TWELVE

SO MANY VICTIMS

Twenty-seven-year-old Kendall Francois lived with his parents and his younger sister on a quiet tree-lined street in Poughkeepsie, New York. His ramshackle green house was located near downtown on Fulton Avenue, just a stone's throw from the ivy-draped halls of Vassar College, and it was two blocks from a sleazy area of Main Street where prostitutes regularly plied their trade.

On September 1, 1998, Poughkeepsie police got a frantic phone call from a woman who claimed she had just been attacked by Francois while they were seated in his car. The police arrested the 6-foot, 4-inch, 300-pound out-of-work school custodian. They soon became aware that he might have committed much more than a single assault. Based on statements he made while being interrogated and after police discovered that he had recently served 15 days for assaulting a prostitute, Francois was charged with eight brutal murders committed over a 2-year period, beginning in 1996. All of the victims had been reported missing, all but one had been arrested for prostitution, most were drug users, and none was a college student.

Indeed, the residents of Poughkeepsie, an economically depressed center of manufacturing with a population of some 40,000, had been on edge because of the string of missing women. Francois's arrest brought relief not only to the victims' families and friends but also to residents of the Poughkeepsie community generally. The fact that the missing women were drug users and hookers kept the city's residents from experiencing collective hysteria. The Vassar campus was no exception. Students and faculty members there were relieved when

the killer was apprehended, but his killing spree had never held the campus in the grip of terror. Francois hadn't gone after college students, only prostitutes.

Not unlike other prolific serial killers, Francois had murdered his eight victims in one place and then disposed of their bodies in another place. After strangling his victims in his car, he carried each of their bodies to his home on Fulton Street, where he hid them in various sections of the house. The stench eventually was noticed by neighbors. It became so putrid by the time of his arrest that the police who searched the premises were forced to wear masks and jumpsuits. Still, family members who shared the house with Francois were genuinely surprised when they later learned of the murders. They simply did not suspect that the odor was that of decomposing bodies. To admit this to themselves, they would first have had to acknowledge that a murderer was living among them.

On August 7, 2000, Judge Thomas Dolan of County Court sentenced Francois to eight consecutive life terms without parole eligibility, but his punishment had a medical aspect as well. It was revealed that the killer had tested HIV-positive; he may have contracted HIV from one of the women he had murdered. Disappointed that the killer had not received a death sentence, the daughter of one victim called the news "poetic justice."

VULNERABLE VICTIMS PREFERRED

As Kendall Francois knew all too well, prostitutes are especially vulnerable to sexual predators because of the accessibility required by their trade, and this vulnerability explains their extremely high rate of victimization by serial killers and their extremely large body counts. A sexual sadist can cruise a red-light district, shopping around for the woman who best conforms to his deadly sexual fantasies. When he finds her, she willingly complies with his wishes . . . until it is too late.

Because of these risk factors, prostitute slayings have occurred in cities across the country—in Rochester, New York; in Seattle, Washington; in New Bedford, Massachusetts; in San Diego, California; in Detroit, Michigan; and in dozens of other locales. Even when it is widely known that a killer is prowling the streets, far too many prostitutes place profit over protection, hoping or assuming that they can avoid death. Some see no other life for themselves, particularly if they have expensive drug habits to support.

The ease with which prostitutes can be targeted explains why their slayings have resulted in some of the largest body counts amassed by serial killers. On October 9, 2002, Robert Lee Yates, Jr., was sentenced to death by lethal injection for murdering 24-year-old Melinda Mercer and 35-year-old La Fontaine Ellis in Tacoma, Washington. The 50-year-old former Army helicopter pilot and father of five became the 11th resident of Washington State Penitentiary's death row in Walla Walla, the same prison where he had once worked as a guard. Two years earlier, Yates had confessed to committing 13 more murders since 1975, most of them in Spokane County. All but one of his victims were women who had ties to prostitution, illicit drugs, or both.

In an earlier negotiation with authorities, Yates had avoided the death penalty in a plea agreement designed to provide a degree of closure not only to law enforcement but also to the families of the victims. In one case, for example, Yates drew a map that led the police to unearth a body that he had buried in a shallow grave in the yard of his Spokane home.

In April, 2000, Yates was arrested for the August, 1997, slaying of 16-year-old runaway Jennifer Joseph. In May, the prosecution filed seven additional counts of murder and one count of attempted murder and robbery for a 1998 attack on 32-year-old Christine Smith, who survived a gunshot wound to the head. Yates was linked to these other killings by DNA and other physical evidence. In July, he was charged in Pierce County with two additional counts of murder.

Yates was known to have cruised Spokane's red-light district in his white 1977 Corvette. Joseph was last seen in August, 1977, in what witnesses described as a light-colored Corvette driven by a white man. Later, over a period of several months, the police pulled over Yates's sports car on several occasions along the strip where prostitutes worked and in an area where a body had been found. At a stop in November, 1998, he had a known prostitute in the passenger's seat of his car.

At first, Yates was only one of hundreds of potential suspects. After a tense conversation in the police precinct, he refused to give the police a blood sample for DNA analysis. Then, the police tracked down his Corvette, which he had sold in May, 1998. As it happened, the car yielded substantial physical evidence implicating Yates. Carpet fibers from the car were matched with fibers found on Jennifer Joseph's shoes as well as with a towel left near her remains. In addition, a button made of mother-of-pearl was matched to one missing from Joseph's jacket. Blood was found on the seat and seat belt of

Yates's Corvette. In the end, DNA proved to be the conclusive evidence linking Yates to at least 12 of the slayings.

Yates was a prolific serial killer, to be sure, but even his body count pales by comparison with that amassed by Gary Ridgway. On November 5, 2003, in a tense King County, Washington, courtroom, 52-year-old Ridgway pled guilty to 48 counts of murder. The longtime truck painter confessed to being the notorious Green River Killer, a man who seemed to kill with impunity, taking the lives of dozens of prostitutes while staying on the loose for two decades. Forensic evidence linked Ridgway to seven of the killings, for which he assumed responsibility.

Most of Ridgway's victims were slain in the early 1980s. Between January and July of 1982, the strangled bodies of four women, ages 16 to 27, were recovered from areas in or around Seattle's Green River. On July 15, two boys riding their bicycles across the Meeker Street bridge in Kent spotted the body of a fully clothed girl floating in a stream. She was later identified by the police as a 16-year-old middle school dropout and runaway. She had been strangled to death.

The bodies of three more women were dragged from the Green River on August 15, 1982. The remains of still another woman were recovered in the woods of nearby Maple Valley on May 8, 1983. All four of these victims had been asphyxiated.

The victim list attributable to the Green River Killer continued to grow, causing local police investigators to focus more and more attention and resources on these unsolved prostitute slayings. A task force was convened, the FBI offered its assistance, and a national telethon was aired to encourage the public to phone in tips. FBI profilers suggested that the killer was likely a white man in his 30s or 40s who had unresolved issues with the women in his life and had spent a good deal of time in the woods.

Police investigators had questioned Ridgway in 1987. At that time, they were able to secure a sample of his saliva by having the suspect chew on a piece of gauze. This evidence was preserved for almost 15 years, until DNA technology became more effective and reliable. It was Ridgway's DNA, taken from that saliva sample, that finally connected him, years later, to seven of the Green River murders and sealed his fate.

Using only evidence linking the defendant with the deaths of seven prostitutes, the state of Washington easily could have secured the death penalty for Ridgway, but instead prosecutors asked for a sentence of life imprisonment.

The plea bargain that spared Ridgway's life was designed to ease the suffering of the victims' loved ones. In return for a life sentence, the killer agreed to cooperate with police authorities in helping them to locate the bodies of his victims, to reveal the identity of his victims, and to close their cold cases.

The Green River Killer also explained his motivation for victimizing prostitutes. Not only did it serve him physically and psychologically, but his plan also was designed specifically to avoid capture (*State of Washington v. Gary Leon Ridgway*, 2003):

> I picked prostitutes as my victims because I hate most prostitutes and did not want to pay them for sex. I also picked prostitutes as victims because they were easy to pick up without being noticed. I knew they would not be reported missing. I picked prostitutes because I thought I could kill as many of them as I wanted without getting caught.
>
> Another part of my plan was where I put the bodies of these women. Most of the time I took the women's jewelry and their clothes to get rid of any evidence and make them harder to identify. I placed most of the bodies in groups which I call "clusters." I did this because I wanted to keep track of all the women I killed. I liked to drive by the "clusters" around the county and think about the women I placed there. I usually used a landmark to remember a "cluster" and the women I placed there. Sometimes I killed and dumped a woman, intending to start a new "cluster," and never returned because I thought I might get caught putting more women there.

The plea bargain with the Green River Killer raises a question that was troubling to those who believe that consistency is required in the administration of justice. If the state of Washington refuses to execute someone who admits to killing 48 human beings, how can it ever again administer the death penalty?

The vulnerability of prostitutes derives in part from their willingness to get into automobiles with total strangers and the lack of response from the larger community. The vulnerability of one additional class of victims—young boys and girls—stems both from their naïveté and their small size. For decades, pedophiles—adults who desire sexual relations with children—have capitalized on the ease with which many children can be deceived by a contrived story or ruse. Even the most streetwise child will not necessarily think twice about going with someone impersonating a police officer. Other children can be grabbed easily, so that their attempts to flee are futile.

By the time he was 27 years old, Wesley Allan Dodd had logged years of experience in molesting and raping young boys. Dodd started out, as a teenager,

by exposing himself in public. As he grew into adulthood, that simply wasn't enough to gratify him. His sexual desire for young boys continued to escalate. "[Exposing myself] wasn't fun anymore," recalled Dodd. "I needed more physical contact. I started tricking kids into touching me. Then that wasn't fun anymore so I started molesting kids" (Public Broadcasting Service, 1993).

At first, Dodd's passion was purely sexual; he never felt compelled to murder any of his victims. Because many of his young victims reported him, Dodd had had numerous brushes with the law, and he had served 4 months of a 10-year sentence in an Idaho prison. Upon his release from custody, he was determined to stay out of the joint. He had no intention to "go straight," however, only to avoid apprehension.

"In Seattle, June 13, 1987, I tried to kidnap a boy," said Dodd. "My intentions, at this point, were to kidnap him, rape him, and kill him so that he couldn't report me" (Public Broadcasting Service, 1993). He realized at that point that murder would be a necessary evil to enable him to continue his career of rape and molestation. However, the boy he accosted in Seattle screamed his way to freedom, sending Dodd back to prison for another short stay.

Dodd had to prepare himself mentally—to "psych himself up"—to cross the line into homicide. "I wasn't sure that I could kill, so in my mind I had to fantasize about it. To be able to kill, I had to make that thought exciting," Dodd explained. "And in a matter of just a couple of weeks . . . I was ready to kill" (Cable News Network, 1993).

After his release, Dodd was prepared to try again to abduct and molest young boys, and this time he was determined not to fail. His first murder occurred during the Labor Day weekend of 1989. Dodd accosted 11-year-old Cole Neer and his 10-year-old brother Billy as they rode their bikes through a park in Vancouver, Washington. Dodd stabbed both children to death after molesting the older boy. A month later, he abducted 4-year-old Lee Iseli from a playground, molested him, and then hanged him by a rope in a bedroom closet. Dodd clearly had developed a taste for murder; he was totally hooked. In his own words, "I became obsessed with [killing]. That's all I thought about 24 hours a day. I was dreaming about it at night, constantly all day at work, all I thought about was killing kids" (Public Broadcasting Service, 1993).

Fortunately, Dodd had neither the skill nor the luck of more prolific serial killers. Two weeks after the Iseli murder, Dodd was again on the prowl. He attempted to abduct a boy from a movie theater bathroom, but his victim started screaming frantically. Dodd managed to wrestle the boy into his car.

The vehicle was in poor mechanical shape, however, and not equipped for a quick getaway. Unable to accelerate, Dodd was captured only two blocks from the theater. On January 15, 1993, following months of intense publicity surrounding his unusual choice of mode of execution, Dodd was hanged at the state penitentiary in Walla Walla, in eastern Washington State.

The vulnerability of certain groups of victims rests not so much in their naïveté, accessibility, or small stature but in the sense that serial killers can prey upon them with relative impunity. As one example, when extinguishing the lives of elderly nursing home residents, a caretaker can capitalize on the normalcy of death in such an environment; moreover, a thrill killer, when trolling for prostitutes along a red-light strip, can be reasonably assured that the disappearances of his victims, because of their typically transient lifestyle, will not immediately be deemed foul play. Society devalues women and men who sell their bodies. The capture of their killer, therefore, often takes low priority; and the killer knows this. Some serial killers, moreover, select other marginal groups—among them minorities, immigrants, and homosexuals—in the expectation that the public and police responses will be muted. If nothing else, serial murderers are opportunists, and they seek out conditions that will allow them to kill repeatedly without detection or apprehension.

CATCHING THE SERIAL KILLER

There is a long-standing myth, which consistently runs through popular television shows and mystery novels, that serial killers, at least at some level, wish to get caught. According to this view, serial killers—even the most sociopathic—actually *do* have a conscience strong enough to affect their behavior; they subconsciously leave clues to their crimes so that they will be punished for their sins. This notion dates back years, at least to the 1946 case of William Heirens, the so-called "lipstick killer," who scrawled a message for the Chicago police on the apartment wall of one of his victims, "For heavens sake catch me before I kill more I cannot control myself" (S. L. Scott, n.d., 1).

Unlike Heirens, most serial killers do everything they can to avoid getting caught. They are clever and careful: When it comes to murder, they are brilliantly resourceful. They methodically stalk their victims for the best opportunity to strike so as not to be seen, and they cleverly dump the bodies far away from the crime scene so as not to leave any clues. The cool and calculating manners in

which many sociopaths cover their tracks arise out of the fearlessness that typifies this personality type. They respond unemotionally and without panic to the prospect of capture, undeterred by the risk of apprehension.

A self-selection process operates to separate the coolheaded men from the hot-tempered boys. If killers like Cunanan and Dahmer weren't so adept at killing and covering their trail, they never would have remained on the streets long enough to qualify as serial killers.

Murders committed by serial killers—at least the methodical ones—typically are difficult to solve because of lack of motive and useful evidence. Unlike the usual homicide, which involves an offender and victim who know one another, sexually motivated serial murders are almost exclusively committed by strangers. Thus, the usual police strategy of identifying suspects—boyfriends, neighbors, or coworkers—by examining their possible motives, be they jealousy, revenge, or greed, generally helps very little. With no such clear-cut motive, there are no immediate suspects.

After his 1995 arrest in the state of Oregon, Keith Jesperson, the notorious Happy Face Killer, explained the elaborate planning that permitted him to stay on the loose while he murdered at least eight women in a number of states. Jesperson's advice, in his own words, to aspiring serial killers was to put time and distance between them and their victims (Kamb, 2003, p. A1):

> Meet a victim one place, dump her someplace else—in another town, another county, another state—somewhere no one is looking for the missing. But you don't have to take it 20 miles away to dump it. You can put a body in the dumpster next door if you feel comfortable that no one can pin it on you. That's why it's best to take strangers, victims who can't be linked to you.

In Gainesville, Florida, in August of 1990, a large task force investigating the murders of five college students had a wealth of crime-scene evidence for the lab to analyze, including pubic hairs and semen. For months, the task force operated on a "pubes and tubes" strategy, collecting hair and blood samples from hundreds of "donors"—just about anyone who could have had a connection to the crime. When seeking a stranger who had no prior relationship to the victims, however, this hunt for the killer was like searching for a needle in a haystack. The high-profile character of the Gainesville murders, furthermore, made for a huge haystack of "suspects"; in addition, well-intentioned citizens from around the country phoned in the names of unscrupulous or sleazy people they thought might be involved.

The Gainesville investigation team was fortunate to have plenty of clues—perhaps more than they needed. Other serial murder investigations have very little evidence of a tangible nature to go on. The more successful serial killers transport their victims from the scene of the murder to a remote dump site or makeshift grave. The police may never locate the body and thus never determine that a homicide has occurred. Even if the bodies of the victims do eventually turn up at a dump site, most of the potentially revealing forensic evidence remains at the scene of the slaying, perhaps in the killer's house or car. Without a suspect, the police do not know these locations. Moreover, any trace evidence, such as semen within the vagina and skin beneath the fingernails, left on the discarded body tends to erode as the corpse is exposed to rain, wind, heat, or snow as well as insects and animals.

In 1988, for example, the police in New Bedford, Massachusetts—some 50 miles south of Boston—were stymied by a profound lack of physical evidence in their hunt for a killer of at least nine prostitutes and drug users. The unidentified predator had abducted his victims from the sleazy Weld Square area of town and discarded their remains along highways in southeastern Massachusetts. By the time the decomposed bodies were discovered, the police had trouble putting names to the skeletal remains, much less to the killer.

To the present day, the New Bedford case remains unsolved. Some people have speculated that the killer recently may have taken up where he left off years earlier. In 2004, the murdered remains of three prostitutes from Worcester, Massachusetts, were discovered in a couple of desolate areas around the Boston metropolitan area. Any police efforts to link these killings with the New Bedford slayings some 16 years earlier would be problematic.

Given the extreme vulnerability of prostitutes, it should come as no surprise that serial killers often target them. Many of their murders go unsolved for long periods of time—months, years, even decades. A few are never solved. In fact, it would not be unexpected to find two or three serial killers independently targeting prostitutes in the same geographical region at about the same time.

Serial killers don't always travel great distances to remote mountainsides and densely wooded areas to dispose of evidence. John Wayne Gacy buried his victims in the crawl space under his suburban home. Jeffrey Dahmer tried to dissolve his dead companions in a barrel of acid that he kept in his Milwaukee apartment. In Detroit and neighboring Highland Park, Michigan, Benjamin

Atkins, 29, a homeless drug addict, confessed to killing 11 women in 1991 and 1992; he had dumped their bodies in vacant and abandoned buildings. In one particularly chilling discovery, the police found three corpses in the shower stalls of three different rooms of the boarded-up Monterey Motel.

BEHAVIORAL PROFILING

Common forensic approaches to tracking serial killers range from traditional fingerprinting to cutting-edge DNA analysis (genetic fingerprinting). A relatively new strategy for serial murder investigations is to exploit the crime scene in the search for psychological or behavioral clues. Psychological profiling has been used occasionally over the years by forensic psychiatrists, but since the early 1980s it has been enhanced by behavioral scientists at the FBI. Through behavioral assessment of crime scene photos, autopsy records, and police incident reports, FBI profilers compose a "portrait" that speculates on the killer's age, race, sex, marital status, employment status, sexual maturity, possible criminal record, relationship to the victim, and likelihood of committing future crimes.

At the core of its strategy, derived from its study of 36 killers (25 serial and 11 nonserial), the FBI profiling team distinguishes between organized and disorganized killers, the former being methodical or careful, and the latter being haphazard or frenzied (Ressler, Burgess, et al., 1985). The organized and disorganized types are distinguished by clusters of personal and social characteristics. The organized killer typically is intelligent, is socially and sexually competent, is of high birth order (one of the oldest children in the family), is a skilled worker, lives with a partner, is mobile, drives a late model car, and follows his crime in the media. The disorganized killer, on the other hand, generally is unintelligent, is socially and sexually inadequate, is of low birth order, is an unskilled worker, lives alone, is not mobile, drives an old car or does not own one, and has minimal interest in the news reports of his crimes (see Ressler, Burgess, & Douglas, 1988).

According to FBI analysts, the personality of a killer is reflected in his behavior at a crime scene. Organized and disorganized types tend to differ in terms of the manner in which they operate before, during, and after their crimes. Specifically, the organized killer uses restraints on his victims, hides or transports the body, removes weapons from the scene, sexually molests the victims

prior to death, and is methodical in his style of killing. In sharp contrast, the disorganized killer tends not to use restraints, leaves the body in full view, leaves a weapon at the scene, sexually molests the victim after death, and is spontaneous in his manner of killing. The task of profiling therefore involves drawing inferences from the crime scene to the behavioral characteristics of the killer.

Psychological profiles may be perfectly on target in novels and films such as *The Silence of the Lambs*, but they are only rough indicators in real life, even when constructed by the most skillful profilers at the FBI Academy in Quantico, Virginia. The profiles are intended to be tools to narrow the range of suspects rather than to point precisely to a particular suspect. Even in meeting this limited objective, the profiles are not always successful. In Baton Rouge, Louisiana, months after the police had linked several murders to a serial killer, the task force released details of an FBI profile of the unknown assailant. The profile described the killer as a strong man, 25 to 35 years of age, who was awkward in interacting with attractive women. The task force also speculated that the killer was white or Hispanic because of the racial pattern in his victim selection. Derrick Todd Lee, a muscular 34-year-old, eventually was arrested for the crimes. Friends and neighbors described him as "disarmingly charming" and "easy to get along with." Also contrary to the FBI profile, Lee was black.

The FBI's Unabomber profile, which guided the investigation of a series of bombings during the 1980s and 1990s, suggested that the perpetrator was in his mid-30s or early 40s, was a blue-collar worker possibly with some college education, and had resided in or around Chicago and later San Francisco. When Theodore Kaczynski was captured, he was in his 50s; he held a doctorate degree and lived as a hermit in Montana.

Profiling is more an imprecise craft than an exact science. Behavioral inferences from crime scene evidence cannot be made with substantial reliability. An FBI study revealed a 74% agreement rate in classifying crime scenes as organized or disorganized (see Ressler, Burgess, & Douglas, 1988). While this may seem impressive on the surface, it actually is deficient in view of the base rate of organized killers in the sample. Of 64 crime scenes classified in the FBI reliability study, 31 were organized and 21 disorganized, while 9 were mixed and 3 indeterminable. Thus, the 74% agreement rate is not much better than that for a strategy of classifying all scenes as "organized."

More to the point, the profiles have a very low rate of success in leading to the identity of a killer. Although psychological profiles work wonderfully in fiction, they are much less than a panacea in real life. Profiles are designed not

to solve cases but simply to provide an additional set of clues in cases found by local police to be difficult to solve. Moreover, one should not expect a high success rate; only the most difficult cases ever reach the attention of the FBI unit.

It is critical, therefore, that we maintain some perspective on the investigative value of psychological profiles. Simply put, a psychological profile cannot identify a suspect for investigation, nor can it eliminate a suspect who doesn't fit "the mold." Rather, a profile can assist in assigning subjective probabilities to suspects whose names surface through more usual investigative strategies (e.g., interviews of witnesses, canvassing of neighborhoods, and "tip" phone lines).

REDUCING LINKAGE BLINDNESS

One of the problems confronting the investigators in the 1988 New Bedford, Massachusetts, case was that the task force was not launched until months after the murders had begun. It was not until the fourth victim's body was found that the police determined that a serial killer was on the loose. Similarly, the three bodies of women from the Worcester, Massachusetts, area discovered in 2004 may have been deposited months, even years, earlier.

This time delay is not unusual. Before trying to solve a case, or even during investigations, police are not always certain that a serial killer is operating in their area. Serial killers do not always leave unmistakable and unique signatures at their crime scenes. Although some killers "specialize," others are far more versatile. A particular murderer may target a redhead on one occasion and a blonde on another—whomever is available. He may also vary his style or mode of killing, using a knife on one occasion and a club on another. His varying modus operandi may reflect not so much an attempt to confuse the police as a desire to experiment with different kinds of victims and different styles of killing. As a result, the police may not recognize multiple homicides as the work of the same perpetrator.

Moreover, some serial killings, even if consistent in modus operandi, cross jurisdictional boundaries. A killer might abduct a woman in Wyoming and duplicate the crime with another victim two states away, a problem characterized as linkage blindness (Egger, 1984).

To aid in the detection of serial murder cases that involve multiple jurisdictions, the FBI has designed and implemented a computerized database for

linking unsolved and bizarre homicides. The Violent Criminal Apprehension Program (VICAP) is designed to flag similarities in unsolved homicides around the country that might otherwise not be connected in the minds of investigative teams (Douglas & Munn, 1992; Howlett, Haufland, & Ressler, 1986).

Although it is an excellent concept in theory, VICAP has encountered numerous practical limitations in constructing a national clearinghouse of unsolved murder cases. First, the questionnaires that local police use to provide information for VICAP are long and complicated. Consequently, cooperation from local law enforcement agencies in reporting cases has been less than satisfactory. VICAP cannot link cases that are not reported to it. Furthermore, even with full participation by police agencies around the country, recognizing a pattern to unsolved murders in different states is not as easy as some people might believe, regardless of how powerful the computer used or how sophisticated the software.

Despite the problems encountered by the VICAP initiative, computers clearly are indispensable tools in managing homicide investigations. Large-scale investigative task forces rely heavily on them for information storage and retrieval. In a case that drags on for weeks or months, particularly when there are multiple victims and multiple crime scenes, the volume of information is nearly unmanageable without the use of technology. This is especially true in high-profile cases in which the public is encouraged (often with promise of reward) to call information in to a tip line.

The annals of law enforcement reveal many instances in which a large-scale investigation failed because certain key pieces of information were difficult to access, lost, or not relayed to the appropriate detectives. In recent years, software for indexing investigative data (including witness statements, tips, and field reports) has allowed detectives to query a database to link, for example, forensic analysis of tire tracks with a witness's statement about observing a truck leaving the scene of a crime.

Of course, a computer does only what police ordinarily do—tracking down leads and comparing information—but at lightning-fast speed. Recent advances in information database matching and artificial intelligence have assisted law enforcement in drawing critical clues from seemingly disparate and incomplete sources. For example, the "Coplink" program, designed by an Arizona-based software firm, searches and matches arrest records, emergency calls to 911, motor vehicle registration files, and other existing databases to help police track down information in a timely fashion. Coplink was installed

late in the Washington, D.C., sniper investigation—in fact, on the very day that the police closed in on the two suspects while they slept in their blue Chevrolet Caprice in a rest stop off Route 95. In response to investigators' request for a list of all vehicles stopped within a travel distance of 1 hour from any of the shooting sites, Coplink flagged the fact that the same blue Caprice was stopped by police at multiple post-shooting roadblocks.

LUCKY BREAKS

Although forensic investigation, psychological profiling, and VICAP all play integral roles in trying to apprehend serial killers, there is no substitute for old-fashioned detective work and a healthy dose of luck. In some cases, the police do get lucky because the killer slips up. He may begin to feel, after a while, that he is invincible and that the police cannot match his skill or cunning. He becomes complacent, lazy, and sloppy, and he starts to cut corners and take chances, which leads to his ultimate demise.

In June of 1993, the police in Mineola, Long Island, indeed got lucky. After stopping a motorist in the middle of the night because of a missing license plate, state troopers discovered a woman's body in the back of his gray pickup truck. The driver, 34-year-old Joel Rifkin, was on route to dump the body of his 17th victim.

In another case, Colin Ireland of London, England, thought he had all the bases covered, but ultimately he failed to work out every important detail. Over the course of several months in 1993, the 39-year-old Briton stalked and killed members of London's gay community without leaving a single useful clue. All of his five victims were gay men who engaged in sadomasochistic sex; Ireland capitalized on this fetish, binding and gagging his victims at will. Once secured in this manner, they were completely at his mercy.

Ireland was methodical. Before each murder, he emptied his pockets so that nothing would fall out and implicate him. After each, he spent hours wiping away the evidence, even destroying the clothes he wore at the scene of the crime. Despite his preparation and planning, however, Ireland made a fatal blunder: A security camera captured his presence as he walked behind his fifth and last victim at a subway station, just prior to the murder. Seeing his photo printed in a newspaper, Ireland panicked and came forward to confess.

The police have utilized a variety of behavioral, investigative, and scientific techniques designed to help identify and capture serial killers. On occasion, however, authorities have "lucked out" through inadvertent means. On December 12, 1983, Sheriff Pat Thomas of Sarpy County, Nebraska, was interviewed by the press concerning the murder and mutilation of two local boys, 13-year-old Danny Joe Eberle and 12-year-old Chris Walden. Talking with reporters about the murder investigation, Thomas referred to the unidentified killer as "sick, spineless, a coward," and as not having the guts to pick on someone his own size.

Little did Sheriff Thomas realize that the killer was closely following the progress of the investigation in the newspaper. Insulted by the sheriff's remark, 19-year-old John Joubert decided to prove that "he didn't just pick up little boys" (United Press International, 1984). He reacted by selecting an adult—a preschool teacher—as his next victim. Unlike the two murdered children, she was able to break away from her assailant, and she had the presence of mind to memorize the license number of his car. After her escape, she called the police. Joubert was apprehended and later convicted. As luck would have it, Joubert's vanity got the better of him.

Serial killers sometimes are apprehended after being linked to crimes or violations having little apparent connection to their killings. The discovery of human remains from dozens of victims at the Calaveras County, California, retreat of killer Leonard Lake occurred only after his partner, Charles Ng, was caught shoplifting from a hardware store. Serial killer Theodore Bundy was captured after being stopped in Florida on a traffic violation, and New York's "Son of Sam" killer, David Berkowitz, was identified after the task force investigating his murders followed up on a parking ticket issued to his car near one of his shooting sites. In these and other cases, the police appear to have capitalized on some degree of luck, but they benefited only because of their attention to detail: Luck does indeed favor the well prepared. Bundy's arrest resulted from a police officer doing his job correctly and being alert. Similarly, the lucky ticket associated with Berkowitz's vehicle would not have surfaced had detectives not decided to track down all tickets issued near each of the "Son of Sam" homicides. As in many areas of life, people made their own luck.