involved [unconfirmed allegations](#) of fraud, cocaine and prostitutes.

The RCMP investigated and found no wrongdoing, but not before Guergis was forced to resign from the Tory caucus. She ran as an independent in 2011 but lost her southwestern Ontario seat to Conservative Kellie Leitch.

Guergis has called the allegations [“absolutely false.”](#)

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Snowdy became involved because he was investigating Nazim Gillani, who had business ties to Guergis' husband, former MP Rahim Jaffer. A [Toronto Star investigation](#) documented their relationship, including allegations made by Gillani that Jaffer had claimed to "open up the Prime Minister's Office" – a claim Jaffer later denied.

A card-carrying Conservative, Snowdy contacted the party's lawyer Arthur Hamilton about Guergis.

"I knew a couple hours before anybody else did that (Guergis) was resigning," Snowdy claims. He assures he's never accepted a cheque from a political party.

"It's been a very surreal journey, the story that just won't go away."

Hamilton later told police there was an apparent video of Guergis snorting cocaine off the breasts of a prostitute.

Snowdy says that particular detail was the result of "broken telephone."

He says he spoke with Hamilton and their "careful conversation" led to the possibility of a video of Jaffer, Guergis and Gillani together at Sassafraz restaurant in Toronto's tony Yorkville neighbourhood.

But Snowdy says he never confirmed to Hamilton such a video existed.

"I finally said, 'Look, if you want me to assure you that nobody has a

video of her doing rails of blow off some hooker's tit, I can't guarantee you that doesn't exist," Snowdy says.



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“And that’s how the conversation got started.”

Snowdy later testified at a Parliamentary committee he had no evidence or information about Guergis.

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Guergis’ lawyer, Stephen Victor, said in an email he would not be responding to this story. Hamilton did not return request for comment.

In 2012, Guergis sued Snowdy, Hamilton, and Prime Minister Stephen Harper, among others.

Former MP Helena Guergis must pay \$118,560 in legal costs to Harper and others she tried to sue

The lawsuit originally alleged defamation, conspiracy, infliction of mental suffering and negligence.

In court, Harper's lawyer called Guergis' claim "gibberish" and "a fiction." [The claim against Harper and the Conservative party was quashed](#) by the Ontario Court of Appeal in June 2013.

Guergis [has since dropped all](#) but Hamilton, his law firm Cassels Brock and Heritage Minister Shelly Glover from the lawsuit.

(Guergis claims Hamilton breached solicitor-client privilege, and that Glover defamed her. None of the allegations has been proven in court.)

Hamilton and Cassel Brock's lawyer, Paul Le Vay, did not respond to a request for comment, but told the *Ottawa Citizen* that the suit is without merit and his client will continue to vigorously defend the matter.

For his part, Snowdy says he's "really disappointed" Guergis decided not to pursue legal action against him.

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"I always knew it was never going to go anywhere. The truth of what transpired is wildly unpalatable to most people," he says.

He claims the RCMP only investigated a small window of allegations regarding Jaffer and Guergis. He says there are still questions about the nature of [business transactions allegedly conducted](#) by Jaffer in Guergis' office, as well as [dealings in China](#) that Snowdy documented in court in 2012.

A lawyer who previously represented Jaffer did not immediately respond to an email from Global News.

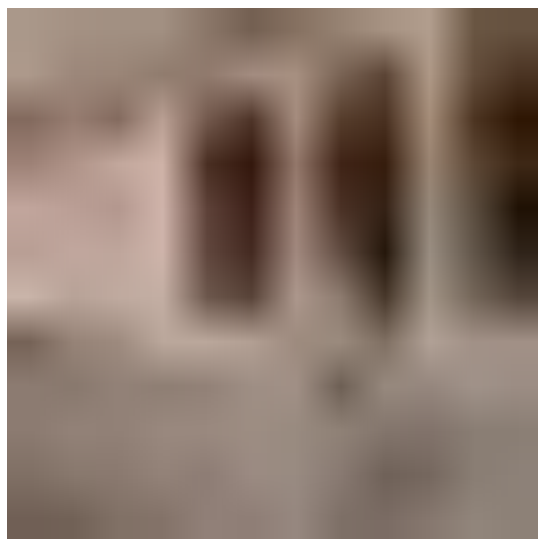
Jaffer has denied lobbying the government on behalf of his company, using parliamentary perks for business or doing illegal drugs.

Nevertheless, Snowdy maintains Guergis is lucky.

“There were extremely troubling circumstances, and I think (Guergis) should be grateful the way it ended up the way it did. It could have been a lot worse,” Snowdy says.

What else is there?

“There’s lots,” he laughs.



Snowdy in Guinea-Bissau in 2010 outside the presidential palace where Joao Bernardo Vieira was killed. (Handout/Derrick Snowdy).

Derrick Snowdy

Bouncing back from bankruptcy

At the request of one of Snowdy's clients, we're driving through the parking lot of Rob Ford's campaign office, located in a strip mall in Scarborough, looking for a yellow convertible.

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But Snowdy doesn't see it. So we do the next logical thing.

"Want to stop and get a bobblehead doll?"

The sparse office is decorated with Ford Nation paraphernalia, and a boy of about 10 is working the phones.

A volunteer asks for Snowdy's name and address.

"Kevin Robinson," he replies, without hesitation. "2345 Enfield Pl., Mississauga, L4Y 3Y9." He adds something about us getting away "from the kids."

Snowdy remembers all of his aliases – some one-offs, others part of a more consistent identity.

"If I'm ever asked, a month from now, what was the information I gave, I can tell you exactly who it is. Even though I've never used that name before and I never will," he says.

“I can drum it off like that, because I now associate those details with that address.”

Born in Germany to a father in the air force, Snowdy lived in six provinces by the time he was 16. He also has Indian status through Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg First Nation in Quebec, even though he’s never set foot on the territory.

He credits his nomadic upbringing as his inspiration to investigate. “I liked pulling the stuff apart,” he says.

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Snowdy got his start in the security business more than 20 years ago, working jobs in the entertainment industry, personal protection and transporting valuable goods.

“We spent a lot of hours on the road late at night, nothing but my stereo and my gun.”

His work has taken him to Beirut, Guinea-Bissau in West Africa, Bahamas and Jamaica. He once worked security for a building on Church Street in Toronto, where he says he met Luka Magnotta. The accused killer filed numerous police reports about being stalked – using unique sets of handwriting.

Snowdy went on to run a large national security company. But it went bust in 2007 after a dispute between Snowdy and his former

business partner. Both have sued and counter-sued.

In 2009, Snowdy filed for personal bankruptcy with more than [\\$13.3 million in liabilities](#). The bulk of Snowdy's bankruptcy filing consisted of an \$11 million lawsuit from his former partner, as well as \$2 million owed to the Canadian Revenue Agency, which Snowdy claims he didn't know was missing.

He now has a soft spot for fraud cases, offering his services for a reduced price, or for free. "I take that personally," he says.

Snowdy's bankruptcy filing came to light as the Guergis affair blew up. His private life crumbled.

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"The marriage took a beating over the Guergis thing and pretty much finalized it. That was kind of the final straw," he says. He has a daughter, 7, and four-year-old son.

He seems to revel in the attention the Guergis case has brought him, even as he rebuffs it. "I'm staying out of it. My name was nowhere near it and it really did have nothing to do with me."

Snowdy now runs a small company with a handful of people, but refuses to divulge its name. He keeps all his files in a storage locker.

“I don’t need to go looking for clients. I’m very particular when it comes to whom I work for.”

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(An Ontario ministry of community safety and correctional services spokesman confirmed Snowdy has a private investigator’s licence “in good standing.”)

He doesn’t regret how things turned out for him.

No longer at the helm of a national company with hundreds of employees and major clients, Snowdy is back doing what he loves – driving around town, checking out leads, filling up on corned beef when he has the time.

“I have no desire to ever have a big company. Never. Never never never. You get away from the thing that you love doing just to run the day-to-day business. You lose yourself,” he says, as he weaves through the streets of downtown Toronto.

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“I like the chase. I like the hunt. I like the game.”

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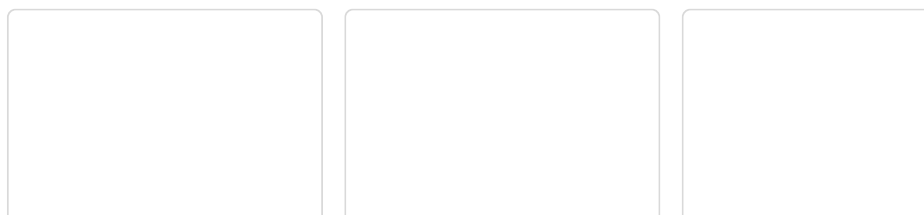
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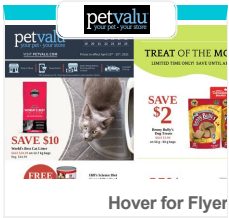
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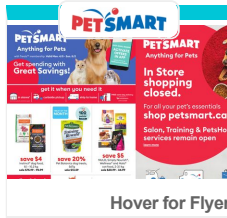
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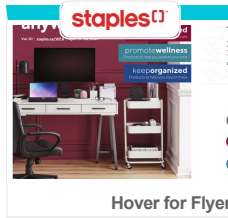
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