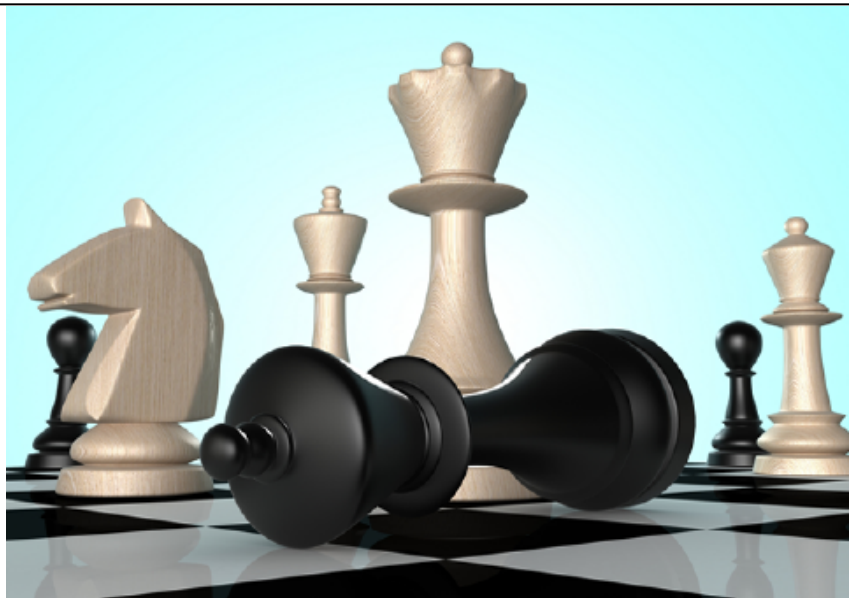


END GAME:

A Serial Killer's Search for Justice



ROGER BAINBRIDGE

**END GAME:
A SERIAL KILLER'S SEARCH FOR
JUSTICE**

A NOVEL

ROGER BAINBRIDGE



DARK HORSE PRESS

END GAME:

A SERIAL KILLER'S SEARCH FOR JUSTICE

This is a work of fiction, as the subject matter clearly suggests. Many of the events occur in real places but, even with these, I have taken the liberty of altering them to suit my requirements. The names of certain characters represent real people. It is hoped that none will take umbrage at the use of their names within the context of this book. No disrespect or disparagement is intended.

Cover image © Dejan Jovanovic | Dreamstime.com

© John A. Rorabacher, 2009

ISBN: 978-0-9864774-1-6

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission of the author or publisher.

Contents

Contents	vi
Acknowledgements	viii
Chapter 1	1
Chapter 2	21
Chapter 3	45
Chapter 4	89
Chapter 5	105
Chapter 6	135
Chapter 7	163
Chapter 8	195
Chapter 9	221
Chapter 10	247
Chapter 11	273
Chapter 12	289
Chapter 13	293
Chapter 14	301
Chapter 15	337
About the Author	354

Acknowledgements

Like any work of fiction or non-fiction, there are those whose contributions to the writing process that seldom, if ever, receive recognition for their contributions to the words, lines, paragraphs, and pages that make up a book. At least, for this effort, I would like to take the time to acknowledge those that made this work a reality.

First, I would like to thank my friends, acquaintances and the denizens of Hernando County, Florida, where I made my home for more than twenty-two years. Over that time, I had the good fortune to come into contact with people who had known the real Billy – Billy Mansfield. They first planted the seed that was to become the current work. That seed, however, lay dormant in the back of my head for as long as I lived in Hernando. Several times, I tried to put my thoughts down on paper, only to file them away for future consultation. The time to write was simply not right.

It took an international move and a job loss to stir me to action. Uncharacteristically, I followed my wife's need to be closer to her children in Canada; so, we pulled up stakes and moved, leaving behind warm tropical summers and mild snow-free winters for temperate summers and bone-chilling cold, snowy winters.

At this point, I have to acknowledge Home Depot Canada. If they had not been wise enough to terminate my employment, I would have simply continued working as one of their associates and would never have had, or made the time to write. During my unemployment, my need to write, initially to while away the time, resurfaced. For this time I cannot thank Home Depot enough.

There is also a cadre of people who labored through the various drafts and versions of the story in the hopes of pointing my writing and me in the right direction. Among these are: Bessie Goldfield, Maurice Cohn, Joyce Short and Hilda Wilcox.

This leaves my two primary supporters. First, there is Ilona “Nona” Gardner. I had first met Nona when I was eleven years old visiting relatives in California. I lost touch with her for nearly fifty years! Eventually, I was reunited with her via the internet. We corresponded and caught up. As I began writing ***End Game***, it occurred to me that I needed someone to wade through my overly Germanic, academic writing style. Who better than a long lost cousin, who just happened to have been an English major? I asked. She accepted. The rest is history. I owe her a monstrously large debt of gratitude, and because of that debt and her dedication, she has earned my most sincere appreciation.

Secondly, I owe my wife, Hava, an equally large share of gratitude for her contributions to this work. Not only has she had to endure countless nights alone while I was “writing” but she also read through the later versions of the manuscript, helped me script scenes and made me understand Susan. Give me a good electric chair to write about but how women think . . . Duh.

Finally, there is Billy, himself. Had it not been for his capture shortly before my move to Hernando County, I never would have given the idea of writing about a serial killer a second thought. Somehow he caught my attention sufficiently that, over twenty years later, I felt the need to write a story based on him. The story is by no means a biography. This story is a complete work of fiction.

I have also taken real people I met and knew in Hernando County and used them as armatures upon which I have built some of my characters. Thanks for being there and being characters.

20 February 2008
Barrie

Chapter 1

Thursday, March 10, 2005

As I leaned against the window, sipping my first morning cup of office coffee, I looked out at the gray, overcast sky and the streets of Chicago twelve stories below. I could see white caps on Lake Michigan over the tops of the barren trees and the lower buildings along the shoreline. I saw the marina, still clogged with ice that undulated with each successive wave that made its way through the opening in the breakwater. On the streets below, the slush was being pushed toward the center of the street by the passing cars. The wind buffeted the building and pelted the windows with airborne snow pellets. I looked at the indoor-outdoor thermometer that sat on the window sill – minus 15. I automatically shivered inside. Even though I had become inured to the cold, this winter had seemed exceedingly long and tedious. I had finally come to a decision, a decision I had not known I was even making.

The sign on the door read, Ned Harrison, *Chicago Sun-Times*, City Editor. Ned stood outside his office giving instructions to one of the other reporters. When he finished, I said, “Ned, I need to talk to you. I need some time off. I’m worn out. I find I’m having to drag myself to the office every morning. You know, that’s not me. Usually you can’t keep me away. I’m just burned out.”

“Why don’t you just take a few days off? And then you’ll be alright.” said Ned, but he saw it in my eyes. He knew I was done being a journalist, no matter how prize-worthy my work had been in the past. The years as a crime reporter had finally taken their toll. “What’s really bothering you? Do you want to step inside and we can talk about it?”

“No. That won’t be necessary. What I have to say can be said here. I’ve been working the crime beat steadily for nearly twenty years straight. I’ve seen and heard things no one should ever see or hear. I’m beginning to lose my objectivity. I’m starting to judge instead of being an unbiased observer. I need time to come to grips with the carnage I’ve seen. At first, it didn’t seem to get to me. I wrote about it and just forgot about it. I simply moved on to the next story. Even though I wasn’t aware of it, all that I have seen has been accumulating inside me, accreting, and I’m finding myself uncomfortable. I need to sort through it all and make some kind of sense of it. And, I’ve been toying with the idea of writing a book – anything other than murder and serial killers. Maybe a peaceful history of something.”

“How long do you think it is going to take you to *find yourself*?” asked Ned, sarcastically emphasizing the last two words of his question.

“At least a year, maybe a little longer.” Ned’s sarcasm had not been lost on me.

Ned knew, intuitively, that I would not be back but he maintained the charade. He had experienced this same scenario with some of his better journalists in the past. Each, eventually, got to point where they began questioning what they did for a living. In reality, it was a mid-life crisis but for those who lived by the pen, it was almost always the allure of writing ‘a book.’ Ned knew the cycle

from personal experience and watching other journalists succumb to the temptation of 'the book.' Once the bug had bitten, there came the rationalizations, then came the inevitable personal sabbatical. Some journalists returned from the break refreshed. Some just never returned. Those that did not return were either broken men, who often left writing completely, or those who fulfilled their literary dreams.

"Where will you go? I'm assuming you're leaving Chicago," said Ned.

"To be honest, I haven't given that much thought. I know it just has to be some place warm. I was just looking out my window this morning and I knew I'd had enough. Usually, I head for Miami or Boca but right now they don't seem all that appealing. I really don't know where I want to go. All I know is that I have to go."

"Very well. Leave a number where we can contact you and keep in touch, okay?" asked Ned. "We're going to miss you." Not even waiting for a response, Ned turned and walked away. He was definitely not one to take part in maudlin goodbyes.

Wednesday, March 30, 2005

It had been nearly a month since my last day at the *Sun-Times*, and I had to admit, I was already feeling the loss of structure that came with working every day. I was beginning to suffer *ennui*, a feeling I had rarely known before. I still had not come to grips with where I would go to write 'the book.'

One evening, as I looked around my partially packed apartment, all I could see were packing boxes. Some filled and ready to be moved. Others lay open wanting more content. As I surveyed the boxes, the phone rang. "This is Roger."

"Mr. Bainbridge, my name is Billy Weatherford."

I did not immediately recognize the voice or name of the caller. 'Weatherford. Weatherford. That name rings a bell, somehow.'

"I'm sure you don't remember me but we knew each other in high school and I've been following your career in Chicago."

"Thanks, and I do remember you. You were some kind of freshman football phenom, as I recall, but you played for Springstead, right?"

"Good memory. And to answer your questions, yes, on both accounts, although I played for Hernando my freshman year. Then I transferred to Springstead. It was closer to home. Since you remember me, a lengthy introduction won't be necessary. To be quite honest, I need your help. You see, I'm on death row here in Raiford at Union Correctional. I'm scheduled to be executed on May 12th for murder. My last appeal was rejected and I'm getting ready for the big day."

"I don't know how I can possibly help you at this late date," I said. "Why didn't you call me sooner? There might have been something I could have done to help you but now there's no time."

"Oh, if you're thinking I want to stop the execution, you're all wrong. I want to go through with it. I know I'm going to die. I've been trying to stop the state's attorneys from making their endless appeals for almost ten years. They just don't listen to me or what I want. They keep trying to overturn my conviction or execution for one reason or another. Finally all that legal bullshit is over. Thank God." Billy sounded genuinely relieved. He seemed at peace with the pending execution. Even so, I was shocked.

"What? You *want* to be executed?!" I exclaimed.

"Yes." I could hardly believe what I was hearing. Most convicted murderers did not want to die but here was Billy actively wanting to get it over with. "I deserve to die. The reason I'm calling is this: I need someone to tell my story *after* I'm gone. Would you be willing to come to Raiford and meet with me?" asked Billy.

"Wait a minute. You said you were in for murder, right? What did you do?"

"I was convicted for the death of seven women from the Tampa area. However, there were seventeen. Would you be interested in hearing about the ten I wasn't charged with?" Billy's voice was emotionless. He could have been arrogant or taunting but his tone sounded simply matter of fact.

I thought to myself, 'If this guy had killed seventeen, or even seven women, surely I would have heard about him. I'm supposed to be an expert on serial killers. I've made my career reporting on the likes of Gacey and Bernardo. How could someone who had killed seventeen women have flown under my radar? Impossible. Someone had to be pulling my leg.' "Who put you up to this? What's this really all about? Did Ned or some of the guys at the paper put you up to this to get me to come back?"

"It's no joke, honest. Let's do this. You call Ronny Sykes He says you two are friends. Ask him about me, and if you're not convinced that this is all on the up and up, we can just forget about it. If you're not interested, there is some other yokel out there who will want my story. I'm offering it to you because I know your reputation. You seem like a fair reporter, telling it like it is, without all the sensationalism, hype, or sugar coating. I want you to tell my side of the story. Yeah, besides the victims' side there is my

side." I sensed a definite change in the tone of his voice. "It may not be pretty but . . . I'm not going to try to justify what I did. I just want people to know that it was unavoidable. Not justifiable but unavoidable. Talk to Ronny and call me back. Thanks." With that, Billy hung up.

I had to catch my breath. If what he had been told were true, it would be one of the few times a serial killer *wanted* to be interviewed. 'But why hadn't I heard about Billy Weatherford? If he had killed so many women, surely I would have heard about him. There had to be something wrong here. I needed to call Ronny.'

Ronny Sykes and I had been best friends all the through college. It was not until Ronny had decided to go to law school at our alma mater, Florida, that our life stories began to diverge. Until then, Ronny and I had been almost inseparable. After my move to Michigan and later, to Chicago, I tended to see Ronny only on his occasional visits to Chicago. In fact it had been some time since I had either seen or spoken to him. I picked up the phone and dialed. Ronny answered, "Hello."

"Ronny, I just got the strangest call of my life. Billy Weatherford called, said he was in Raiford, looking to be executed in thirty days or so. I've never heard of him, well not as a serial killer. I remember him as some kind of amazing high school football player. All things being equal, I should have heard about him. He said I should talk to you. What gives?

"Well, hello to you, too!" exclaimed Ronny.

"I'm sorry. You're right. Hello. Is Mr. Sykes home? I have a question for him."

"Hello Roger. Now, isn't that much better? And to answer your initial question, yes, he's the real deal. And you're right. He was that standout football player at Springstead during our senior year at Hernando. He called me two days ago. You're probably asking why would he call me, right?

"Yeaah!?"

Ronny replied, "I was part of his early defense team. I later begged off and was replaced. So, that's my part in the story. I was part of the team because Billy and I knew each other personally. He used to live out in the Weeki Wachee Acres area out near Spring Hill. I used to do some work for his dad right after I got out of law school and came back to Brooksville to practice. When the police showed up at the Weatherford's to arrest Billy and search his parents' place, his dad called me for advice. I was there when they arrested him and his brother and went through the house. Later they came back with search warrants for the entire Weatherford property as well."

"You're telling me you were involved with a case of serial murder right here in Brooksville and you never called me to give me a heads up?"

"First, I wasn't involved all that long. I had prior obligations that precluded my participation in the trial and, besides, I'm not a capital crimes trial lawyer. Second, you're a big time reporter in Chicago, why would you be interested in a small time killer in Brooksville? And, during the time I was involved, no one knew exactly what he had done or was being accused of. We knew he was being accused of murder, but we had no idea what was really going on. The charges just kept coming and coming as the investigation progressed but, in the end, he was charged with seven murders. How you didn't hear about it on the wire services I can't

tell you. But I have to admit, it was one of the quietest murder trials ever. I think part of the reason it was not overly publicized is that Billy was so cooperative and pled guilty, and there was no big trial event. It was a *fait accompli* by the time they arrested him. After that, it was just a matter of going through the investigative and legal motions. No denials. No excuses. No apologies. No nothing. He simply pled guilty and it was over. You know, wham, bam, thank you ma'am."

"Okay. Okay. I'm sorry for accusing you of keeping me out of the loop. So, he's for real. How did he hear about me?"

"He called me a couple days back and asked if I knew any reporters that could help him tell his story. I mentioned that you were a friend, that you had reported on a couple serial killings up north and that you were a square shooter. He seemed to recognize your name. I also told him you were a man of your word. I didn't call because I wasn't sure Billy would really go through with telling his story. He hadn't really said much before, during, or after the trial. All he did was cooperate with the cops who were investigating the murders. He was almost overly helpful. If he called, great. If he did his usual thing and became incommunicative, and didn't call, no harm no foul. I'm glad he called you, though. He couldn't ask for a better advocate. Are you going to call him back?"

"Yes, but there's something wrong here. Serial killers are notorious for keeping quiet about everything. It's only the rare killer that is willing to share any part of his experience. They're usually so internalized and secretive. Let me think on it a bit. I have to digest all this before I make a move. But I promise I will call him back, no later than tomorrow. Thanks for the help. Can I count on you for more information and advice?"

"I wouldn't have it any other way. Good hunting."

I was in shock. This could be a chance of a lifetime. My earlier complaints to Ned had vanished. I was excited, again, by the prospect of interviewing another serial killer. I thought, 'Almost never do serial killers spill their guts. Thirty days. Not much time. I have to work fast. How should I go about this? Think, think, think.' I mulled over the possibilities most of the night.

Thursday, March 31, 2005

In the morning I called the prison at Raiford. My name and reputation eventually got me through to the warden, who transferred me to the death row block. The death row captain listened to my explanation for calling, then he summoned Billy.

"Hello."

"Billy, this is Roger Bainbridge again. I talked to Ronny last night after your call and he confirmed everything you told me, except that he thought you were responsible for only seven murders. What gives with the seventeen? Were you just trying to tease me?"

"No, the real number is seventeen. They only asked me about seven of them and I cooperated on the ones they seemed to know about. The rest were mine and mine alone.

"How can you be so sure about the number?"

"I kept a detailed journal about everything. I never volunteered the journal. That was mine. No one knows where it is, but me."

"You're telling me everything you did you wrote down in a journal?"

"Yup."

"I'd like to see that journal."

"You and a lot of other people. For now, it's safe. If everything works out between us, I'll tell you where it is, but you can't get it unless I instruct my lawyer to give it to you. Deal?"

"I don't really have much of a choice, do I? So, it's a deal. When can we sit down together? Talking over the phone isn't the best way for us to do this."

"If you're really serious about doing this, we can make arrangements for an interview room here at the prison. It'll take a few days to set up, but I'm sure we can do it. Give me a day or so and I'll call you back with the details. Thanks for calling back. I'll call you," said Billy. Again, the dial tone sounded. He was gone.

I thought, "This is almost too easy. When do I wake up, reality crashing down all around me?"

Saturday, April 2, 2005

Two days later I received a phone call. "Mr. Bainbridge, this is Warden Jackson at Union Correctional facility at Raiford. Normally I do not conduct prison business over the weekend but I am willing to make an exception in this case. We spoke the other day about inmate Weatherford. He has requested that you and he be allowed to conference in one of our interview rooms. I must tell you that this is not in keeping with our normal policies. Inmates on death row have certain final privileges, but we don't like to have them outside their cells or the block, except under unusual circumstances. Mr. Weatherford did, however, indicate that if he were permitted this interview exception, everyone would benefit. I'm not quite sure how much benefit an interview with a reporter, even of your stature, would be. So, unless you have information that I do not possess, I am inclined to dismiss the request."

“To be very honest, I know much less about Billy than you do. He called me the other day and said he wanted his side of the story told. Inasmuch as few serial killers open up to anyone, I think this may be an opportunity for us get to learn more about the psyche of a serial killer. There is one thing that Billy confided to me that doesn’t match with what I do know about him. He was charged and convicted for the murder of seven women. But, he told me that he had killed seventeen.”

“No shit!! Sorry about that. Based on his records there were only seven women involved in the case. If he can or will confirm the ten other murders, I would grant the interview, but only on that basis. Otherwise my decision will be to decline the interview request. I will speak to Mr. Weatherford personally and if he confirms what you have just told me, and is willing to provide information regarding the rest of the murders, I will grant the interview. It would be in everyone’s best interests,” said Jackson.

“That seems fair. Can I talk to Billy and advise him of your condition?”

“No need for that. I will go over to the block immediately and talk to him myself. If he does confirm that he will cooperate with the investigators, I will arrange for the interview. Either way I’ll give you a call back later on today.

“Thanks for your time. I look forward to hearing from you.”

The next few hours seemed interminable. ‘What would Billy say to the warden? Would he feel I had already betrayed his trust by mentioning the seventeen killings? A lot was at stake here, for the victims’ families, the police and for me. What would Billy say?’

The warden called back around 4:30. "It looks like we have a deal. He is willing to provide detailed information regarding the deaths of the other ten victims but only in exchange for my guarantee that the interviews would be allowed to go on as long as necessary to get everything off his chest," said Jackson.

"Before, when we first talked, I was going to tell you that it would take more than one interview session to accomplish what I believe Billy wants to do and what I would like to do. Now that we are talking about information on ten more murders, it could take several interviews to accomplish everything. Are you prepared to allow this to be a multiple session interview process?"

"Yes, but he had better come across with useful information, or I will terminate the whole damn thing after the first session. Do we understand each other?"

"We all have a vested interest in seeing this work. When can we begin?" I asked. "Before you answer that, I have to tell you, right now I'm in Chicago. Can you give me a few days to get my stuff moved and myself down there? How about if we begin on the 12th?"

"Be here in the morning on Tuesday, the 12th."

"I'll be there. Can I talk to Billy and let him know what's going on?"

"No need for that. I will talk with him again, outline my requirements, and tell him what the schedule will be."

"You mentioned your requirements, and what might those be?"

"Basically, he will remain shackled at all times. You will be provided with a private interview room, but we will be observing and will step in if there are *any* violations of our prisoner visitation

regulations. I will make sure you get a copy of those rules. Our primary concern is for both you and Mr. Weatherford's welfare and safety. He must provide useful intelligence each day for the interviews to continue. Finally, we will listen in but will not record your conversations. We will, however, take notes regarding the intelligence he divulges. You will turn over a copy of your notes containing any intelligence materials. There will be a one or two day interval between interviews so that we can confirm the validity of his statements regarding the deaths of the other women. If what he says is either validated, or it looks like it could be valid, subsequent meetings will be arranged through this office. Do you understand these requirements, Mr. Bainbridge?"

"I see no problem with what you are asking for. However, I would like to make an additional request."

"And what would that be? We're being quite flexible already, as you know." Warden Jackson sounded annoyed by anything that might constitute a further bending of his precious policies.

"I would like to request that an FBI profiler be allowed to observe and listen in on the interview. If he would like any particular questions asked, they must be presented to me and I will be the one who asks them and me alone. He may not, however, record any part of the interview. He can only take notes. Is that agreeable to you?" I asked.

"Good idea. I will contact the Bureau and make the necessary arrangements. What if they cannot get someone here? Can we postpone it?"

"They'll get someone there. If they can't we proceed on the schedule we've already talked about. The inter-views go on with or

without them there. Remember, time is of the essence now," I pointed out.

"I look forward to meeting you, I've heard a lot about you and I look forward to chatting with you. See you on the 12th."

I didn't like all the conditions demanded but, under the circumstances, I really couldn't complain. They were at least all reasonable. My first order of business was to get ready for my move to Florida. Again I called Ronny.

"Ronny, it's all set. The interviews start on the 12th. That gives me about a week to get moved.

"Moved?! I thought you'd just fly down for the interviews and stay in a motel."

"Things have been chaotic the last couple of days, I forgot to tell you. I quit working for the *Sun-Times* about three weeks ago. I've been packing up getting ready to move."

"You quit?! You're moving, where?" asked Ronny in total shock.

"To be very honest, I didn't know where I was going. This thing with Billy at least gives me some direction. So, I guess, I'll be moving to Brooksville. It makes the most sense. What do you think?"

"Absolutely. It makes all the sense in the world! When do you plan on leaving?"

"If I leave on Thursday, that's the 7th, that would give me three days to drive down, and I should be in town sometime early on Saturday. I'm traveling light. All I have to do is get the rest of my apartment packed up and put in storage between now and Thurs-

day. I'll give you a call sometime on Saturday to let you know I'm in. Okay?"

"That would be fantastic. It will be nice to have you around for a while. It's been a long time," remarked Ronny.

"Ronny, I can't believe this is really happening. The only thing the authorities are insisting upon is that Billy provide them with useful information about the other murders."

"What other murders?"

"Your information about the number of murders was incorrect. Billy confided to me and, later to the warden, that there were, in fact, seventeen murders, not seven. He is willing to provide information on murders that the police had not even been aware of. They can use it to close the books on missing persons cases they have not been able to solve to date. You know, cold cases. That should make them very happy. I know how they hate having unsolved disappearances on their books. What do you think?"

"I'm overwhelmed. Do you know what this will mean for your career? It could be huge. You could win another Pulitzer!" poked Ronny.

"Yeah, yeah. Let's not get ahead of ourselves here. There's a lot to be played out before any kudos can be handed out. Let's just see what happens next. I'll keep you posted. Besides, I may have some questions of a professional nature that I might need answered. Are you up to it?"

"Whatever it takes. Bring it on! Give me a shout anytime. I look forward to hearing from you. It looks like you're going to be a busy boy for the next few weeks. Good luck, guy."

"Thanks. I'll talk to you soon."

Saturday, April 9, 2005

When I finally crossed over the Withlacoochee River, I knew I was home. The water level looked down. I had taken many a canoe trip down that river. Only a few more miles and I'd be exiting I-75, getting on State Road 50, for the final drive into Brooksville.

As I came upon Exit 301, it struck me just how long it had been since my last visit, the better part of twenty years. There were new signs for McDonalds, Burger King, Subway, three or four motels, and several new gas stations. The last time I had been home, none of this had been here. Maybe there had been one motel – the Best Western – but the rest was all new.

The drive into Brooksville was, likewise, an eye-opener. Gone was the two-lane highway, replaced by a modern four-lane thoroughfare. As I drove into Brooksville, down May Avenue, I saw Ronny's father's realty – Sykes Realty. I would stop in and say hello to Mr. Sykes. He could locate a suitable rental for my tenure in town. I was surprised to learn that Jim Sykes had sold his realty and was now retired. The new owner was more than pleased to show me around town and, at the same time, show me some of the available rentals, some with options to buy.

Among the units I was shown, was one located in Candlelight, a comparatively new residential community within town and catering to a discerning clientele. The entire development was designed to retain the best qualities of old Brooksville – roads lined with majestic oak trees draped in Spanish moss – along with modern estate homes and townhouses. Among the units I saw was a small, two-story clapboard townhouse on Darby Lane. For me, the townhouse was perfect. It was centrally located, reasonably priced, and maybe more importantly, it was furnished. The agent,

Bob, convinced me that, at current prices, it would make a good investment. Rather than simply rent, I would make my money work for me. We put in an offer which was quickly accepted. Within less than six hours in town, I had become a homeowner. I could move in the next day, if I wished, even before closing. I would have to stay in a motel for only one night.

As I settled into my room at the Comfort Inn at Weeki Wachee, I toyed with the idea of calling Ronny but the day's activities were catching up to me. I finally realized I was exhausted. Instead of calling Ronny, I found it easier to just lie in bed and watch a little basketball – the Bulls were playing. I could call Ronny tomorrow after I moved into my new townhouse. Even before that thought had completely traced its way through my brain, my eyelids drooped and I was soon fast asleep.

Sunday, April 10, 2005

When I awoke the next morning, the enormity of what I had done began stirring in my consciousness. 'I'm a homeowner. For the first time in my life, I own something bigger than a car. Wow!' As I prepared to check out, I thought, 'I should have waited and talked to Ronny before jumping into the purchase of the townhouse.' All during the drive into Brooksville, my head was filled with questions but as soon as I turned onto Darby and glimpsed the little townhouse, I realized I had made the right decision. It was perfect for me. I would have to contact Bob and get the key, so I could move in.

Once I had secured the key, I moved into *my* town-house. It was not as large as my apartment back in Chicago but it was spacious enough for the time being. I did not have the luxury of time. It was already Sunday. For now, unpacking and shopping for some essentials for the house was about all I had time for. I needed, at a minimum, sheets, towels, and other linens. Dishes, pots and pans,

etc., could come later. Dressing up the rest of the house was not in the foreseeable future. Who needed all those *tchotchkes*, as my Jewish friends would say?

Tomorrow I would have to make arrangements for utilities, especially phone and internet service, as well as picking up some supplies – legal pads, a pocket tape recorder, cassette tapes, etc. – the tools of the journalist’s trade. Food and everything else would have to wait until I returned from Raiford.

I also needed to phone Ronny. Ronny had expected a call from me, yesterday. He might be worried. “Hi, Ronny. Yeah it’s me. Sorry about not calling you when I first got into town but I got tied up. I dropped into your dad’s realty and found that he had retired. Since I needed a place to rent, I just went out with the new owner, Bob, and he showed me around town. Man, has the place changed! Well, to make a short story shorter, I bought a townhouse in Candlelight. Yup. I made an offer and it was almost immediately accepted. And I took possession about an hour ago.”

“Now let me get this straight. You drive in yesterday, put in an offer on a house, the offer is accepted, and you’re already in possession of the place? All in one day?” Ronny was dazed.

“That’s what I’m telling you.”

“But why would you buy a house? I know you said you were moving but I thought you’d rent for the time you’re going to be here. Aren’t you here just for the interviews with Billy? How long can that take? A month? Then he’s gone. What are you going to do after that?” asked Ronny, clearly confused.

“I bought the place because I’ve decided to move back to Brooksville for the time being, and buying a place made sense. I don’t

know how long I'll be here, but real estate is always a good investment. Right? And I still have my book to write, where better to write it, than in good ole Brooksville.

"You have to be kidding me! A big shot reporter from Chicago, living in Brooksville. What gives? Really?"

"Ronny, it's a long story and best shared over a beer.

Chapter 2

The First Interview – Prelude

Monday, April 11, 2005

On Monday I packed my bags, rechecked to see that I had everything I would need and made arrangements for a room at the nearest local motel in Starke. I'd leave for Starke later on in the afternoon. I didn't want to try to make the trip on the morning of the interview. Since the interview would start at 9:00 a.m., I didn't want to be on the road for a couple hours driving and then try to do the interview. I'd prefer coming in refreshed and ready to get to work. With the execution looming just over three weeks away, we had no time to waste. So, a stay-over the night before would allow me to get some rest and compose myself for the journey I was sure Billy would take me on.

I was also a little apprehensive but, at the same time, excited. All kinds of ideas seemed to be randomly popping into my head. When I would sit, my legs would begin doing that nervous jumping thing they did when I was anxious about something. I could not believe how agitated the prospect of the interview was mak-

ing me. I hadn't felt this way since I was waiting for the announcement of the Pulitzers. I thought I had become a hardened journalist. I guess not. Why was the prospect of this interview affecting me? It should not have. Strange.

What if Billy chose to clam up and we would lose out on a unique opportunity? An opportunity to at least answer some yet unanswered questions for the relatives and friends of the women who had died at Billy's hands. At least they could have some kind of closure. In some respects, the same could be said for the investigators. They would have some closure as well. For Billy, it might be some kind of closure but, in all likelihood, if he was like most serial killers I had studied; it would be an opportunity for him to gloat, boast and demonstrate just how powerful he really was. For me, this could be an opportunity of a lifetime. Or, it could be one of the biggest letdowns. The next few days would tell.

It occurred to me that we were calling the FBI, but I wondered if anyone had contacted the Tampa Police. I thought I'd give them a call and let them know what was going on. They, in turn, would get in touch with the district attorney's office. That should put all the links of the chain in place.

There was an old Tampa telephone book in the top drawer of the end table. I had found it accidentally shortly after I had moved in. It was well worn. I guess the Turners, the previous owners, must have used it frequently. The corners were bent and battered by repeatedly being thrown into the drawer. I opened it to the page with important government and agency numbers. There was the number for the Tampa Police Department – Criminal Investigations Division, Robbery/Homicides/Assaults. I dialed.

"Hello, my name is Roger Bainbridge. I have some information regarding a series of murders that happened about ten years ago

involving Billy Weatherford. Could I talk to the detective that was in charge of that investigation?" The receptionist asked me to wait a minute while she transferred me to homicide. A couple of minutes later I was patched through to homicide.

"This is Detective Sergeant Miller. Can I help you? I was told you have some information regarding the Billy Weatherford case. Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"And to whom am I speaking?"

"My name is Roger Bainbridge. I currently live in Brooksville and I have been in contact with Billy. He has made arrangements for me to do an interview with him at the prison at Raiford tomorrow. He informed me that during his trial he was charged with seven counts of murder. He has also indicated that there were additional murders that he had committed but was never charged with and that no details regarding them were ever brought out. He would like to correct that oversight."

"Do I understand you correctly? Did you say he wants to confess to additional murders?"

"That's right. The reason for my call is to let you know about the interview and to see if you would like to send a representative from your office to be in attendance. We are in the process of making arrangements for the FBI to send a representative. I wasn't sure if anyone had contacted your offices. This interview could possibly clear up as many as ten disappearances and unsolved murders for you guys."

"Who exactly is we here?"

"Billy called me a couple of days ago. He wants me to interview him regarding the murders. He confided in me that there were additional murders he had not been charged with. He indicated he was willing to provide details about these murders as part of the conditions for allowing the interviews. These arrangements were made with Warden Jackson at Union Correctional."

"Would you mind if I check this out and get back to you? Can you give me a number where I can get back to you on this?"

"I can, but it won't be of much use. I'm leaving in a few minutes for Starke. All the arrangements have been made for the first interview to take place tomorrow morning. I have to be at the prison by 9 a.m. I've made arrangements to stay at the Best Western in Starke. If I leave shortly, I should be there around 4:00. You can try calling me after that at the motel. I don't have the number, but I am sure you can get it. You can, probably, also call the warden himself. He'll confirm what I have told you. Is there anything else you need from me?"

"No. I don't think so. All this is news to me. Thanks for the info. I'll have to check with my superiors and I'll contact the warden too. I have no idea what we can do on such short notice, but I'm sure we'll do something. Whatever we do here, I will give you a call and let you know our plans. Again, thanks for the call. It is much appreciated."

"No problem," and I hung up and headed for the car.

Normally I would have taken U. S. Route 301 to get to Starke. It was a much more scenic route but I wanted to get there as quickly as possible this time, and settle in at the motel. So, instead, I elected to take I-75 to Gainesville, then pick up 301. That would give me time to put together some questions. I was going into this

interview almost blind, since I was unfamiliar with Billy or his case. I'll have to do some on-line research after I check in. I would have liked to stop and take a look around Gainesville and the campus of my alma mater but there was no time for a side trip or sightseeing.

....

Starke is a small town southwest of Jacksonville. The area around Starke is rather notable, but not in terms of its geography. What makes it interesting is the plethora of correctional institutions that are scattered around the area. All in all, there are six penal institutions.

All the prisons in Florida are collectively and individually called Florida State prisons by people outside the system. Each is, internally, known by its institutional name. Florida State Prison (FSP) is across the road from Union Correctional Institution (UCI). Both of these institutions are used to house male death row inmates but FSP houses the state's only death chamber. Those death row inmates at Union Correctional are transferred to FSP for their final death watch and execution.

Directly east of Starke is the Camp Blanding, a National Guard base. Most people have probably never heard of Camp Blanding, but most people have seen it. A number of popular movies have been shot at the camp or in and around Starke. *GI Jane*, *Tigerland*, and *Basic* were all shot on the base and the surrounding countryside. So, to Starke's reputation as the center for Florida's correctional facilities, one can add movie capital as well. Quite a pedigree.

....

I arrived a little before 4:00 and checked in at the Best Western. They had my reservation and room ready. Before I left the check-in counter, I told the clerk that I would be expecting an important call from Tampa, and I asked if they could patch it through to me. The clerk indicated that it wouldn't be a problem. I asked, "Does my room have internet access?"

"Yes sir. All our rooms now are wired for the Internet. If you don't have an ISP, you can go through ours, whichever works for you."

"Thanks." I walked to my first floor unit – a stop and go room. After settling in I set up a work station at the desk that was conveniently located next to the internet port – a combination phone and internet cable jack arrangement. I fished out my Ethernet cable, plugged it in and, *voilà*, I was connected. The first thing I needed to do was obtain some background information on Billy and the cases against him. A couple searches on *Google* and I found the material I needed, although I was surprised just how little information there really was.

One site had a picture of Billy taken during his trial. It was of exceptionally poor quality but it provided me with an opportunity to see what Billy looked like, even if they had been taken 10 years earlier. Billy looked like he could be a pensive graduate student at some university. It left me with a chill. He also looked a little like Charlie Manson.



As I read through the documentation on Billy, one thing struck me. None of the seven murders attributed to Billy were the same. Each of the women was killed using different methods. How could this be? This is not a pattern of a serial killer. Serial killers may change details of their methods, but there is always a central theme – a tendency to improve or refine the method that provides the greatest emotional satisfaction. There didn't seem to be a progressive refinement component. Each kill was distinctly different. The only similarities lie in the savagery of the killings. Something was wrong here.

What about the victims? Were they similar? What did they have in common? Each victim was a woman between the ages of 18 and 30. Most had been blonde, blue-eyed and slim. Each would be described as buxom. So, there was a similarity in terms of physical type. That was a little more reassuring to me, but the methodology still troubled me.

What about disposal of the victims' bodies? From all the investigative work, each of the victims had been abducted in the Tampa area from local bars, mostly splashy, glitzy, rock bars. Most had live entertainment. Almost all the women were abducted during the week, *not weekends*, when the bars would have been more crowded. Interesting. Apparently, Billy wasn't worried about being seen. During the week, with fewer patrons, the odds were that anything he did out of the ordinary would have been observed and would, therefore, be more memorable. In a crowded bar, the odds drop. There was no indication that the abductions started in the bars. There was no indication that the women had been afraid. No hesitancy regarding Billy. How did he pull it off, especially if he had abducted 17 women? The bars were spread out over northern Tampa, all north of Kennedy. But, other than that, there was no apparent bar location pattern. Some of the bars were cheap watering holes. Some were upper end establishments. Again, no pattern.

If there is anything that characterizes a serial killer, it is the evolution of patterns. I wasn't finding many.

One curious fact emerged. Every one of the women abducted had left their purse and jacket behind, either with the party they were with, or on the bar. There was something wrong here. Women just don't go off without their purses, even if it's just to go outside for a smoke or to the powder room. Purses are appendages for most women, an integral part of them. What gives? It was as though the purses were left behind so that the group the women were with would know that their friend was missing. Was the purse left behind, Billy's calling card? Did he want people to know that he had been there? Here was a pattern. So far, we had physical type and purses. Huh. How do you put those together?

How long had he been active? Looking at the cases that he was convicted of; all the women were abducted and killed over a three to four-month period, with the last known victim taken only two weeks prior to Billy's arrest. I wonder how the police put everything together and were able to move so quickly? I'd needed to talk to Sergeant Miller for details about the investigation and the arrest. What put them on to Billy?

I jotted down some notes and started to piece together some preliminary questions, instead of having to think on my feet. I actually had the luxury of being able to think about what I wanted to ask, not just blurt out something in the heat of a news conference. Almost never were reporters allowed direct access to the killer. This was going to be a history-making opportunity. I didn't want to blow it.

Shortly before I was ready to turn in, I received my call from Miller. He was not sure he would be able to make it tomorrow, on such short notice, but someone from the department would be in

attendance, probably a Detective Barnkowsky. I asked if Miller or someone in his department could put together a quick dossier on Billy that I might use as a reference for future interviews. I told him I was having to fly by the seat of my pants on this first interview. Also, if they had some specific questions they wanted me to ask for them, I would. Just give them to me in advance. I was almost certain Billy would not permit anyone else to interview him. He had been silent with the authorities to this point; there was no reason to believe he would confide in them now. Miller indicated he would get some questions to me via Barnkowsky, who I would meet up with sometime tomorrow.

I turned in, after a meal in the motel's adjoining restaurant. I needed to be fresh tomorrow. It looked like it could be a long day. We'd have to wait and see what actually developed. I had my fingers crossed. I requested a wake-up call for 7:00. That would give me sufficient time to get packed and ready to go and have a quick breakfast.

When my wake-up call came, I was already awake, just lazing around in bed. It was actually quite a comfortable bed. I'd slept well, but I have to admit my mind had taken a long time to settle down. And even then, I had dreams of what today was going to be like. My subconscious was doing a dress rehearsal. After dressing I threw my gear together and went to the little breakfast bar the motel maintained. I found some bananas, coffee, and the ever present cinnamon buns. As I sat down, I could see one of the attendants pointing me out to a large man in a cheap suit. He approached. "My name is Mark Barnkowsky of the Tampa Police Department. Sergeant Miller told you I would be attending today's interview. You are Roger Bainbridge, right?"

“Yes. I’m Roger. Nice to make your acquaintance. When did you get in? Please, have a seat.” He shoved an absolutely huge hand toward me and we shook.

“I don’t have time to sit, thanks. I came in late last night. I didn’t want to disturb you, so I waited till now. I hope I’m not intruding. I just wanted to thank you for calling us. That was a nice gesture.”

Despite his immense size, he was a soft spoken man. He almost seemed gentle. Too bad about the suit. I suppose it’s difficult to find a good suit off the rack in his size. It had to be a 52 at least, maybe even larger. He looked like he could easily have been a lineman for the Bucs, Tampa’s pro football team, or the Bears.

“Not a problem. Have you had your breakfast yet?”

“No. I think I’ll grab something on the way out,” said Barnkowsky.

“I’ll be ready in just a couple of minutes. Just want to finish my coffee and this bun. You know, these buns aren’t half bad. You might want to try one. By the way, would you like a lift to the prison? We could save both of us driving.”

“No. I’d better drive myself. Who knows what might happen and I had better be prepared to do whatever needs to be done. Thanks anyway. I’ll meet you there.” With that he went to the coffee bar, fixed a cup for the road, grabbed a cinnamon bun, and he was gone. I followed a few minutes later, after washing down the last of my bun with a cup of institutional Best Western coffee.

♦♦♦

After parking in the Union Correctional visitors' lot, I reported to the guardhouse at the entrance of the prison. "Check with Warden Jackson, he's expecting me. I'm Roger Bainbridge."

"Don't need to check, sir. The warden has already placed you on the authorization list. But I will need to see your driver's license for identification purposes." I handed the Illinois license to him. Of course, I hadn't gotten around to getting my Florida license yet but I still had a few weeks and be in compliance. "Thank you Mr. Bainbridge. If you'll head over to the administration building, the building just to your left and straight ahead, someone there will take care of you. Have a good one. Oh, here, please put this visitors badge on somewhere where it can be seen easily. Again, thanks."

He pulled back into his air conditioned guardhouse. I was on my own.

As I approached the administration building, a gentle-man opened the door and greeted me. "I'm assuming you're Roger Bainbridge. I'm Warden Jackson; you can call me Tim." We shook hands. "I've had the pleasure of reading a number of your pieces, mostly having to do with John Wayne Gacey. Nice work. I found the pieces rather insightful. I hope we can piece together this stuff with Weatherford as completely. Come into my office and we can chat a bit before things get going."

We walked down the main corridor and into a large but sparsely furnished office. It was as institutional looking as the rest of the prison. "Have a seat. I have some documents for you to read and sign. Here's the list of rules and regulations having to do with death row inmate visitation. Please read it and sign at the bottom. Here is a hold harmless form. Since we are making some exceptions to our normal prison policies, we need you to grant us immunity in the case something goes wrong. It shouldn't, but you

know how government agencies work. We want clean hands if something should go wrong and you somehow get injured or killed. Forgive me for being so blunt. Do you have any questions so far?"

"No. Not yet." I had to admit, Warden Jackson wasted no time and didn't seem to pull any punches. His comment about getting injured or killed was a bit of a wake-up call. I had never honestly ever thought about either of those possibilities, and I had been a visitor in a lot of jails during my career.

"Okay, this is how we're going to proceed. These are the mandatory ground rules. We will transfer Mr. Weatherford from the death row block to an interrogation room in the rear of the administration building. The room has two observation, one-way glass panels. The FBI and police representatives will be in one of the observation rooms. All the prison people, including myself, will be in the other observation room. There will be an armed prison guard outside the only door leading into the room. His role is to protect you if anything happens and Mr. Weatherford becomes aggressive or violent, either toward you or himself."

The warden continued, "Mr. Weatherford has been advised by our in-house legal staff that he should be represented by counsel, since he has already indicated that he will be discussing crimes for which he has not been charged. He has refused the offer of counsel. He also understands that he could be charged subsequently for these crimes and a trial could ensue; however, at this point, there is no desire on anyone's part to delay the execution as scheduled for any reason, himself included. Nothing revealed by him here today or subsequently will serve as the basis for another appeal. Finally, nothing learned here today or subsequently will be released to the press or any other media source until after the completion of the execution writ, which is scheduled for 28 days

from now at midnight. Here is the final agreement form.” He handed me a neatly printed form on legal sized paper. It had a place for me to sign, a witness, and a place for the warden to sign. As I began to read through the document, the warden went on.

“In this form we agree to allow you to interview Mr. Weatherford; all documents, tapes, videos, or pictures obtained during this and any subsequent interviews will remain the property of the State of Florida until the execution has been fulfilled. You may claim any or all of these items once Mr. Weatherford has been certified as dead. The State will not retain or seek to obtain any of these items from you subsequently. They will be deemed your private property thereafter. The only portion of those items to be obtained will be any and all evidence or information deemed pertinent to the location and recovery of the remains of the unaccounted for victims. This information will be used immediately by the proper law enforcement agencies for the purposes of finding and the recovery of the victims’ remains. Finally, if you fail to live up to any part of the bargain we agree to, if he does not provide the information we need to find the other victims he alleges he has murdered, the interviews will terminate and will not be resumed under any circumstances. Do you understand all the conditions I have just mentioned?

“Yes. I do have a question, however. You mentioned videos. I have not made any arrangements for videography. Is someone else going to be videoing the interviews?”

“Both our prison staff and the FBI will be making videos.”

“Am I entitled to these as well?”

“Everyone has agreed that these materials will stay here under lock and key until Mr. Weatherford has been executed. We have

already advised the FBI that any and all videos made will become your property, if all the conditions of this arrangement are fulfilled." I didn't like the sound of this last comment.

"I can just see it now. We do the interviews and you guys renege on your side and I'm somehow hung out to dry. You keep everything and I end up with zilch! What assurances do I have that any of you will keep your side of the bargain? None! You guys withhold everything because you find some way to weasel out of the deal. Let me be right up front with you. It's not that I don't trust you, but I don't! I know how government agencies work. If we can't insure I get what is promised, the whole thing is off. Do you understand me?!" I was getting a little more than just annoyed. I was downright pissed off. I knew exactly what was going to happen. They'd keep my daily notes and I would never see them again. They would just "disappear." All I would be left with are memories and no concrete proof that the damn interviews had actually taken place. How can I protect myself?

"I have an alternative proposal. I keep all materials collected during each interview. I agree not to reveal any of these materials until after Weatherford's execution. If I fail to keep my end of the bargain, the government becomes the owner of every piece of information obtained from the interview. I lose everything and any claim to it. I will agree to the return of a copy of the video tapes made by the FBI to the FBI for purposes of evaluation and study, but not for release to the public in any form or fashion. Or, as a compromise, all the materials are handed over to an impartial third party to hold in escrow. That person would have to be mutually acceptable to both of us. Take my counter proposal to everyone involved. If they don't agree, I'm out of here. It's that simple. Take it or leave it! I am pretty sure no one else will get Billy to talk or reveal anything. So it's my way or the highway. Your choice."

The warden looked stunned. He looked like he'd been hit by a bus. No one talked to him like that, I was sure. "I'll have to talk this over with all the other parties. Believe me, it won't be an easy sell, if I can sell it at all. I'll get back to you. In the meantime, read and sign the other stuff."

As the warden made his way to the door, I said, "Warden, remember Billy is expecting the interview to begin soon. If it doesn't happen fairly soon, he'll become suspicious and we're both dead in the water. So work fast." My comment only added insult to injury, and it showed on his face. He was livid. His face had a crimson tinge to it, and the veins on his neck and forehead were bulging.

The warden left the room, slamming the door behind him. He was gone for almost half an hour. When he returned, he looked tired. "Reluctantly, everyone agrees with your proposal. Everyone wants assurances however."

"You have your staff attorney draw up the agreement. I want to have my attorney review it before I sign it. I can fax it to him and he'll proof it and send it back to me here. In the meantime, let me talk to Billy and reassure him that I'm here and it's just taking a little longer than expected to work out the details of the interview. That will buy both of us some time. Okay? Also, I'm going to be absolutely candid with him about what has been going on. I don't want any surprises. Do we understand one another?"

"I understand. If it weren't so important to find those poor women, I'd oppose all of this. It's just not right. I'll make arrangements for the agreement to be drawn up and we'll get you in contact with Weatherford."

"I will also need access to a phone so I can call my attorney in Brooksville."

"We can arrange for that too. Just give me a minute."

The warden left the office. I could hear him on the phone. "This is Tim. I want you to draw up an agreement between Bainbridge, us, the FBI and the Tampa Police. In it we agree to allow the interview info to be escrowed with an agent of our mutual choice, even the video tapes. It's essentially the same agreement we had skewed our way, but now everything goes his way until after the execution. Don't argue details with me. Just prepare it. We're running out of time!"

I could hear him talking to someone in the other office. "Get through to D Block and put Weatherford on the line. Then give the phone to Bainbridge." He returned to the office. "Here, use my phone and call your attorney." He handed me the phone on his desk.

"Thanks." I dialed up Ronny. "Hello, this is Roger Bainbridge. Can I speak to Ronny? I don't care if he is in a meeting. Let him know I'm on the phone; it's important." A moment later Ronny was on the line.

"Ronny, we've kind of run into a mess here. In a few minutes I'll be faxing you an agreement. Read it over. Make sure there are no loopholes for either side. Basically, I keep everything that comes out of the interviews secret until after Billy has been executed. I get all documentary materials. I will share the video with the FBI, but only for research and educational purposes, not for release to the public. I don't want to get screwed out this stuff either by hook or by crook. I want it to be enforceable on both sides but, buddy, cover my ass, okay? Let your secretary or receptionist know a fax

is coming in and have her get it to you immediately. We don't have a lot of time left to get this all resolved. If we don't get it done quickly, Billy might just clam up and we'll all be losers. Okay? Thanks. When you've reviewed it, send it right back to me. What's your fax number? Okay. Got it. Again, thanks."

A short time later the warden said, "The call to Weatherford is ready." He handed me the phone. "Just press line 2."

"Hi, Billy? This is Roger. I'm here in the warden's office. We're just tying up loose ends regarding the interview process. It shouldn't be too much longer. Just sit tight and they will be bringing you to the administration building. When you arrive, everything will be settled and we can begin. Sorry for the delay. Everything is alright, honest."

"Okay, I was starting to think you had ducked out on me. I'll be ready when everyone else is ready. Thanks. I look forward to meeting you," said Billy. I hung up the phone.

"Warden, we're good to go on Billy's end."

Shortly after hanging up, a woman came into the warden's office, documents in hand. It was the agreement we had discussed. I read it over. It seemed fine to me. I gave Ronny's fax number to the woman. She took the agreement and the fax number. "I'd appreciate it if you'd fax the agreement to that number as soon as possible. Thanks." She nodded in my direction, turned and left without a word. To be honest, she didn't look all that happy with the recent turn of events.

Within 15 minutes she returned. Ronny's office CID was on the top of the document. There was a short note that read: "Roger, everything looks like it's in order. There were no dangling loopholes on

either side. Everyone agrees to the conditions as you expressed them to me and as I understood what the document is supposed to do. I don't have a problem with it. I initialed the bottom." Sure enough, Ronny's scrawl was on the bottom of the document.

"I'm ready, are you?" The warden had been sitting back in his chair with his hands clasped behind his head, fingers interlaced.

"Yes. Let's get the show on the road. Irene, would you make three additional copies of the agreement and

bring them to the interview room? Have Captain Steiner bring Weatherford to the interview room in about fifteen minutes. Have everybody involved in this to meet us there as well. Thanks," said the warden.

The warden led me down the hall to the rear of the administration building. We entered a medium sized room. It was only slightly less institutional looking than the warden's office. As we entered the room, I could see two large one-way mirrors and a large oak table in the center of the room. There were no windows and only one door. Mortised into the table was a large O-ring and a similar one in front of one of the two chairs that were on either side of the table, opposite one another. In the middle of the table were two microphones. The lights were institutional fluorescent. Soon the room filled with half a dozen people. The warden made introductions all around. There were prison personnel. There were two cinematographers, one for the prison and one from the FBI. There was detective Barnkowsky. And there was one gentleman I assumed to be the FBI special agent. He was introduced as Special Agent Nelson.

The warden outlined what the procedure was going to be. He went over our agreement, asking if everyone understood. They all

noded their acquiescence. A moment later Irene came in with the photocopies of the agreement and handed copies to all the parties involved. "Please read the agreement and sign your copy. Hand your signed copy to the next signatory. When everyone has signed every copy, everyone should have an originally signed document.

I asked, "Does everyone here have the authority to sign on behalf of the agency they represent?" Again everyone nodded in the positive. I sure hoped no one was lying about having the authority to sign. It could really cause a problem later on down the line. At this point, I had to take them at their word.

Everyone signed and handed the document on. Finally a fully executed document was placed in my hands. We were ready to begin. Everyone left the room. I put my agreement in my leather attaché. The first thing I noted was that everything in the case looked like it had been rifled through. I looked at the warden. He knew what I had discovered. "Yes, we searched all your paraphernalia. Routine security search. We have to make sure no weapons or drugs or contraband of any kind make their way into the prison, no matter who comes in. Even I have to go through the metal detector, in and out. You probably didn't notice it when you came in. We scan everyone one for weapons and contraband. I hope you understand." The warden seemed to be back in his more relaxed level of anxiety.

I began pulling things out of the case and setting up for the pending interview. I brought out my pens and pencils. I brought out my note pads, some of them already used to prepare questions. "Warden, does anyone have a particular question they want me to ask Billy and what are the two microphones for?"

"I'd forgotten all about that. I'll ask around. They link to the video cams." He, too, left the room. I guess I wouldn't need my tape re-

corder. I was alone. Without everyone there the room took on an even more institutional appearance. It really should not have been referred to as an interview room. It was an interrogation room, plain and simple. The warden returned. "No one has anything at this time, but they reserve the right to put together questions later. We can collect any questions that come up during one of the breaks. There will have to be regular breaks. If we don't give the inmates routine breaks, they scream abuse like little kids. Whenever you or Billy requires a break just let us know and we will take care of the details."

Not too much later and Billy was escorted into the room by an armed guard and the warden. The warden was very candid with Billy about everything that had transpired between everyone in attendance and me. He outlined the rules of the interview. The same as any regular visitation. He was not to leave his seat until it was break time or he was instructed to do so. He let the warden know he understood. With that, the guard escorted Billy to the chair, attached the lower half of his shackles to the O-ring in front of the chair and the upper half to the O-ring embedded in the table. We were ready to begin. Both the warden and the guard left the room and we could hear the door close behind them.

When you have talked to someone by phone you, almost automatically, conjure up an image of what that person looks like, just from their voice and demeanor. I'd done that with Billy. I suppose, knowing what he had been convicted of had also contributed to the image. And I had seen his trial photo, such as it was. In my mind's eye, I had seen him as a fairly good sized

man, not as large as Barnkowsky, but good sized. In his late 30s. Now clean shaven with brown hair. It is amazing how the mind works. How could you possibly develop an image of someone just from the sound of a voice?

I had some of it right. He was around 5-10, a little more muscular than I would have imagined, sandy brown hair, clean shaven, and since he and I had been high school contemporaries, only maybe two to three years younger than me. That would make him 36, possibly 38. He was actually quite handsome in his prison orange T-shirt, blue pants, and prison issue sneakers.

"I'd like to shake your hand, but we're not to have any direct contact."

"Hi," said Billy.

Despite the fact we had talked on the phone, the softness of his voice surprised me. I suppose, I had expected his face-to-face voice to be much more menacing. His voice was amazingly gentle, almost soothing. Is that how he enticed his victims, with a voice that lacked even a hint of danger? His voice was mesmerizing, almost lyrical. I was intrigued.

"I assume we're not alone?" Billy asked.

"No. We have prison officials in one of the observation rooms, behind the one-way mirrors, and the Tampa police and FBI in the other."

Billy raised his hand as far as his shackles would permit

and made a waving motion. "Hi guys." He smiled approvingly. "Well, where do we go from here?"

"That depends on you. How would you like to begin? You just jump in or I can start with some questions, and we can go on from there. Which would you prefer?"

"I'm used to being interrogated. Haven't had much of an opportunity to do an interview. Why don't you start off with some questions? On second thought, why don't we get to the stuff the cops want out of the way first? The information about the location of the other women I killed. Then we can get back to the more important stuff."

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Right up front. He was going to give the police the information they so desperately wanted, no, needed to know. And how could what he had to say about anything else be more important than locating the victims. I was taken aback.

"Warden, can I give Mr. Bainbridge a note I've written before we begin?"

A PA speaker embedded in the wall in front of one of the one-way mirrors came to life. "Yes, but place it on the table, pull your hand back off the table, and Mr. Bainbridge can, then, retrieve it. What does this note pertain to?"

"It's really a note for Mr. Bainbridge to deliver to my attorney, Mr. Sykes. It gives Mr. Sykes the authority to give certain items in his possession to Mr. Bainbridge. Is that Okay?"

"Proceed." Billy leaned forward so he could reach into his orange T-shirt's breast pocket. He pulled out a slip of paper. On the outside was written 'Mr. Sykes.' "You don't need to read it now."

"It's just like I told the warden. It gives him instructions and permission to give you some things he's been keeping for me. I don't want anyone else to see any of them until after my death." He placed the folded note as far toward the center of the table as his

shackles would allow. He retracted his hands. I picked the note up and without opening and looking at its contents, I placed it in the inside breast pocket of my sports coat. I just knew this damn note was going to be a point of contention between me and the guys behind the mirrors. Oh well, what's new? Nothing ever goes smoothly in this business.

"I don't know if this comes under the terms of my agreement with the authorities or not. I will have to check with Ronny, Mr. Sykes, on that. During one of our breaks I'll call him and find out. If he says I'm not entitled to them until after your execution, I would rather he hold them until then. Is that okay with you?"

"Some of the information in the stuff he's holding would help the police in their efforts to find the bodies but do whatever you think best."

"Okay. What do you want to tell the police?"

Chapter 3

First Interview, Part 2, Revelations

Tuesday, April 12, 2005

“First, let’s clear something up. I’m doing this not because of any sense of guilt, or in the belief I owe it to you guys, or I’m hoping for some kind of redemption or forgiveness.” He stared directly in the direction of the observation room occupied by the police and FBI, and his voice was getting an uncomfortable edge to it. “I’m doing this because you guys missed my earlier kills. I want people to know about them too.” Now, here is the personality that belied the calm spirit I had known to date. The real Billy Weatherford was coming to the surface. Then, just as quickly as the edge had tinted his voice, it was gone and, again, the controlled tones returned.

“Plus, by giving you this information I can get my message out. That’s more important than you knowing about who I’ve killed or where they are now.” How could anything be more important than knowing where his victims lay and providing their loved ones with a sense of closure? Unbelievable.

“You guys got me for seven murders. They were only the latest. I killed 17 women, beginning nearly six years before you arrested

me. I'll give you information on the first three today. The rest will come later."

Those six little lines contained a lot of information. Most importantly, he had answered one of my 'need to know' questions – how long had he been actively killing? I did some quick calculations in my head. If I had the timeline right, he was arrested in 1995, tried in 1996 and had been in prison for nearly ten years, it meant he had begun killing as early as 1989-90. He would have graduated that same year, which means he had been born in 1971. That would mean that he had made his first kill around the time he was 18. By BAU (the FBI's Behavioral Analysis Unit) standards, he had started his rampage well ahead of the norm. The usual progression is for the killing to begin somewhere between the ages of 25 and 40.

Mary MacIntyre

"Most of the women I killed were from North Tampa, except my first kill. That one was done in Hernando County. Her name was Mary MacIntyre. She lived somewhere east of Brooksville. I don't know where. I met her at the Hilltop Bar & Grill one night. Even though I was under-age, no one ever carded me. There was a band playing that night. I can't remember who they were. Mary was more than half in the bag by the time I got there. She was easy. It took little to no coaxing to get her out of the bar and into my car. She was the first and only one I personally abducted. Later, my brother and I worked as a team.

"I strangled her with one of those wire things with handles.

"You mean a *garrote*?"

"Yeah, that's it. I made it out of a piece of heavy stainless wire my dad had in his shop. I made the handles from a couple pieces of

dowel. I took her north of town into the woods. I tied her wrists behind her back with a zip tie. When she woke up, I told her I wanted to do an experiment. She started to scream. I told her if she screamed I'd kill her. She stopped short."

"She said, 'You're not going to kill me? You're going to let me go? Each word was said so pleadingly. I told her she was going to be just fine. She seemed to relax. I stepped behind her, I crossed my hands, making a loop of the wire, and slipped the loop over her head. I don't think she saw it in the moonlight. Then I pulled it tight on her throat. I put my knee in the middle of her back, between her shoulder blades so I could get leverage. All I heard was a little whimper. She couldn't scream. She fought for a few seconds, and then just slumped. I'd never known such a rush. I'd actually done it. I'd rehearsed the event in my mind hundreds of times with satisfaction. The real thing was way better. I wasn't sure I was going to be able to pull it off. But, it went just like I had planned. The only thing that surprised me was that the wire had cut almost all the way through her neck. Her neck bones stopped the wire. Even so, I was afraid her head would come off, so I had to let up at the end. I didn't like that."

"I just sat on the ground next to her for a while. I stroked her hair. It was so soft and smooth. I had such a sense of accomplishment. Like I said, I wasn't sure I'd be able to go through with it. And here I was. I'd done it!"

"I went back to the car, got the shovel I had brought with me and dug a hole. I slid her in, threw in her purse, covered her up, and spread leaves over the area. Before I put her in, I tried to make sure that I had gotten most of the blood-covered leaves in the hole first. I didn't want some animal digging her up and mutilating her. She looked so peaceful, except for the huge gash in her throat. That kind of bothered me. I wasn't going to make that mistake

again. I put the, what did you call it, the *garrote*, in with her. I knew I wasn't going to be using that thing again. It's way too messy."

So, he didn't like all the blood. He wanted his kills to be clean and neat. He wanted his victims relaxed, or as relaxed as they could be, just before he killed them. Interesting. He almost seemed concerned with them. And he didn't want the animals to get at the body and mutilate it. He didn't seem worried about people finding her; and he was right, no one had to date. More importantly, he had mentioned that he buried her purse with her. Why was this detail different from the subsequent murders?

"If you go north of Brooksville on 41, just passed Grubbs Road, across from Turkey Trot Lane, on the left is a clump of woods adjacent to a large field. Walk along the tree line on the north side of the wooded area about fifty yards. Head straight in from there about fifty feet. There's a large oak tree in the middle of a lot of smaller trees. It's the biggest tree I saw. On the roadside of the tree, out about 15 feet is where you'll find her body. You'll know when you find the *garrote*."

"Billy, how can you remember everything in such detail?"

"If I remember everything, I can go through it again and again. It's like reliving the experience each time. It just feels good to be able to do that. I can take it step by step each time. It's almost like it happened yesterday."

Carol Manson

"Number two. This was my first kill with Gary, my brother. A month to six weeks after I'd killed Mary, I just couldn't contain my excitement. Gary kept asking me what was up. He could see my excitement. Finally I could not not tell him. I made him promise

that he wouldn't tell a soul. So, I went through the events of that evening. At first he was shocked, then, impressed that I'd had the guts to do it. Man, you should have been there! It was great. He asked if I was afraid of being caught. I told him no. No one would ever find her in those woods. We both read about Mary being missing. I felt so proud of my accomplishment. I guess Gary caught the fever. He got caught up by the excitement I was experiencing. He wanted to take part in one. I told him, if he got involved; he was in, no getting out. He said, he knew."

"I told him that it probably wasn't a good idea to snatch people we knew. We ought to pick an area and 'go hunting.' It took a month to decide where we'd get our next victim. I was still enjoying the first kill. There was really no rush. I still had to work out how I wanted to kill the next one. I liked the feeling of control the strangulation left me with, but the *garrote* wasn't the way to go. I had to come up with something better, less messy. Finally I decided on using a piece of pipe. I'd use it just like the *garrote* but it wouldn't cut into the neck. It would just crush the throat and no blood."

"We settled on North Tampa. There were lots of women there. Most of them were going to school at USF. We'd hit the rock bars. That's where we'd find most of the coeds."

"Then I started thinking about where to bury the body. We didn't want to be carting the bodies around all over the place, so I had to settle on some place to bury her where she wouldn't be found, but it had to be close. I didn't like the idea of going into the swamps around Tampa. Too much mud and too many mosquitoes. Then, in a flash, I knew exactly where we'd put her. You're going to love this." A look of absolute delight seemed to cross Billy's face. He was really, really enjoying the attention and the ability to share his exploits with someone other than himself.

“Can I have a glass of water?”

“Sure. No problem. Continue.” A few minutes later a guard brought in a carafe of water and two paper cups. “Let me pour that for you.” I poured both of us a cup of water. I pushed the cup toward Billy until I knew he could reach it. I withdrew my hands, making sure there was no contact between us. I thought to myself, as I

took my first sip of the cold liquid, this guy is colder than the damn water we were drinking. You just would never have expected this alter ego lived within the man who had walked through the door only a short while ago. There was nothing gentle about him. Although soft, his voice was cold, calculating.

“I bet it took six months before we were ready. During that time, we had done a lot of planning. Finally, Gary and I were ready. We cruised around parts of north Tampa, around the Nebraska area. We found a place that looked good to us. We went in together. Finally, after a couple drinks, I saw the one I wanted. Her name was Carol Manson. She was a coed at USF. Junior or something like that. Gary hit on her first. Score! I don’t know exactly what he said to her, I was standing away watching. He was smooth. Pretty soon, she put her jacket on and began walking toward the door with Gary. They walked to our car. I followed. As they approached the car, I realized this was really dangerous. We needed something that would give us more privacy. A utility van would be perfect.

Gary was bent over into the car getting something. I poured some ether I had gotten on a handkerchief. She didn’t see me coming. I grabbed her, put the cloth over her nose and mouth. Soon she slumped to her knees. ‘Gary, I don’t know how long this stuff works. We need to get moving. Quick.’ We piled her into the backseat. Gary sat beside her crumpled body. And we headed out.”

"We drove toward the intersection of East Fowler and I-75. Just north of the intersection, in the median, before you come to 127th Avenue, there are three clumps of trees that had not been removed during the construction of the highway. They served as a visual break between the northbound and southbound lanes. They were pretty good-sized clumps. It was here that we would take care of her.

We parked the car well off the shoulder of the road. Gary picked her up, when we were sure no one was coming in either direction. He carried her across the road. She was still unconscious. I picked up my pipe and the shovel. Once inside the woods, I bound her hands behind her back with a zip tie. We laid her on the ground, and waited for her to regain consciousness.

When she finally awoke, she looked terrified. I tried to calm her. I told her not to scream. It would only make things worse. We're not going to hurt you. We're just going to have some fun. She knew what was coming, but not everything. She thought she was just going to be raped. That's what Gary wanted to do. Just rape her. The rest was up to me. I never had sexual relations with that woman. Kind of reminds me of a Clinton comment, don't you think?"

I nodded. I knew what he was referring to. He seemed very self-satisfied.

"The ironical thing about her was that she started to cooperate with Gary. He got off. She sat up. She said something like, can we go now, or is your buddy going jump on board? Her tone was almost defiant. I could hardly believe my ears. She was willing to go through with it again, if need be. From behind her I said, no that

wasn't my thing. She asked, then what is *your* thing? She was almost sarcastic in the way she said it. This is, and I brought my pipe over her head, put my knee in the middle of her back and put pressure on her throat. She struggled, but, again, no scream. Just a kind of gurgling sound. I pulled harder. I could feel her throat collapsing under the pressure. There was a kind of mashing, crunching sound. Finally she slumped. I knew she was dead. Again, there was a kind of euphoric rush. God, what a beautiful feeling. It was amazing the sense of power and exhilaration that flooded over me."

I'd been covering crime stories for a lot of years, but somehow the delight Billy described chilled me to the bone. How could anyone be so cold?

"We took turns digging the grave. We placed her in the grave, made sure she was comfortable, and covered her up. Bandon had run back to the car to get her purse and we threw that in with her. We pulled some debris that was lying around over the freshly dug grave and headed toward the car. We had just put the shovel in the trunk and closed it when a state trooper drove up behind us. He got out of the cruiser, a nice Mustang painted black and yellow. I always thought that cruisers were supposed to be those big honking Fords."

"He walked up to us with his hand on the butt of his gun. 'Gentlemen, is everything alright.' I could see Gary was nervous. I said everything's Okay. The trooper asked, 'If you don't mind, could I take a look around?' Sure go ahead I said. 'Would you kindly open the trunk for a minute?' With that he stepped back and placed his fingers around the grip of the pistol. I opened the trunk." All that was there was the shovel and some other odds and ends. He took a quick peek inside the trunk. 'Okay, you can shut the trunk.' He moved around the car, keeping an eye on us and flashed his flash-

light over the seats, the floor, and the dash of the car. 'Can I see your driver's licenses? Please take them out of your wallets.' We handed him our licenses. 'Please get back in your car and wait while I radio this in.' We did as he instructed. "

"Ten minutes later, he approached the car, handed us our licenses, and told us we were free to go. We headed out, laughing our asses off almost all the way home. Man, that was close, but we'd pulled it off. The euphoria of the kill AND walking away after the cop stopped us, priceless. I couldn't have been more satisfied with myself. I was in seventh heaven for days. Gary had the shakes for days. He told me he was not sure he could do it again. I reminded him, he was in for good now. There was no way of walking away from this. After a while he calmed down and we began to plan our next crusade."

"The pipe had worked perfectly. I'd keep using it.

"If you want to find the grave, go to the intersection of I-75 and East Fowler, again. Take the northbound I-75 on-ramp. Just north of the intersection are the three clumps of trees in the median. Go into the clump that is closest to the overpass. In the middle is a small clearing. No trees. Right in the middle of that small clearing you will find Carol's grave. Dig down about two feet below the surface. You should find her body down just a couple of feet. The entire grave is probably, no deeper than say, 3 and a half to four feet at the most.

Billy leaned closer to me and in a low voice said, "If you get the stuff from Mr. Sykes, I'll be able to pinpoint the locations of all the graves. I have information in those journals that will help." Even before he had finished, I could hear the warden's voice coming over the PA.

"Billy, please sit back in your chair and no whispering. Is that understood? We want a clear recording of what you have to say. Do we understand one another?"

"Yes sir." But, he had gotten his message across to me. He sat back in his chair. I was looking forward to catching up with Ronny tomorrow and see what he had that belonged to Billy.

"Warden. Can we take a short break. I need to drain the weasel," said Billy.

"Okay. I'll send the guard in and he'll take you to the men's room. Mr. Bainbridge, please remain seated while the guard escorts Mr. Weatherford from the room. Then you are free to move around. But wait until Mr. Weatherford returns from the men's room before you use the facilities." The speaker went dead before I could say anything.

"Warden."

Over the PA, "Yes."

"Is there a chance I can use a phone to call my attorney again?"

"Do you see the small table in the corner to your right?"

Feel free to use the phone that is located there." I had not seen the table or phone before. I nodded in acknowledgement. I dialed Ronny's office. It was still early.

"This is Roger Bainbridge again. Yes, thanks." His receptionist was putting me through to Ronny without the slightest hesitation. I guess Ronny had instructed her to connect me immediately if I called. Soon Ronny was on the phone. "Hi. I have a question for

you. Billy handed me a note addressed to you. He said you were holding some things for him. Is that true? I haven't read the note yet. He said there was no need to read it now. Do you know what the item is? Okay. You have one package. Well, here's my question to you. Does this package or this note fall under the agreement I signed earlier this morning? The reason I ask is that he said they would help the police find the remaining bodies. If they contain anything they can use, I would like to share it with them. However, if there is other information that they don't really need or are entitled to under the agreement, I'd like to be the one to decide what they get and what they don't get. Does that make sense to you? The number here?" I looked at the dial on the phone, but there was no phone number sticker on it. "There's no number on the phone. Okay, call the warden's office and ask them to get a message to me during our next break. Just let me know in a simple yes, if they are entitled to it, or no, if they aren't. Let's keep it just that simple. No elaboration. Good. "It's going well. I can't believe how cool this guy is. So far he's describing his first murders. Not in elaborate detail, but more than enough to satisfy the cops. If you picture the crimes in your mind as he tells his story, it's pretty grisly. He seems to be really enjoying himself, reliving the whole sequence. Whew. I have to go. Get back to me ASAP. Thanks."

Billy was coming back in. The guard replaced the shackles in the two o-rings. "Billy, would you like a coffee or something?"

"No. No, Thanks. I'm good for now. What time do you want to break for lunch?"

"They'll probably want to take you back to the block for meals. I doubt if they want to bend the rules much more than they already have. What time do they usually have lunch around here?"

"In our block, they serve around 12:30. We don't get to go to the mess with the rest of the crew here. That gives us a little over an hour. Let's continue 'til then. I'm pretty sure we can get through the last of the stuff the police want to hear about in that time. Is that okay with you? We can resume after lunch and take care of some of the business I wanted to really talk to you about."

"That's fine with me. We'll probably have to clear it with the warden. Warden."

"Yes. I heard what you two were talking about. I don't see any problem with that kind of schedule. Proceed."

"What about the third murder?"

"It actually took Gary and me several months to put it together. The thing that slowed us down was how was I going to kill the next victim. I liked the pipe but I was looking for something different. Something that seemed a little more fiendish. No, not fiendish, creative is probably a better way to describe it. It took me a long time to come up with how I would do it."

"So that is why there was no pattern in how the women were killed?" It was starting to make sense now.

"I had decided that each kill would be different. I had read some stuff on serial killers. In fact, I read one of your articles and in it you emphasized how serial killers tended to use one method of killing and elaborated or refined it in subsequent kills. I didn't want to do that. I didn't want to show a pattern. That would mean there was less likelihood that the police would put two and two together. Different methodologies meant different killers. At the time, it made sense to me. I got sloppy toward the end, though."

"I wrote down a bunch of potential ways of killing people and chose the one that seemed to be the best at the time. I wasn't being very creative in the beginning. Just the same old ways. But I knew I didn't want to be a regular, predictable serial killer. Yes, I knew what I was. I decided not to worry myself over what I was. I decided I just wanted to be good at it. I don't know if that makes sense to you or not. In the long run, I don't really give a damn if it makes sense. As it turned out, it is damn difficult to come up with new ways to kill people and not repeat yourself. That was the hardest part."

Haley Porter

"Our next victim was a woman we abducted from another bar on Nebraska. You know, abducted is the wrong term. Every one of them wanted to come with us, at least just before we sprang our little trap. They were always cooperative. That always amazed me. They were so gullible, so trusting. It's like they didn't seem to care much about themselves and their safety. That is what made it so easy. They weren't even wary. They just seemed oblivious to what was going on around them." He paused for a moment. He was thinking about something.

"What's wrong?"

"Oh, nothing. I was trying to think of the name of the bar. It's slipped my memory. Huh, that's strange. I usually don't forget that kind of stuff. I wonder what that means?"

"Well, we did, essentially the same thing we'd done the last time. Only this time, we'd replaced our car with a van. Ford Econoline. No side windows. Only rear windows but we had painted over them. Just so people couldn't see in. We also installed a curtain between the front seats and the back of the van. We bought it without seats in the back. Just all open space. Like a work van.

Gary lured her out to the van on the pretext of some coke. Like before, I came up behind her while she was bent over in the van looking at what she thought was the coke. I put the ether cloth to her face, in a couple seconds she just fell face first into the van. Gary climbed in, pulled in her legs that were still dangling outside, closed the door and bound her wrists with a zip tie."

"Essentially, we did like we'd done before. We drove out to I-75 and East Fowler. This time, we chose the next treed patch north of where we had buried Manson a few months earlier. Again, we waited for traffic in both directions to clear and Gary carried her into the woods, out of sight. I followed with the shovel. I hadn't brought any other equipment. On both previous outings, I had used a tool. This time I wanted to look her in the eye and watch her face as the life drained out of it. The only way I could do it was to strangle her face on. So, I decided I'd use my bare hands. The only thing I had brought with me this time was a pair of latex gloves, like the ones you can buy in almost any drug store. She finally woke up. This time, no matter how gently we spoke, she was terrified. We couldn't get her to settle down. She was always fighting us. So, we had to gag her. I didn't like having to do that but she left us no choice. She didn't cooperate with Gary either. Somehow her struggling turned him on even more."

"This time he was rough with her. He'd been almost gentle with Manson. For some reason, he couldn't get off. He tried and tried but all the fighting was making it hard for him. Finally, he jumped up and called her a bitch for fighting so much. 'You could have made this a lot easier on both of us, you bitch.' He kicked her in the groin. She curled up in pain. I'd never known him to be sadistic before. Once the pain had subsided and she quit rolling around on the ground, I slipped on my gloves. I sat on her. I put my hands on her throat. Her eyes widened. They looked like the eyes of an owl they were so big. I told Gary to remove the gag in her mouth. As he

did, I began to press down, harder and harder and squeezed at the same time. I could feel her throat begin to collapse under the weight I was putting on it. It's a funny feeling, enjoyable, but funny nonetheless. Her eyes began to bulge. Saliva started puddling at the corners of her mouth. Then, and this is the only way I can describe it, it looked like someone had turned out small lights in her eyes. They just, somehow, kinda dimmed. And she was gone. God, that was satisfying. I'd done it with my own hands. What a rush!"

"We dug a quick grave. I'm not sure why we didn't do it right. She deserved a decent burial. I don't know. Maybe we were thinking how close we had come to being caught by the trooper the time before. This time we just dug deep enough to make her body even with the ground around and piled the dirt we had dug up on top of her. We camouflaged the grave with stuff that was just lying around on the ground. And we headed out. Gary was really angry. He hadn't come. 'She was fighting too much for me to enjoy it. How can we do it next time so, whoever it is, won't fight so much?' I told him I would have to think on that one."

"So, you'll find her in the middle of the second clump of trees in the median north of the Fowler, I-75 overpass. Oh, by the way. Her name was Haley Porter. She was from somewhere outside Tampa. I didn't recognize the address on the license, and I never took the time to look the place up on the map. I should have. I owed it to her. But, I didn't."

"I'm getting a little hungry. Can we break for lunch now?"

"Warden?"

"Sure. Same routine as we followed during the break, Okay?" Billy and I both nodded.

As the guard came in and was unlocking Billy from the o-rings, I said, "What time would you like to resume our talk this afternoon?"

"What about 2:00? Would that be okay with the warden?"

"Warden?"

"Yes, two would be fine."

The guard escorted Billy out the door and back to D block.

The warden came in, not exactly all smiles. "It would seem Mr. Weatherford is cooperating just like he said he would. I thought he would keep us dangling until the end of the interview to get any information about his victims. I am amazed at the detail he is providing. How can he possibly remember all that stuff more than ten, maybe fifteen years after the fact?"

"I think, for him, it was like yesterday. Killing became his life. Nothing much else mattered. He probably relives each kill over and over in his mind, trying to savor every second. Under those circumstances, wouldn't you want to remember every detail? There are, in all likelihood, a lot more details that he simply didn't share with us that he remembers. Those are in his private collection. For his mind's eye alone."

"It kind of makes sense, when you put it that way. One other thing, Mr. Weatherford passed a note to you. I'd appreciate it if you would hand it over now for our review." He put out his hand to take it.

"I can't do that. The note is addressed to Mr. Sykes. I called him and he is reviewing the agreement we have to see if this note falls

within the purview of the agreement. Until I hear back from him, I cannot turn it over to you. I haven't looked at it. It just has Mr. Sykes's name on the outside, and Billy asked me to deliver it to him."

"Give me the fucking note!" Jackson shouted. I wondered what had him so upset.

"Sorry, I can't comply until I hear from my attorney. In the meantime, I would suggest you check with your counsel."

"Son-of-a-bitch! This is getting ridiculous. I'll check with Irene right away." He stormed out of the room. I was left standing all alone. Momentarily, Mark Barnkowsky stepped into the doorway.

"You have any plans for lunch? If not, let's go grab a bite together."

Over lunch Barnkowsky and I just chatted. We didn't even mention Billy once. He wanted to know about my career as a journalist and wanted to know if I liked what I did. I had to admit, for the most part, I did enjoy it. It was always a tightrope walk legally-speaking. People in government were always demanding this or that from journalists, and, usually, we had to refuse giving up either certain information or our sources. If we violated that agreement, no one would talk to us. He understood.

I asked him about his career with the police. He'd been on the force here just over ten years. He'd been on the force in Minneapolis for three. He came to Tampa for better weather, a promotion, and less crime. He had gotten two out of three. The crime wasn't much different between the two places. He had joined the force just before the arrest of Billy. So, he really didn't know much about the case, other than the scuttlebutt that he had heard. Miller had asked him to sit in for him today, since Miller had a court date.

Shortly after lunch the secretary for the warden came into the cafeteria where we were and informed me that I had a phone call. If I wanted she could transfer it to the cafeteria. I said I'd prefer taking it somewhere quieter. I'd come to the warden's office. I excused myself and headed for the office.

The secretary handed me the phone. "Hi. Thanks for getting back to me so quickly. The warden was all over me about the note. He wanted to review it. I told him I couldn't hand it over until I had had a chance to talk to you. So, what's your opinion?"

On the line Ronny said, "From my reading of the agreement, they probably are entitled to at least look at it because it was obtained as a consequence of and during the interview. However, if it is addressed to me and I'm still Billy's legal counsel, it could be deemed communication between a client and his attorney. You know attorney-client privilege. Since he entrusted it to you, for delivery to me, you have a fiduciary responsibility to hand it over to the person to whom it is addressed. That's me. In effect, you become a fiduciary extension of me as a courier of privileged correspondence. Does that make sense to you? If the need arises, have their counsel call me. We can settle it if you don't think you can prevail."

"Okay, so it's privileged information. I've been made your agent by the fact that Billy wants me to deliver the note to you. Yeah. I think I can do it. If not, you'll get another call. Sorry to get you so involved. I'll talk with you tonight. Bye."

Just before the afternoon session was to begin, the warden approached. "I've talked with our counsel. She is of the opinion that the material you received from Weatherford is covered under our agreement. So, please hand it over so I can see what it says."

“My attorney agrees. However, he is also of the opinion that it is a privileged communication between himself and his client. You see, the note is not addressed to me. It is addressed to Mr. Sykes. By his client handing it to me to deliver to him, I become an agent of Mr. Sykes and can only deliver it to Mr. Sykes. I cannot give you the note under the circumstances.”

“I knew that was coming. Our counsel, essentially, said the same thing. Do you know what the note says? Have you read it?”

“No I haven’t read it and I am not going to. I have a responsibility to deliver it to Mr. Sykes, which I will do at my earliest, which will be, probably, tonight or tomorrow morning. Whatever is in the note is between Mr. Sykes and Billy. I won’t break my fiduciary responsibilities to either party. I’m sorry.”

“Okay, Okay. I had to give it a shot. That’s my job. Will you let me know what the note says after you deliver it to Mr. Sykes?”

“If I am made privy to the contents of the note, and I have no further fiduciary responsibilities to either Billy or Mr. Sykes, I will share it with you. But, if the contents do not permit me to divulge anything, I will honor that responsibility as well. Is everyone ready to begin again?”

“Yes, everyone should be back in position within the next ten minutes or so. Mr. Weatherford will be returning about the same time. By the way, I thought things went well this morning. He did exactly as he said he would. Congratulations. Also, I want to apologize for my profanity earlier. Sorry about that.” With that he left and returned to the observation room,

The Afternoon Session

Right on schedule, Billy returned to the interrogation room; he was re-shackled to the table and floor, and we resumed our interview. From here on, for the rest of the day, he was mine. Just before we were about to begin, the warden had one of his men hand me a list of a few questions he and his staff and the law enforcement people would like asked. I scanned them and would get to them at the appropriate time.

“Okay, Billy, how would you like to start this afternoon session? Me asking questions or you just starting off?”

“Why don’t you start with a question and we can go from there.”

“Just give me a moment.” I scanned their questions and I scanned my own. Some of what I wanted to ask were also questions the people in the observation rooms wanted asked. So, I thought I would ask my questions, and they’d get the answers they wanted at the same time. “Billy, this may seem like a wide, open-ended question but do you have any idea what started you on the path to becoming a serial killer? Most kids don’t wake up one day and say, I’d like to be a serial killer when I grow up. I’m not making light of what happened. I’d like to understand how it happened from your point of view. You were there, none of us were.”

“That’s a biggy. When I was a little kid, my mom and dad brought Gary and me to Florida. I think we moved from Tennessee. I have no idea where from, though. I was, maybe, four or five and Gary was two or three. I learned, later, that we had to move. Dad was getting a lot of flak from the local sheriff where we lived. Apparently, he was beating up on mom fairly often. She reported him to the cops a couple of times. They were always stopping by our place to “check in.” Dad got tired of that and so we moved.”

“How we came to land in Hernando I have no idea. Dad started up a kind of junkyard auto parts place on the property he owned. It was off Toucan Trail, out near what is now Spring Hill. When we first moved there, there weren’t many other people in the area. Dad could do just about whatever he wanted. He built up a big wooden fence around the property, just so people couldn’t see *what* he was doing. Over the years, more and more people moved into the neighborhood. That’s when the complaints started. Apparently, Dad’s little business was deemed an eyesore by the new neighbors. I had always thought the fence gave dad the privacy he wanted and that would be enough for everyone. Apparently not. The neighbors didn’t like the fence either. It was too big. What the hell did they think the fence was for? It was for privacy. The county folks kept harassing dad. He hired lawyers to help him, and for the longest time nothing seemed to happen.”

“During our first few years on Aberyls, everything in the family seemed to be okay. Dad quit beating up on mom. He never hit us kids. He just hit mom. I didn’t like him hitting her and, usually, we didn’t hear anything like that going on between them. The only thing we saw was when mom would show up with a bruise on her face or a cut lip. We’d ask what had happened, and she would tell us one thing or another. As we got older, we realized what dad was doing.”

“When all the stuff with the neighbors began, things got more and more tense in the family. Not only was dad whupping up on mom more often, he started whacking us kids around from time to time. As things got more tense, he hit us more often and harder. We could never understand why he was hitting mom. She was always taking care of him. And for that, she was getting smacked around? It didn’t make any sense. Then, when he started in on Gary and me, things made even less sense. We’d even try to avoid him, because we never knew when he was going to go off on us. Each time

he'd started in on one or both of us, I hated him! I wished I was bigger and stronger and could whack him around, just to show him how it felt. When he was calm, he was a pretty good dad."

"In the beginning, when he punished us for doing one thing or another, we knew it was coming. In the backs of our minds we knew we'd done something wrong. But, later, stuff seemed to come out sideways. Just out of nowhere he'd start wailing on us. I started thinking to myself, I'll get you one day you son-of-a-bitch! You won't hurt any of us ever again. You know the kinds of things kids daydream about. Revenge. This went on for years."

"I was sitting on the railing of the front porch one day. From behind I heard the screen door slam but before I could turn around dad had walked up behind me, silently. Then, dad's hand hit me in the back of the head. It felt like I'd been hit with a rock. I flew from the railing into the dusty sand of the front yard. I hit the ground with a sickening thud. I lay there not hearing, but he continued to yell, nonetheless"

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

"I thought I tol' you to feed them chickens!"

Billy said nothing

"Did you hear me, boy?!"

Again, Billy said nothing. His father bounded down the three steps to the ground, picked up Billy's head, using his hair as a handle. He looked Billy straight in his half-shut eyes and asked, "I said, did you hear me?"

Billy's eyes fluttered. "Huh."

"Don't huh me, boy," his father said, growing angrier by the second.

Finally, Billy's eyes opened wide. His father had never hit him so hard before. This time it was different. For the first time, Billy was truly afraid. His dad had never blindsided him like that before. He may have struck him before, but he always knew it was coming and could prepare himself for the impact. Through his yet unfocused eyes, Billy could see red. It was like a waterfall of red, cascading before him. Billy put his hand to his face, trying to wipe the blood from in front of his eyes. As he looked at his hand it was blood free. The red was not blood pouring down his face. Billy was truly frightened now, and shouted, "Dad, everything is all red!"

"What the hell you shoutin' 'bout?"

"Everything is red and blurry."

"Don't screw with me boy," becoming even angrier.

"I thought I tol' you to feed them chickens. And here

you are lolly-gaggin' on the front porch," his father shouted.

I was just takin' a break."

"Git up, clean yourself off and get to them chickens," his dad said exasperated.

Billy got to his knees and, again, wiped his hand across his face. Surely there had to be blood pouring down his face, the world was all blotchy red. Again, he looked at his hand. No blood! Then he realized, the blood was cascading inside his eyes!

"Holy shit dad! My eyes are bleeding."

"They ain't doin' no such thing. What's wrong with you?"

"Everything is red and there ain't no blood on my face."

"What the hell you talkin' 'bout?" taking Billy face in his callused hands and looking him straight in the eye.

"Damned if your eyes ain't all red." "How'd that happen?" his father asked, knowing full well that he'd done it to his eldest son.

"We best get you to Doc Murray." His father picked him up off his knees, walked him up the front stairs and into the house and sat him down at the kitchen table.

"Millie, Billy Dean's hurt his-self and we need to get him to Doc Murray, now!"

Millie, a frail looking woman ran into the front room of the house. "How'd he do that?"

Billy was about to explain, when his father said, "He fell off the porch and hit his head hard on the ground. Don't ask so many questions, woman. Get the damn car and pull it around front, so we can load Billy Dean in and get him to the doc."

Millie took off the apron she was wearing, picked up the car keys and ran out the front door toward the garage that was out back. Billy could hear the car come to life and soon Millie had the car idling in front of the house. She rolled down the passenger side window and yelled: "Kevin, come on. Get the boy in the car and let's get going."

Kevin helped Billy to the car, slid him into the back seat and he went around to the driver's side. "Move over Millie, I'm drivin'."

"I can drive, just climb in on the other side."

"I tol' you to move over. Now move!"

Millie slid across the front seat and took up her place on the passenger's side. Under her breath she said, "You son of a bitch!"

"What did you say?"

"Oh, nothing important. Let's get the boy to the

doctors'" Then she remembered something. "What about Gary? He ain't home and I don't really know where he's at."

"He's big enough to take care of hisself. We'll be back shortly. Don't worry yourself 'bout him now. We need to get Billy Dean to the doc."

Kevin backed the car around, threw the car into gear, and headed for the gate at the end of the driveway.

"Millie, git out and open the damn gate! Why you jus' sittin' there?"

Millie jumped out of the car, the car passed through, she dutifully closed and latched the gate behind her, got back into the car and off they sped toward Highway 19. Kevin headed north on 19, heading toward State Road 50 that would take them into Brooksville, where Dr. William Murray had his office.

“It was only 18 miles or so. The drive to Weeki Wachee was okay, 19 was a good four-lane highway that paralleled the Florida coast all along the Gulf, all the way from Naples to Tallahassee. Kevin reached the intersection of 50 and 19, and turned right, heading for Brooksville, the county seat of Hernando County. Fifty was still a 2-lane highway, but already it was becoming congested. Spring Hill was a large Deltona retirement development, constituting nearly 30,000 wooded lots that had been developed in the late ‘60s. Now, people were starting to buy up the cheap real estate and building their retirement homes. Spring Hill was the biggest development in the county. It occupied thousands of acres of scrub oak between US 19 on the west, State Road 50 on the north, almost all the way to US 41 on the east, and County Line Road on the south, which divided Hernando and Pasco counties from one another. It was one huge development by any standard.”

Every time Kevin had to drive into Brooksville, he grew increasingly upset. ‘Why the hell do all these snowbirds have to come down here, turning our county into some kind of playground, and gettin in the way all the time,’ he thought to himself. ‘The sons o’ bitches are every-where.’ He was making good time.

“Doc Murray’s office was in a new private medical office complex next to the new Brooksville Hospital, on a stretch of road that was an extension of what was to become Ponce De Leon Blvd., between what is now 50A and Broad Street. The hospital and Doc Murray’s office complex were nestled among stands of stately oaks that hung with Spanish moss. It gave one the impression of a cozy little southern town. And, in 1980, that is exactly what Brooksville was – a cozy backwater, Florida town of about 5,000 inhabitants. Little did anyone know that today was the beginning of the end for Brooksville’s and Hernando County’s peaceful quaintness.

Even though Doc Murray had a new office – he had finally moved out of his converted Victorian home office on Brooksville Avenue in town – he had not fully adopted the new ways of doctoring. He still made house calls, and was in his office if he wasn't at home for meals or at the hospital on rounds. Yeah, I guess you'd call him a throwback, as he frequently referred to himself. So, he would probably be in his office, Kevin thought. He was always there."

Sure enough, as Kevin helped Billy to the office door, Doc Murray's nurse/receptionist, Ms. Johnston – no one ever called her by her first name – had rushed to the door to greet them. "Kevin, what happened to Billy Dean?"

"He fell off the porch, hit his head and his eyes are all red. Is the doc in?"

"Yes, Yes. Bring him in," as she led the way to the first exam room. "I'll get the doctor. Wait just a minute," and she scurried down the hall and out of sight around the corner. A moment later, Doc Murray, a slightly overweight, sandy gray-haired man in his early sixties, rounded the corner on his way to exam room number 1.

"Kevin, what's happened to Billy?" Before Kevin could even begin, Dr. Murray said, "Get him up on the exam table and lay him down." As Kevin helped Billy onto the paper covered exam table, Dr. Murray quickly washed his hands and turned back to Billy. "Okay, what happened? Let me take a look at him."

"He was sittin' on the railing of the front porch and he fell off onto the ground," said Kevin. At the same time he looked Billy in the eye, as if to say, 'Don't tell the doc the truth about what happened, boy.'

"Yeah, that's what happened. I don't know how, I just lost my balance, caught my toe on the railing and

landed on my head," Billy said in a slightly agitated voice.

"Found him layin' there when I came out," piped in Kevin.

"Billy, did you lose consciousness?" What part of your head did you land on?"

"I must have passed out, but I'm not sure. All I know is dad was holding my face and asking if I was okay. Then I realized everything was kind of a blotchy and red. Dad took one look at me and here we are."

"I thought I'd bring him to you. He was awake, but the bloody eyes scared me. Maybe I should have taken him direct to emergency instead of bringin' him here."

Reassuringly, Dr. Murray said to Kevin, "You did fine, by bringing him here, we can get a look-see faster. You'd have to have waited at Emergency just to see someone. Here, there's no waiting."

"What's wrong with the boy?"

"It could be a number of things," said the doctor. "We'll have to have a look at him and see what's what." He ran his educated hands all over Billy's head, finding a lump on the right side of his head, just in front of the temple.

"From the size of this lump, you must have hit pretty hard." He then picked up his new ophthalmoscope and began peering into Billy's eyes. "Look up, now look to the side, look down, look to the

other side," he instructed. He repeated himself as he moved to the right eye. "Billy, are you experiencing any headaches, nausea, etc."

Before Billy could answer, Kevin asked, "What's wrong, doc? Is it serious? Can we do anything?" He was actually showing some concern. Millie was about to say something but Kevin gave her a look, and she stepped back and said nothing.

"No headache but my head is kind of throbbing."

Talking to no one in particular, Dr. Murray said, "Well, it looks like you may have a mild concussion and the tumble has caused some blood vessels to break in the back of Billy's eyes, and some blood is now suspended in the eye fluid. It doesn't look like it's too serious but to be on the safe side, I want you to take him over to the hospital, and see Dr. Michaelson, the ophthalmologist on call. I'll call ahead and let him know you're coming. Go to the Emergency Room. When you check in, ask the triage nurse to call Michaelson for you. Tell her I called ahead," instructed Dr. Murray.

"Thanks, doc," said Kevin. "We'll go over there now. Thanks again." Kevin helped Billy to his feet and out the door, with Millie bring up the rear but looking back at Dr. Murray with a forlorn, pitiful look on her face. Dr. Murray saw the look and just nodded, as if to say, 'I know.' Then he reached for the phone and called Dr. Michaelson.

"Mike, this is Bill. I just had a boy in here with some retinal bleeding. I was told he fell from the front porch

but something tells me there's more to it. Could you take a look-see for me? I don't think there is any serious damage, but I wanted a second opinion. You know how iffy these kinds of things can be. I've already sent them to the ER and they're going to ask for you.

Thanks. See you soon. Are we still on for a round at the country club tomorrow, about two? See you then. We can talk about Billy's condition then. Give me a call back if it's anything serious, Okay? Again, Thanks." He hung up the phone and began scribbling in Billy's file, which Ms. Johnston had retrieved from file storage for him.

Dr. Murray penned a quick note. 'Billy shows evidence of possible abuse, again. If this happens again, will have to consider reporting it. Damage to right temporal area, contusion, possible concussion. Patient is not sure if he lost consciousness. Blood seepage in aqueous humor. Referred patient to Dr. Michaelson for consult.

"That poor boy," said Ms. Johnston. "How many times has he gotten hurt by that man?" she asked rhetorically.

"Just let it lie for now, Ms. Johnston," Dr. Murray said exasperated – not with her, but with the situation.

"Mom and Dad took me to the ER. Dr. Michaelson showed up right after we told the nurse we were there to see him. He took me into an exam room, took a look into my eyes and ordered an X-ray. Dad wasn't going to be happy. He always said, 'Whenever you go messin' around in the 'mergency room, the bills just keep pilin' up.' He had another saying when it came to things

getting costly. He would say: 'Do you know what the monkey said when he pissed on the cash register? This is gonna run into money.' I always thought that was cute."

"Even so, if he hadn't blindsided me, none of us would have been there in the first place. They took me to the X-ray department and

I had a couple shots taken of my noggin. We had to wait for the results of the X-rays before we could go home."

"Mr. Weatherford, please come this way. Step into my office. Have a seat. You, too, Mrs. Weatherford. Billy, you sit here," he pointed out a chair for Billy. "The X-rays are inconclusive. By that I mean, I don't see anything seriously wrong, but there is a small spot here," and he stood up and pointed to a part of the X-ray that was displayed on a light case mounted on the wall. "See this slightly darker grey area right here," Kevin, Millie and Billy strained forward to see it. "This looks like some slight bleeding. There are two things we can do. We can either admit Billy for observation; or we can entrust him to your care and you monitor how he's doing for the next eight to twelve hours. If there are any problems associated with the injury, symptoms should show up by then. Which would you like to do?"

"We really can't afford an overnight for the boy. So, I guess we'll lug him home and watch him. What should we look for?"

"He will probably have a mild headache. If it worsens get him back here. If he shows signs of nausea bring him in. There really isn't anything we can do for the

bloody eyes. That will go away, on its own, in time. It may take a while, but it will go away. Do you understand what needs to be done? If you fail to take care of this, he could get a lot worse and it could mean his death. Do I make myself clear on this point?"

They nodded.

"Good. Take him home. Make sure he rests. For the next 8 to 10 hours, no excessive fluids. If he looks and feels okay tomorrow, we're in the clear. Any last questions?"

There were none.

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

"Something happened to me that day. I don't know if it was really the head injury or what, but I started thinking differently. I know I was fed-up with being knocked around. I knew I was a bit afraid too. I started thinking of ways I could protect myself. I wanted to run away, just to get away from the unfairness of dad's attacks. For a while after the 'accident', as dad so quaintly called it, he seemed less prone to smacking any of us around. Then, gradually, he started hitting us again. It seemed that the accident's impact on him had worn off. After a while, he was right back where he'd been before, maybe a bit worse from time to time. I knew that mom was more or less helpless when dad started working Gary and me over but I always thought she could have protected us more. But she never did. She just let it happen and happen again. I loved my mother, but I started hating her for not defending us kids. In a way, I probably blamed her more than I did dad. Dad just couldn't control himself, especially if he'd had a couple drinks in him. He was just a downright mean drunk. He didn't drink all the time, but when he did, , someone was going to get hurt."

"Mom was a little woman. I didn't think she could hurt a fly. She just didn't have a mean bone in her body. Dad bullied her unmercifully. Always did. He used to call her stupid. He was always ordering her around. She did what he wanted her to do, or else. Like I said before, we had to move because he was always working her over when we lived in Tennessee. And the sheriff was on to him. They were always checking in to see if mom and us kids were okay. Dad didn't like all the attention from the sheriff and his deputies, so we moved. I don't know why, but the sheriff in Hernando seemed to just turn a blind eye to what dad was doing to all of us. Year after year Mom just sat there and took whatever he dished

out. She never, ever seemed to fight back. Then, one day she just snapped. After he had beaten her one night he fell asleep. Mom came into our room."

"Billy Dean, get up and get dressed. Then, get your brother up. Have him get dressed too. Do it very, very quietly. Then slip out the front door. Don't make a sound. Just go over to Mrs. Venecour's. I'm going to give her a call and make arrangements for you to say there tonight."

"Mrs. Venecour was just about mom's only friend in the neighborhood. All the rest of her friends and kin she had left behind in Tennessee. She made the call. I had Gary up and dressed. We were standing in the doorway to our room. Mom waved her hand saying, "Get going." She put her first finger to her lips as if to say, "Be quiet."

We tiptoed to the front door. Just before we opened the door, mom came up to us and said, "It's going to be alright. Billy Dean, where is your baseball bat?"

"I whispered, 'It's in my closet with my ball and glove.'"

"Why?"

"Never you mind. I need to borrow it. There's something I need to do. Now scat," and she opened the door and prodded us to leave. We ran over to Mrs. Venecour's place. She was waiting at the door for us."

"What's wrong, Billy?" she asked as we approached the door."

"I don't really know. Mom just woke us up and said she needed to do something. She didn't say what. She told us to come over here for the rest of the night. She wanted to borrow my bat, though."

"Oh, really. I'm sure she'll take care of whatever it is she has to do. Come on in. You two can sleep in Benny's room tonight. He won't be home for a couple more days." Benny was her brother, who lived with her when he wasn't on the road as a trucker. We crawled into his double bed and were fast asleep. Whatever mom was going to do was okay by us. She always treated us proper. It was her inability to stop dad's tirades that upset me. It wasn't her fault but"

....

Millie crept into Gary and Billy's room. She rummaged through Billy's unkempt closet and found the bat. She swung it around a couple times, just to get the feel of it, and drove it into the boy's mattress with an awesome thud. Then she marched into her bedroom and straight for her sleeping husband. He was sprawled out on the bed, spread-eagle with his clothes still on. He never knew what was coming. He was passed out. There was no chance to avoid the impact of the bat. She swung with all the might she could muster. The bat came crashing down on his right knee. The impact was thunderous, and it shattered his knee cap. His foot and lower leg swung up toward the ceiling, while his torso and upper leg remained flat on the bed. The cry of agony that erupted from Kevin was heard by neighbors three houses away. It actually woke them up from a deep sleep.

Millie, still holding the bat, ready to swing again said to Kevin, "Kevin, you make one move toward me and I'll kill you dead! You ever hit me again, and I promise, as God is my witness, I will kill you. So, you better make sure I'm dead. Cuz, if I survive, I'll kill you! If you ever hurt the boys again, I will kill you. Do you understand me?"

The shock of what he was hearing almost equaled the pain in the knee he used to have.

"Do you hear me? Do you want me to repeat myself, again?"

"I hear you, you bitch!"

"Let me add one more thing. If you ever curse me again, so help me, I'll make you wish the words had never been created. Am I making myself clear?"

All Kevin could do was nod his head.

"I'm calling an ambulance for you. You tell them whatever you want. I don't give a damn." She went to the phone and calmly called the local emergency number. "My husband has had an unfortunate accident. Could you please send an ambulance? He's hurt his knee. The address is 48 Aberyls Road, off Toucan Trail."

Forty-five minutes later the ambulance arrived. The paramedics attended to Kevin's shattered knee, putting a temporary splint on it and transported him to the hospital in Brooksville. Millie followed a few minutes later.

When she arrived at the emergency entrance to the hospital, Kevin had already been moved into one of the treatment rooms. She entered, lowered her head to his ear and said, "In all likelihood the police have been called in to investigate. You tell them whatever you want. I won't say a word. Tell them I did this to you. Tell them that it was an accident. I don't care what you say. Just know, either way, if I go to jail and I hear you've laid one hand on those boys while I'm gone, I will be back one day and there will be Hell to pay. Mark my words. The choice is yours."

The police had been called. They first went to Kevin's cubicle and interviewed him before he was taken upstairs for surgery to re-

construct what was left of his knee. The doctor said it would never be the same again. He'd always have a knee that would not bend, or bent very little. But, he'd be able to walk with a limp.

The police questioned Millie as soon as Kevin was taken upstairs. "Mrs. Weatherford, I'm Officer Coulter and this is my partner Officer Tinch. We need to ask you a few questions about your husband's accident. Can you tell us how it happened."

"I really can't. He went to bed early. I was out in the living room when he screamed. What did he say happened?"

"He said he was standing on the bed, reaching up to get something from a high shelf beside the bed. Somehow he slipped, his foot slipped between the bed frame and he fell forward and his knee got busted. Man, I bet that hurt. Doctors don't think they can reconstruct it. He'll only be able to hobble around once it heals. It's a damn shame. He seems like such a nice guy. Oh well. Thanks for your time. If we have any further questions, we'll let you know. Have as good a night as you can, under the circumstances."

"It will work itself out I'm sure. Thank you officers."

....

"It took three months for Dad's knee to heal enough so he could put his full weight on it. He had to have regular physiotherapy in Hudson. Mom drove him to every one of the sessions. Dad did not so much as look sideways at her. He knew there was a new order in the Weatherford house. He raised his hand against me only once, but withdrew it before it could connect. Mom stood back and just smiled. She had taken her one chance and Dad was a better man for it."

"Everyone knew what had happened. They knew it had been no accident. But, unless Kevin said anything, it was over. "

"Mom finally stood up and was counted. She taught Dad an important lesson. She was not to be messed with anymore. And, I don't believe he ever came close to laying a hand on her or us again. It's like that night changed our world. Dad had paid dearly. His leg was never quite the same again. He always walked like that guy on *Gunsmoke*. What's his name? Dennis Weaver was the actor, but what was his character's name?"

"Chester."

"Yeah, that's right. Chester. That was a good show for its time. Whatever happened to James Arness, I wonder? Never mind. Do you know what time it is? I'm getting kind of stiff and a bit tired. Would you have a big problem if we called it quits for today? I'd like to go back to my cell if it's okay with you and the warden."

"Warden?"

"Its fine with me." Came the voice over the PA. "The guard will be in momentarily. Mr. Bainbridge, please ."

"I know the drill. Stay seated until Mr. Weatherford has been escorted from the room, right?"

"That's it."

The guard came in, removed the shackles from the o-rings. As they were on their way to the door, Billy turned. "Are we scheduled for day after tomorrow? Are we good to go?"

"As far as I know, yes. A lot has to do with what the police find tomorrow. I'm sure they're going to visit the sites you mentioned. If they don't turn up anything, we may be done. Either the warden or I will let you know. Take care, Billy."

The guard escorted him out the door and he shuffled back to the block.

'That was quite a day,' I thought. He seemed so candid. I sure as hell hope he was telling the truth about the burial sites. If not, if he was just bullshitting us, the interviews would be over for good. And we'd never know anything more. Was he telling the truth or not? Or was it just one big game with him? Tomorrow would tell.

I packed up my notebooks, pencils and tape recorder, shoving them into the attaché case as I headed for the door. As I exited the interview room, the warden met me. He had a cardboard box in his hands. I could see notepads and videotapes in the box.

"Are those for me?"

"We'll see."

"You're starting with that bureaucracy bullshit again, are you?" It was probably as much a statement as a question.

"No, but before I hand this stuff over to you, I need to know what you're going to do with them to insure their security. That's all."

"I had planned to have Mr. Sykes hold all this stuff in escrow for us but since he has a legal obligation that involved both Billy and me, I need to rethink what to do with it. I think it would be wise to choose another attorney to be the escrow agent for it. Do you have a problem with that?"

"No, that makes perfect sense to me. No conflict of interests. Do you know who will be the escrow agent?"

"There's only one other attorney that I know in Brooksville. Joe Tortino. I'll contact him and see if he's willing to sit on this stuff for us. Could you do me a favor? Would you have the contents of the box inventoried, have two copies of the inventory made up? You keep one and I'll keep the other. After it has been inventoried, please have it officially sealed, you know, like crime scene evidence, so we both know that nothing has been tampered with. Does that work for you?"

"Makes perfect sense to me. I'll have Irene do the inventory and make arrangements to have the box sealed. Thanks for your cooperation. Sorry we got off on such a bad footing earlier. It's my job and I try to go by the book. But what's going on here is just not in the book. I hope they find something tomorrow. I personally don't want this interview to end just after it has begun. We all have something to gain from this guy's talking. Give me half an hour to get this stuff cataloged and you can pick it up at my office. Again, sorry and thanks. You're doing a great job getting him to talk. Bye." With that, the warden was on his way toward his office, box in hand.

Mark Barnkowsky rounded the corner from the hall that led to the observation rooms. "Roger, before you leave, I want to let you know we got all the info on the three burial sites. I have the notes right here in my pocket. Before I leave I will call Miller and let him know. He may or may not want to wait until tomorrow to try to exhume, at least one of the bodies. He might try to get it done tonight. Do you have a cell number or a home phone, so I can get in touch with you?" I gave him my cell number. "Whatever he decides to do, I will let you know. Thanks for the help. It's really appreciated. From the sounds of it, we'd never have thought to look

for the girls' bodies in the median of I-75. Kind of diabolical, if you want my opinion. Who would think of burying bodies there? Kind of buried in plain sight, so to speak. Ingenious."

"Mark. Can I ask you a personal question?"

"Sure."

"Where did you go to school?"

"You mean college?"

"Yeah."

"I got my bachelor's at the University of Minnesota, in criminal justice and I'm working on my masters at USF, the University of South Florida. Why?"

"Just curious. Did you happen to play football?"

"Ya. I played for the U of Minnesota and, later, I played linebacker for the Vikings. I played only two years for the Vikes, though. At the beginning of my third season, I blew out my shoulder. I had surgery on it, but it was just never the same. So, I went into police work. I can't tell you which is more dangerous.

"I kind of thought you looked like a ball player. I just wanted to confirm my suspicion. Are you going to be here the day after tomorrow to do follow up?"

"I can't say for sure. Miller may want to take over from here on out. I'd like to keep up on this, either way. If I don't see you then, don't be a stranger. I'd like to get to know you better and talk over what's going on in this case. Maybe you and your wife could come

into town and we could all have dinner. My wife is a superb cook. You name it, she can cook it."

"I'm not married. But, I would love to meet your wife and have dinner. Give me your number and I'll call you. Wait a minute; you already gave me your number. Here it is." I pulled out his card and on the back was his cell number. "We're good."

"Thanks. One or the other of us will call the other, right? Got to get going. Thanks again." And he strode down the hall toward the warden's office and the exit.

A moment later I made my way to the warden's office. Irene should have had enough time to inventory the contents of the box, made copies of the inventory, and sealed it up. I stopped in at the warden's office. No one was there. I asked his secretary, "Do you know where the warden is?"

"Yes. He had to leave. I'll call Irene. I think she has your parcel ready for you." She picked up the phone and dialed. "Mrs. Cohn, is the parcel ready for Mr. Bainbridge? Do you want me to come in and get it? Okay." She turned to me. "She'll be right out."

Irene, package in hand, papers stacked on top, entered the room. "Here's your package. Here are the inventory sheets. If you'd sign or initial one copy for our records, one for the warden's records, and the third is yours to keep. Would you like to review the inventory before I seal the box?"

"No. If you say this stuff is in there. I'm going to believe you. There is no reason for any of us to be untrusting. We're all on the same team in the end."

"That's nice of you to say. I know we should be, but we all have different agendas, even so, I think we all want the same thing. The truth. No matter how disturbing it might end up being." She finished putting the evidence tape on all the exposed edges and over the top and bottom flap joints. "That should do it. Here you go." She handed the sealed box to me. "It's your baby now. Good luck." She turned and retreated to her office, her copies of the inventory and the remaining roll of evidence tape in hand. The door closed gently behind her.

I turned to the receptionist. "I didn't catch your name this morning, sorry."

She looked a little perplexed and embarrassed. "I'm, I'm Morgan, Morgan Frank. Pleased to meet you."

"I'm Ro . . ."

"I know who you are Mr. Bainbridge."

"Roger, please."

"Okay."

Our goodbyes said, I turned toward the door and walked to the guard shack. The guard stopped me, had me sign out, and confirmed that the parcel was leaving the prison legally. He called Irene. Everything was in order. I handed him my visitor's ID tag. I stowed the box in the back of the car and began the short drive to the Best Western. Once there, I talked to the counter attendant.

"I'll be back day after tomorrow. Can you hold a room for me?"

“There’s no real need to reserve a room this time of season. We’re not usually all that busy. Rather than set up a formal reservation, I will put a note in the system that you will return day after tomorrow. Would you like the same room?”

“That would be fine. I just don’t want to end up without a room. You know what I mean?”

“I understand. The note is in the system. Do you want to check out now?” He prepared my bill. I paid the charges, packed up, and began my drive back to Brooksville. It had been a memorable day. Things had gone well, all in all. Even so, I was glad to have it over with. Tomorrow would tell.

Chapter 4

Validation

Wednesday, April 13, 2005

It was 4:30 by the time I was on the road home. Three hours later, I pulled into my drive. Well, not exactly mine yet, but it was home. I unpacked the car, bringing everything into the house, including my little cardboard treasure box. What to do first – call Ronny or Tortino? The call to Tortino could wait. Ronny was expecting me to call. It was right in the middle of the dinner hour and I was feeling a bit peckish myself. I'd grab a bite, then call him. I walked to the Wendy's just up the street, off Candlelight. I stopped myself. Do I really want fast food? Yes, faster the better.

Back at the house, I called Ronny, burger in hand. "Ronny, I made it! I got the first interview. I also have the box of tapes and stuff from the interview. They just let me walk out with it. Yeah, I can hardly believe it myself. You're a fucking genius. And I'm a great actor. A bullshit artist is more like it. Yeah, I have your note. Do you want to do anything about it tonight, or wait until morning? Sure, I can bring it over to the office. Meet you there in, say, half an hour? Should I bring the box? I was thinking that it might be best for someone else to hold it. I don't want you to be accused of con-

flict of interest. You represent Billy and, I don't know for sure what our legal relationship is. I'll let you worry about that. But, to make sure nothing goes wrong, what if we have Tortino hold everything? Okay, we can talk about that when I see you. Bye."

Half an hour later I was parked outside Ronny's law offices. He parked behind me on the street, across from the old city hall.

"So you pulled it off, you son of a bitch! Come on in." We went into his office and just sat silently for a minute or two. We both had to catch our breath and start thinking things through. "First order of business. Do you have Billy's note with you?" I nodded. "Good. Let me have it." I handed the note across to Ronny. He unfolded it and began to read. "Have you read this?"

"No, it was addressed to you. Billy didn't say take a look and give it to you. I tried to honor his wishes, even when the warden wanted it. And thanks to you, I could defend my actions. He finally caved. Apparently, his counsel told him about the same thing that you told me. You know, the fiduciary responsibilities and all that crap. What does it say?"

"Basically, Billy wants me to turn over to you a package I have been holding for him since shortly after he was arrested. Somehow he had it hidden away somewhere in the house and the police didn't find it when they searched the house. To be honest, I don't know where it was. That's really unimportant. All I know is that Mrs. Weatherford, Millie, brought it to me a few days after Billy and Gary were arrested. Apparently, Billy told her where it was and she brought it to me with instructions not to open it, just hold it until he told me to release it. I've been sitting on it ever since."

"You never even peeked?"

"I honestly try to do what is in my clients' best interests. He gave me instructions while I was his counsel, and I've tried to honor that obligation. I'm really a good attorney. I may not win every case, but I take my job and the law very seriously."

I knew that now. For me, Ronny was first and foremost my buddy and college roommate. I know more about him than he probably does. I was sober longer. This side of him was kind of new for me. I had left Florida right after graduation. He stayed on at Florida to go to law school and back home to practice. All our meetings after that had been causal and in Chicago. I had never really seen him do his legal thing before. He really was good.

"Okay, let's quit screwing around and get down to business. Where do we go from here? Do you have the package here?" I asked.

"Yes, it's in a small vault we maintain in the basement of the building. We had it installed when we converted this building into our law offices a few years back. I'll go down and get it. Wait here. I'll be right back."

After a few minutes, Ronny returned with a bundle. It was about 9" by 12" and 2" thick, wrapped in plain brown paper with all the joints of the paper taped. The cellophane tape had already begun to dry out and yellow. Some of it was so old and dry that it was no longer sticking to the paper. Anyone could have simply unfolded the paper and slipped the contents out, had they wanted to. I was sure that Ronny had no reason to lie to me, and he did seem to take his fiduciary duties seriously. It had probably sat in the safe untouched since Billy's mom had given it to Ronny. He handed the package to me. "By handing this over to you pursuant to instructions from my client, I hereby discharge my obligations and responsibilities regarding the package."

“Damn. That sounded like legalese to me.”

“It was meant to. Probably tomorrow, I’d like you to stop by and sign an acknowledgement of receipt. That way, I have a record that you got the package and I’m no longer responsible for it. Also, it absolves me of any further obligations to Billy. So, I could take possession of the interview box after that.” Then, goodtime Ronny was back. He was like a kid waiting to open Christmas presents. “Come on. Open the damn thing up. I’m as interested as you are in seeing what’s in it.”

I tore away the paper on the bundle. It was a bound ledger. It said on the cover, “The private journal of Billy Dean Weatherford.” That’s quite a moniker.” I flipped open the cover. On the first page were details about the first murder he had described earlier today. I flipped through the rest of the journal. Each entry named a victim. Taped to the top center of the first page of each entry was the victim’s driver’s license and what looked

like geographic coordinates in degrees, minutes and seconds. Holy crap! The guy had GPS coordinates for each of the grave sites. Absolutely unbelievable. I needed to get these to the guys in Tampa. The first entry was labeled Mary MacIntyre. “You’re not going to believe this. He recorded the details of his kills here, and included their driver’s license and coordinates for where the bodies are buried! Look here.” At the bottom of the MacIntyre page Billy had made a note, dated August 2, 1995: ‘A great device has just become available. It’s called a Magellan NAV 1000 GPS receiver. I’m going to revisit all my burial sites and record their locations. This is so cool.’ That was just before he was arrested.”

I looked up at Ronny. His jaw was slack and almost dropped to his desktop. “Are you kidding me?! He kept a complete record of what he’d done and he revisited all his burial sites? And I’ve been hold-

ing this information for ten years!?” He couldn’t believe it. He’d been sitting on information that would have made it possible for a number of families to get some closure, rather than always wondering if their daughter, wife, or girlfriend was still alive somewhere.

“How do I share this with the police and not have to give the journal up to someone?”

“Beats the shit out of me. Let me think. Do you know anyone in the police department that you can trust?”

“Well, I know two people. One I talked to on the phone. The other I met today at the prison. Why?”

“Can you trust either of them to keep your identity a secret? You’d be an anonymous informant. Do you think either would do that for you?”

“I can call Barnkowsky and do the hypothetical question thing with him. He seems like a straight shooter, but it depends on how much of a company man he really is.”

“OK, give him a call, now!”

I pulled out the card Mark had given me earlier and dialed the number scribbled on the back. “Mark. This is Roger Bainbridge. I have a hypothetical question for you. If someone offered you information concerning the whereabouts of a murder victim and that information included the victim’s driver’s license *and* GPS coordinates of the burial site, could you pass this information on to the proper people without having to divulge the identity of your informant?”

"Where did you get this information?"

"From a confidential informant."

"You rotten bastard. Did I say that out loud? You didn't hear that did you? Obviously, I can't make that call. But what I can do is contact Miller to see if he's willing to play the game. I'll only refer to you as an anonymous caller. Sure, he'll know it was you, but I'm sure he will play along. Let me give him a buzz and see what he says. Where can I get in touch with you in, say, the next half hour?"

"What's your private line number here? Barnkowsky wants to phone back in a few minutes with an answer." Ronny gave me a number and I repeated it to Barnkowsky. Then he hung up.

Ronny and I went through the journal. We could not believe the detail Billy had recorded. It seemed like only a few minutes had passed, when the phone rang. "Hi, Mark. What did he say?"

"He said let's first test the validity of the information. He was already at the site Weatherford described as the second murder. The one in the woods just north of the I-75 and the Fowler overpass. He said to get the coordinates and he'd verify them against where they were. Can you give them to me and I'll phone him with them?"

I read off the coordinates as they appeared in the book.

"I'll get back to you as soon as we have confirmed or ruled them out. Hang tight. This is great information if it's real. I really appreciate your willingness to get this to us so quickly. It might make things a whole lot easier for us." Before I could respond, he hung up.

It seemed like an eternity waiting for Mark to call back. The phone rang again. The first word I heard was "Bingo! The coordinates were right on. Sure there is some discrepancy, but that's to be expected. Ten years ago the civilian versions of GPS receivers were less accurate than they are now. Now they actually survey with the damn things. Miller says we have an anonymous informant. He knows it's you, but he won't press the issue. Can you give me the coordinates for the other two sites Weatherford mentioned today? What about the rest?"

"I can give you the other two but I can't give you the others until he has revealed the murders during the interview. Do you know where I'm coming from? If he fails to divulge all the murders, I will pass along all the information I have. Does that work for you? As it is, your crime scene people are going to have their hands full with the three sites he's already given us. You start adding three more sites with each interview and you guys will have to call in reinforcements. I think this could work for all of us if we can all be patient. Here are the other two sets of coordinates." I read off the coordinates as written in the journal. "Why don't you read them back to me, just in case. Yah, Yah, Yah. Yah. You're good to go. Thanks Mark. Talk to you soon. Bye."

"The coordinates worked. He's agreed to let me feed him the information I can release it as the interviews progress."

"I know. I was listening to your conversation, you know. What do you want to do about the package?"

"Will you accept responsibility for it or would you prefer we find someone else? I'd rather have it in your vault than sitting around my place unprotected. Can you do that for me?"

“Sure. No problem.” He took the package, went down to the basement, and put it in the vault.

When he returned, I said “I’m exhausted. Simply worn out. I’m going home. I’ll talk to you tomorrow. See you later.” I walked out of his office feeling like a limp noodle. Was I the luckiest bastard in the world or what!?

Although I was tired, I couldn’t help but look through the journal. Page after page of information on each of the murders. The detail was astounding. Everything printed out in nice neat, perfectly formed letters and words. The grammar in every sentence was correct and perfectly punctuated. I could only wish my work was as well written and concise. The penmanship was reminiscent of a draftsman’s printing on house plans. There were no corrections. Everything was written in pen. There were no pages missing. Everything appeared as if he put his thoughts and the details down only once without revision. Amazing. Either he had prepared earlier drafts and copied the final version into the journals, or, like Mozart with his compositions, there was no need for corrections. Everything came out in its final form the first time. I’d have to ask him about that somehow without tipping my hand to the authorities.

Finally, I gave in to my fatigue. It was only 11:00, but the Land of Nod beckoned. I stored the journal away in my makeshift desk and went to bed. Bed had never felt so good. Tomorrow would be another day.

When I awoke, the morning was still young. The night’s accumulation of dew had not yet evaporated from the grass in the back yard but the sun was making its way in and would soon burn it off. It was still crisp. I loved this. I could say crisp but it was nothing like the mornings back in Chicago this time of year. A sweater would

suffice. Later on in the day, I'd be back in short sleeves. The temperatures would probably climb into the high 70s by noon. I really had missed the winters in Florida, almost always being assured of sun and moderate temperatures. Spring and fall were really comfortable too. The summers, however, were hot, humid, and rainy.

Strangely, even with all the events that had played out over the last couple of weeks, I had a soft place in my heart for Chicago. But, for now, Brooksville was home and Florida was a damn interesting place to be.

I got ready to call Mark to see how things had gone with the search last night. I wanted to know if the second set of numbers had been as useful. Also, were they going to look into the Hernando burial site, or would they have the local sheriff's department take over? I supposed there was a jurisdictional issue there. As my coffee brewed, I dialed Mark's office. "Yes, may I speak with Detective Barnkowsky? This is Roger Bainbridge." A moment later, Mark was on the phone.

"Hello, Roger. What can I do for you this fine morn?"

"You sound chipper. What's up?"

"Those coordinates you gave me last night, well, they *all* worked."

"What do you mean they *all* worked? You guys didn't have enough time to check all of them out, not by – and I looked at my watch – 9:30.

"Think again, buddy. We called Sheriff Nugent in Hernando last night, told him what was going on and he had his team out at the burial site by daybreak. We just got a call back that they had found

what they believe to be a burial site. They can't give us a hundred percent confirmation on it until their forensics people have a chance to do a full site review, but indications are that the site is there. The co-ordinates you gave me and the description of the site that I had jotted down yesterday were a perfect match. I'm impressed all the way around."

"Do you want me to get the driver's licenses to you?"

"With the victims' names, we pulled up the missing persons' reports that had been filed by friends and family members. So, we have names and addresses. Thanks. We'll contact the parties concerned as soon as we have confirmation from our forensics teams."

"Like you said, what we have already is going to keep our people and labs busy. Apparently, the first site has been processed. The second is in progress. They only found bone fragments and the purse in the first grave, just like Weatherford had reported. The labs are going to do a routine DNA analysis to verify that the bodies are who they were reported to be. From all indications, so far, there probably isn't much doubt that these remains are those of the women Weatherford told us about. Miller is very pleased. So am I. Thanks for working with me. I'm getting plenty of brownie points for this. Every point counts around here when it comes promotion time. If there is ever anything I can do for you, just let me know, Okay? Got to go, but keep in touch. Oh, by the way. It looks like Miller will be tied up here with site processing and evidence collection, so he's going to send me back up for the next session. See you tomorrow. Take care."

I just had to see what the coordinates Billy had provided looked like. I pulled up *Google Earth* on the web and entered the coordinates Billy had given for the first three victims' locations. I found I

could locate the exact sites at varying scales. I could almost make out individual trees. It was unbelievable just how precise his information was. The coordinates given in the journal were:

Mary MacIntyre -- 20° 36' 13.43" N, 82° 41' 49.66" W;

Carol Manson -- 28° 3' 30.75" N, 82° 21' 16.01 W; and

Haley Porter -- 28° 3' 32.12" N, 82° 21' 16.05" W.

The descriptions he had given for the sites were not as apparent using Google but, then, ten years had passed. Things change over time.

Everything was playing out perfectly. Billy was genuinely cooperating with us. He hadn't missed a point so far. The pessimist in me wondered if it would continue. This was going almost too well. Too easy. The shit just has to hit the fan sooner or later. It always does somehow, especially with serial killers, and Billy was turning out to be almost too cooperative. He has to have some kind of agenda. He's so methodical in what he does. Everything seems to have an absolutely defined goal or purpose. What is his goal here? It can't all be "wanting to clear up the record." With so much internalization going on with him, he really doesn't need to publicize his exploits. They are all recorded for posterity in his own mind. There has to be some ulterior motive at work here. But, what the hell is it?

I'd have to get back to Mark to see if I can get copies of the case files for the murders Billy was actually charged with. Those murders represented the final stages of his killing spree. I wondered how, or if, they differed from the earlier ones he's describing for us now? Has he followed some kind of progression, or would he

continue to remain as controlled as he was with the first three? He already said he grew sloppy toward the end. How sloppy?

My Realtor, Bob, called as I poured my second mug of coffee. The closing has been scheduled. "Have you made arrangements to transfer funds for the closing?" he asked. I hadn't. In the midst of all that was happening, it had simply slipped my mind. "Did Chelsea Title send you your closing statement? You should have received it already. It will give you the bottom line amount you will need at closing. Also, you will need the funds in the form of a cashier's check."

"I don't know if I have received the closing statement. I've been out of town. I'll have to check my mail. I don't think the transfer will be a problem. Let me work on finding the closing statement and making arrangements for a wire transfer of the monies into my account here. I'll give you a buzz later today. When exactly are we supposed to close? On the 30th, right? Okay. I have enough time to get my ducks in a row. Thanks for calling. My head has been elsewhere and I simply forgot all about this stuff. No problem. Talk to you soon. Bye."

Damn! I'd forgotten all about the closing. I'd have to get myself in gear. First, I needed to find that closing statement. I didn't remember seeing the envelope, but I hadn't had time to open it, let alone look it over. I began shuffling through the stack of unopened mail on my kitchen table, amazed at the volume of junk mail. When I opened the statement I saw I was getting more credits against my amount due than I had imagined. I wondered why? I'd talk to Bob about it when I got back to him. I had to call my money market investment manager, and have him cash out what I needed, along with a few bucks to live on. I wasn't on a payroll any longer. No need to see if my check had been deposited. There wasn't going to be one. I had become so habituated to the check

just being deposited to my account that it was a little frightening to think that that was no longer happening. I was really all on my own, now, financially. My only safety net was my money market investments. Not a problem to worry about now.

I needed to call Ronny as well. My “free day” was starting to fill up with routine life matters. The drudge stuff of life.

“Stan, this is Roger Bainbridge. I’m in Florida now. Yeah. I moved here a couple weeks ago. I probably should have let you know before this. Sorry. Here’s my problem. I’m buying a house down here. I need to pull some money out of my money market account to cover the closing costs. Yeah, I know it’s not a good time to be pulling funds out, but I need it. It’s never a good time to pull funds out.” We both chuckled. “Would you arrange to have the money I need wire transferred to my account in the Sun Bank here in Brooksville? Sure, I can do that. I’ll e-mail you the account information and the amount I need. Okay, how is the market doing? I haven’t had a chance to keep up with it. Oh, really. That doesn’t sound good. What’s the long-term look like? Okay. I won’t worry about it then. Thanks. Appreciate your cooperation.”

Whenever I talked to Stan, the market was always going to the dogs. Even if day after day the Dow Jones set new highs. Sure, sooner or later there had to be an “adjustment” but, for now, things looked pretty good. I wasn’t going to lose any sleep over it. Well, at least not right now.

I dashed off a quick e-mail to Stan, giving him all the numbers. That responsibility was taken care of. Better call Bob back.

“Can I speak to Bob? Thanks. Bob, I found the closing statement and have made arrangements for my funds to be transferred into my Sun Bank account. Should be there later today. I have a couple

questions. First, the bottom line – the amount due at closing – is less than I had anticipated. Why? Okay. They're crediting me with the property taxes, which I will have to pay when they come due. Understood. No. I haven't made arrangements for homeowners or house insurance. Who would you suggest I contact about that? I know, but do you have anyone you can recommend? Browning Insurance or Wayne Haidle. I'll make arrangements with one of them. Yes, I've already spoken with the folks at Withlacoochee. All they needed from me was a date to switch service. They'll do it a couple of days prior to the official closing. Second, if I should have to be out of town on the day of closing, can I take care of whatever I have to do at closing before hand? You see, I'm kind of in the middle of something and I can't miss these meetings and I don't really have control over when they are scheduled. You'll arrange for me to close in absentia. Good. If I'm really free on the closing day I will attend. Otherwise, everything can be taken care of in advance? Perfect. Thanks Bob. Talk to you soon. Bye."

I finished getting dressed. I'd better see Ronny. I had a couple things I need to go over with him. As I drove up Broad Street, toward town and Ronny's offices, I saw the Cottage Inn – a little, and I mean little – restaurant on the corner of Broad and what had become Martin Luther King Blvd. The owner, Flo, had run the place, it seemed, forever along with her daughter. In fact, she had a burger named after her daughter – the Bunny Burger. Always a favorite. I decided I had time to stop in and grab something to eat before I met with Ronny. Attorneys always had "business lunches" to attend. I couldn't interfere with that tradition. I'd catch him after lunch. As usual, the service was down home casual and friendly. I had the special. I really wasn't up for burgers two meals in a row. The meal was delightful, as usual. I paid my tab and drove to Ronny's. He should be back from his power lunch by now. It was almost one.

When I arrived at Ronny's office, the receptionist informed me that he had not yet returned from his lunch meeting. I knew it. He was expected back momentarily, because he had an appointment scheduled with a client at 1:30. I told her I'd wait and catch him before that meeting. Ronny finally came in. "Do you have a minute so we can talk?"

"I don't have much more than a minute. I have a meeting I have to prepare for. What's up?"

"Did you have a chance to think about the package I left with you last night?"

"I've given it some thought. I don't see any conflicts of interest now. I discharged my responsibilities to Billy by delivering the package to you as he requested. Since I don't have anything else that belongs to him, I would feel comfortable holding it for you. Anything else?"

"Two things. First, the coordinates were right on the money. Barnkowsky confirmed them with me. Second, one more small thing. Money. I can't allow you to provide legal advice and services out of friendship. This needs to be a business arrangement. I'd like to retain your services, officially. Any problems with that?"

"Yes and no. Yes, you're my friend. And, no, because in time you may need additional legal advice, but, not to sound cold hearted about it, law is my business. So, we can talk more about what and how much of a retainer later. Right now I need to get ready for my meeting. I hope you understand. Now get out!" The last comment was said with a big foolish grin on his face.

"Okay, okay. If you'd rather talk to some other cranky old client, so be it. I'm outta here. I'll call you later. Take care." As I passed

through the reception area, it looked like his cranky old client was a tall, slender, leggy brunette dressed to the nines. She was really something to look at. I'd want to get ready for any meeting with her. As I approached the door, I heard the receptionist say, "Mrs. LaFave, Mr. Sykes will see you now. Would you follow me to the conference room? This way." Then they were gone. She was married. Damn. She was stunning. I hadn't been involved in the dating social scene in Chicago but Mrs. LaFave had made a definite first impression on me. If there were more like her around, my singularity could be compromised. I wondered if she has a sister?

With things fairly well tidied up, I had the rest of what was left of the afternoon free. I wanted to get home to go over the journals a little, getting ready for tomorrow's interview. I reminded myself to call the motel to let them know I was coming for sure. Just to insure I had a place to lay my head tonight.

Chapter 5

Interview Two, Part 1 – More Victims

April 28

I spent the afternoon reviewing the journal, especially the next few murders. The details on each page were impressive, but one thing continued to nag at me. There wasn't a single correction. Not so much as a missed stroke of a letter or change in a word or punctuation. How had he done it? The only apparent revisions to the journal were the addition of the GPS coordinates, added after the original pages were penned.

Another thing that struck me was that there was no mention of the purses and coats of the victims that were left at the scene. When and why did that pattern begin?

Since I couldn't seem to find any more answers in the journal, I packed my overnight bag, loaded the car and got on the road for Starke. I wanted to check in early and take care of putting together my impressions of the day before and catch up on my personal journal. I'd been lax about keeping up with all the recent developments. I was fairly certain that I wouldn't be found or bothered in Starke.

After I was settled in at the motel, I sat down at the little workstation in the room and reflected on the events of the day before. Except for the revelations about the actual murders, only a couple things gave me pause. First, why did he feel it necessary to use a different method for each victim, when the abductions were, essentially, all the same? Why did it matter how they were killed when no one had ever discovered the whereabouts of the victims' bodies? No bodies, no pattern. Was he more upset with his father or mother, regarding the abuse he had received at the hands of his father? Did the anger he felt for either or both of his parents have an impact on his life as a killer?

I had also forgotten about the dossiers that Sgt. Miller had said he would have prepared for me. Mark Barnkowsky was probably supposed to have given them to me but, for whatever reason, he had forgotten. Under the circumstances I suppose I could understand why his mind was on other things. I am sure he was racing inside after hearing the details of the murders and such detailed information about the location of the bodies. I know that what we had been told was riveting. Billy had taken us all by surprise.

I called the front desk to see if Mark was scheduled to check in, if he wasn't already here. "This is Roger Bainbridge, I wonder if you could let me know if Mark Barnkowsky has checked in yet, or if he is scheduled in later? What room is he in? No thanks. I can call him directly from my room. Thanks for the help."

I called room 221. No answer. I called the front desk again.

"This is . . . Okay. Could you leave a message for Mr. Barnkowsky for me? Would you have him call me when he comes back? Thank you."

Apparently Mark had stepped out a bit earlier. Why hadn't the clerk at the front desk told me that when I talked to him? It would have saved me making an unnecessary call, and having to recall the front desk. It just would have been so much simpler to tell me he's out and I could have left a message right from the start. Eeee. I don't know why that kind of stupidity just drives me up the wall!

I returned to my review of the previous interview, making notes in my laptop as ideas and questions came to me. While I had thought I would need to take notes, the double recording arrangement precluded my need to do so. I could focus my full attention on Billy and his statements. I would have Billy's comments, verbatim, on the tapes. I could refer to them and I wouldn't miss a single word or tone. Added to this was the video of what he said, his posture, his demeanor, and facial expressions. All these were clues to veracity. Those tapes should prove to be a great resource and reference later.

As I mused over the interview, the phone rang. It was Mark replying to my message. "Hi, Mark. Great. How about you? Did you get a promotion yet? Just kidding. I was wondering. Two things actually. First, what are you doing for dinner? If you don't have big plans, maybe we could sit down and partake together. I have some questions for you about what happened yesterday and today. You know, some nice juicy unofficial tidbits for a friend. Second, I was also wondering if Miller had given you a dossier on the last seven murders committed by Weatherford? He said he would put something together for me. Fantastic. Don't worry about it. I had a feeling that you may have forgotten. I'm sure your mind was almost anywhere but on getting that stuff to me yesterday. Why don't you bring it along with you this evening? I tell you what. Since I am sure the city has you on a tight leash with regard to *per diem*, why don't you let me buy dinner? So, with that said, where would you like to go? I don't know anything about this town. You check out

the possibilities, I can drive, and you can tell me where we're going. Is that okay with you? Good. Does 7:30 work for you? Great. Drop by my room when you're ready to go. See you then. Bye."

I had about an hour to kill before Mark would be ready to go. Probably best to catch a quick shower in that time.

Promptly, at 7:30, Mark knocked on my door. "Good to see you. Come in. I'm just about ready. Just a couple quick things and we can get out of here. Did you happen to bring the dossier with you? Good. Just put it on the desk over there, please. Thanks. We can talk about it over dinner, although talking about murders over dinner may not be entirely appropriate. Just let me slip on my shoes and we can get going. Did you find a place to eat tonight?"

"Sure did. Do you like BBQ, seafood, or outback cookin'?" asked Mark.

"Are you trying to tell me there's an Outback restaurant in Starke!"

"Well, no. I asked the same question too. According to the clerk, there just aren't any really fine eateries in this town. There are lots of fast food places, you know, burgers, tacos, subs, etc., but not much haute cuisine in these here parts." He was laying a bit of Florida country boy on me. Yeah, a guy from Minnesota. "Steve said the best, non-fast food places in town were Jinright's Seafood just down 301 toward the center of town. Almost across the street is Mate's Billabong. Over on Madison Street is the Madison Street Station, which sounds more like a bar to me. And, then, there's Sonny's Real Pit Bar-B-Q south on 301. That's about it, I'm afraid. "What's your poison? Just looking at you, I suppose you could go in any direction, right?" said Mark.

“Yeah. But I have to admit, when you mentioned the outback coo-kin’, my taste buds just got fired up for a good grilled steak. So, here is what I propose. Let’s shoot down 301 and check out the Billabong place. If they have a good looking menu, we eat there. If it’s a dump, which deep down in my heart I feel it will be, we head for good ole Sonny’s. At least I know their menu and the food isn’t half bad for a BBQ joint.”

“You’re a man after my own heart. I hope it’s not a Golden Corral wannabe.” Golden Corral was ‘well thought of ‘family-style buffet restaurant specializing in fried chicken and mashed potatoes and other precooked entrées throughout much of Florida.

We drove to the Billabong, and were pleasantly surprised. It wasn’t the Outback, but probably as close as Starke will probably get for a while. We ate, we drank a few beers, had a good talk and returned to the motel about 9:00. I was surprised just how tired all the food, beer, and driving had made me. We went to our rooms, agreeing to meet at 7:00 in the ‘cinnamon bun room’ for breakfast.

I began to look over the dossier, since it had not come up over dinner. After only a few minutes I knew my time would be better spent getting a good night’s sleep.

I arranged for a 6:30 wake up call, but sleep eluded me. My mind kept returning to the dossier. It revealed a completely different murder methodology. The brutality of the murders seemed to escalate with each new body found. Here were two things that did not make sense. No longer were the murders clean and neat. Each subsequent murder got messier and messier. And the bodies were not clandestinely buried. They were discovered, appearing as if that was by intent. Someone wanted them to be found! This was not at all in keeping with the murders I had heard described by

Billy the day before. He had mentioned that, toward the end, he had gotten sloppy. That was an understatement. They were figuratively and literally sloppy, brutal murders, with a rapidly growing display component. This somehow was not adding up. We'd have to wait and see what the next interview held in store for us. Tomorrow at 9:00 maybe we'd start finding out.

At breakfast Mark and I chatted about nothing important or, for that matter, not much germane to the pre-ceding two days, or what might happen today. After a quick bite and coffee for the road, we both drove out to the prison.

The initial pre-interview routine was repeated, except that everyone on the prison staff that I came into contact with knew who I was by sight and name. Word had gotten around quickly. I met with the warden.

"How are you today, Tim?

"All in all, pretty darn good. The other day went extremely well, don't you think?"

"You bet. I was especially gratified that the Tampa police were able to locate the first body so quickly after being directed to the burial site, based on the information Mr. Weatherford had provided us with. That was amazing."

"I talked to Miller in Tampa the night after the interview. He called and let me know that they had found the first body and that they were looking for the second – the ones in Tampa. I got a call from him yesterday and he indicated that the Hernando deputies had located the third, or first victim. I'm almost in shock. Weatherford has been here for the better part of ten years and during that time,

he hadn't given us so much as a hint that there might have been more victims. You must have the magic touch," said Tim

"I'll be honest with you. All this is very bizarre. Most serial killers have become so internalized by the time they actually start their killing rampages that most won't give any of it up to someone else. It's like they don't want to share the experience with anyone else, for fear that by so doing, they might lose a piece of the memory. It's very strange, really. And for Billy to be so open, it almost doesn't make sense. There has to be more going on here than meets the eye. I can almost guarantee he has some kind of agenda, but, for the life of me, I can't fathom what the hell it might be. Based on what he's told me over the phone, and from what I've seen during the interview, I don't believe that agenda includes the avoidance of the execution. From my read of him, he wants it all over with! But, seeking some kind of atonement for his actions is not in keeping with the normal serial killer's MO. Right now, he has me baffled, to be honest."

Tim replied, "I hear ya. He does seem like a strange bird. We've had other serial killers here, like Bundy and Rolling – Bundy, however, was before my time and Rolling is a fairly new arrival. They pretty much fit the profile of a serial killer. Weatherford doesn't somehow. Apparently, Bundy was a talker. A boaster. Rolling is a lot like Weatherford, only slightly more talkative, but not about the murders he was charged with. Almost everything else he talks about. Weatherford, he hadn't talked with any of the staff, except about routine prison topics. He seldom had questions, and he answered all questions put to him as clipped as possible. He was not effusive. So, I was shocked at the amount of information that poured out of him the other day without so much as a single real question being asked.

We'd better get going. Mr. Weatherford will be coming over in just a few minutes. It was good talking with you. Oh, would you mind if we have two days, minimum, between interviews? That would give the police a little more time to process the information we get from him."

"For me, it's okay. I can't speak for Billy. If he balks at the suggestion, I don't want to lose him. So, let me discuss it with him and see what he has to say about a change. I hope you understand."

"I understand and agree completely. We'd better get going."

The warden took his place in the observation room. I took my place in the interview room, and Billy was escorted in and shackled to the table and floor. I asked if he was ready to start. He nodded he was.

"Are you guys ready back there?" The warden's voice came over the PA with a "Yes, proceed." It went silent again."

"How are you doing today, Billy?" Not really waiting for a reply, I continued, "The warden has asked me to ask you if you would mind allowing two days between the interviews, so the police can corroborate what you tell us. I told them that I wouldn't have a problem with it, but the real issue is if you have a problem with it."

"Wasn't everything I said the other day the truth? I've proven that I'm telling the truth. Didn't they find the bodies exactly where I had described they'd be?"

Well, to be honest, yes they did. This is a request, not a demand."

"They can't demand shit from me! What the hell do I have to lose by cooperating? Either way, they're going to kill me." And, at the

same time, a pinch of superiority mixed in. If he understood the reasoning behind the request, he didn't let on. He continued, "We keep going as we agreed, or we're done now. Take it or leave it."

The PA sparked to life with a small hiss. "Mr. Weatherford, we appreciate your cooperation and there is no need to alter the schedule, if you are adamant about the proposed change. Proceed."

Then, it was as if someone had flipped a switch inside Billy. He smiled, becoming almost affable. "Sure, we can change the schedule. No problem on this end."

The warden, over the PA again, "We sincerely appreciate your cooperation on this matter. We're sorry if we upset you with the request. We'll try not to change anything again. Please accept my apologies." Billy just smiled.

What was that all about? One minute he's got us by our private parts, squeezing, then, he becomes Mr. Nice Guy. This was not making sense. Where is he going with all this?

"Okay. How would you like to proceed today? Would you like to repeat the process we started the other day,

or would you like to change the sequence? The choice is entirely yours."

Alice Swanson

"We can start with the killings, It's fine with me. The fourth victim was Alice Swanson of Live Oak. She was a student at USF. With Alice, we did the abduction thing a little differently. Well, it was kind of the same. I had to hit the John and at the same time Gary snagged her. He thought I was right behind him. He led her out to the van but when I didn't pop up behind her and use the chloro-

form on her, Gary had to improvise. He coaxed her into the van with a promise of some weed he'd squirreled away inside. He told her they could sit safely in the van and not get caught tokin' up. She crawled in and they fired up."

"When I couldn't find Gary, I knew where to look. So, I headed out to the van. Sure enough, there they were. She was already unconscious and bound. "Why didn't you wait for me?" I asked.

"Hey man, I thought you were right behind me, like usual. Where the hell were you?"

"I had to take a leak. I'd didn't think you were ready to get rollin'."

"I came out and you were gone. So, how did you get her in the van?"

Gary described how easy it had been. "I got her in the van to smoke a joint. She toked up a couple times, I whacked her on the head, she passed out and I cuffed her using the zip ties we always use. I just have to gag her before we leave. It was just that simple"

"Cool. Okay, let's get out of here."

"We drove up to East Fowler, and took the northbound I-75 on-ramp off Fowler. In the middle of the on-ramp circle is a good-sized stand of trees. They never cleared the area. We pulled off the on-ramp onto the apron, and got off the road as far as we could. I put my backpack on and picked up the shovel. When the coast was clear, we each grabbed an arm right at the shoulder and dragged her limp body down the embankment and into the woods. We probably should have carried her, but like the others, she was still unconscious and we both had stuff in our hands. We only had one free hand each. The dragging kind of tore at her skin, leaving

some fairly deep abrasions. Those must have hurt when she came to, because she started trying to scream through the gag as soon as she regained consciousness."

"I'd given this scenario a lot of thought. It required a lot more time to plan, since I had to have Gary, who was good a welder, fabricate a headpiece that was adjustable, so that it would fit over any victim's head. You would be surprised by just how much difference there is in the size of women's heads. It also had to be a little adjustable height-wise as well. I wanted the headband to fit securely in the center of the girl's forehead."

"After Gary had his way with her, it was my turn. I had Gary sit her up. I put the helmet on and adjusted the fit.

It fit perfectly. Gary had done a great job fabricating it. She looked scared. Had she known what was coming, she would have been even more terrified. As I reached into my backpack, I pulled out the T-handled screw that Gary had machined. I inserted the pointed end of the screw into the receiver Gary had placed in the center of the headband. A few twists and it was securely in place. I had Gary take a piece of rope he had carried down the embankment and tied her securely to a tree. I told her, "This is going to hurt, but it won't hurt for long."

"Once the point of the screw touched the skin of her forehead she started squirming around, a lot. We had to put another rope across the gag and tie it around the tree to keep her head from moving sideways. I began to screw the point into her head, a quarter to a half turn at a time. I could hear her screaming in pain as I twisted the screw deeper and deeper into her skull. Finally, there was much less resistance. I was through the skull. A few more turns and the screw was buried deep within her skull, and she was gone. Surprisingly, there was very little blood. The screw cut a

clean hole through her forehead and skull, sealing most of the bleeding. There were a few small streams of blood that ran down on either side of her nose, over her eyes, and began running down her cheek. But there wasn't all that much. I was pleased that it had worked so well. Much better than in my mind's eye. It was clean and it took time to accomplish its job. Both were a satisfaction to me."

"As we dug the grave, I started thinking to myself. 'Maybe next time, we should find some other place to dispose of the bodies. This was our third burial within a half a mile. It's either choose another burial area, or get a new van.' I didn't want the same vehicle to keep showing up parked in the same area. 'What if someone should remember the van being parked beside the road? They probably wouldn't, but it's better to be safe than sorry later. Yeah, but where next?' Or worse, if a cop came along and radioed in our license, it could show up that the same vehicle had been observed parked in the same area previous. I didn't want that scenario."

"Finally we had the grave prepared – we took our time this time. That's only respectful. We laid her in the grave, crossed her hands and arms on her chest and covered her over. I left the helmet on. I wasn't going to use that again, even though it had worked perfectly. I realized I enjoyed looking at my victim – looking into their eyes as that last bit of life fled from their body. I wonder if it is the soul that gives life to the body or is it the body that nourishes the soul? I wonder how one could find out which?"

Sarah Wilkerson

Without a pause, he began, "Sarah Wilkerson was our next kill. By this time, I was finding that I was enjoying the planning process as much as I was the actual killing. That surprised me. I guess it was the anticipation of the act that excited me. The actual kill was the climax of the planning process. It wasn't anticlimactic but, some-

how, the build-up to it had a lot more duration. As a consequence, I didn't feel the need to rush things. Instead of quickening, the time between kills actually grew longer. "

"There is a lot of satisfaction trying to work out in the open but it had its limitations. There must be a way around this. I thought. The moonlight was the only illumination we really needed. A full moon was always the best time to do your thing. If we only had some-place where we would be away from the prying eyes of neighbors and the cops, someplace remote, but close enough that you could get to it easily without being seen."

"I confided in Gary that getting the girls into the van before we did anything makes it so much safer for us. If we kept snatching them from the bars and drugging them with the chloroform outside the van, sometime someone was going to see what we were doing and then it would be all over. I said to Gary, 'Do you think you can keep getting them into the van on one premise or another?'

"That shouldn't be a problem. So far it's been easy. Most of those bimbos were looking for something to get high on,' said Gary.

"Please don't call them bimbos. Most of them are probably nice girls. They just find themselves caught up in something that their minds could never have anticipated. Who would think two clean-cut guys like us, would want to do them harm? Apparently, most don't seem to worry about it, once they fixate on the opportunity to score something. Keep it up. It's working great. They just get beyond their comfort zone before they know what hit them."

"One night I was watching some nature show on TV. It had to do with snakes, like pythons and anacondas. I had always thought that they crushed their prey to death. Apparently, they don't. What they do is prevent their prey from breathing in. Each time

their prey exhales, they just tighten up a little more, until there isn't enough breath to sustain life. What an ingenious way to kill your prey. Quiet and clean. But, how could I use it? I know I couldn't do what the constrictors do. I wouldn't have the strength over the time it took to have them suffocate. Besides, how could I watch if I was working so hard. There had to be a way."

"Then it came to me while I was having a tire fixed one day. When they had a problem getting the bead to seal to the rim, they put this hose around the tire, cinched it tight, and filled the hose with compressed air. In an instant the tire's bead made contact with the rim and the tire guy filled the tire with air. Could I build something that would work for me? All I would need is a tube of canvas with two walls and air bladders between the walls. I could blow up the bladders with compressed air and keep increasing the pressure on the prey until she couldn't breathe anymore."

"To have this method work I'd need some place I could get a source of compressed air. That would mean I needed a compressor and a place where we could be secure for a while. Both were serious problems but for every problem there is a solution. beyond their comfort zone before they know what hit them."

"I said to Gary, 'I have this idea for our next kill but we will need a place with compressed air and where we can be out of sight for at least half an hour. I was thinking, you're good friends with the guy who has a truck repair place over in that small industrial park in Brooksville. What's his name, Bobby McNabb? The trucker, and his wife runs the repair shop.'"

"Do you think you could talk him into letting us use the shop when no one is around?"

"Gary thought he could do that."

"I told him I wanted our next prey to be squeezed to death using the compressed air at the shop. There wouldn't be any blood, so there wouldn't be any cleanup. I asked him to get permission to use the place."

"Gary allowed as it might take some doing to convince Bobby to let him use it after hours, but he thought he could concoct something. He thought my idea was really neat."

"Mom was the only person I knew who sewed. I could try it, but I didn't want anything to go wrong mechanically. Mom would be the best bet to put this thing together for me. 'Mom, I've got a problem. I need something put together and I know I can't do it. Would you sew something for me? It'd have to be from scratch and without a pattern. I can describe it to you and I'll get all the materials you'll need. Do you think you could do this for me?' She agreed but wanted more information."

"I told her it's like a large sleeve. Actually, it's two sleeves with air bladders sown in between. I said I'd buy the bladders and the canvas. All I really needed her to do was sew the bladders into the canvas sleeves, making sure the bladders won't fall out."

"She had me go to Jo-Ann Fabric for canvas and nylon thread. 'I told her this was for an experiment I wanted to do and made a joke that I'd have to kill her if I told her the details because it was a spy thing. Mom just laughed and called me her James Bond.'"

"Over the next few weeks I scrounged around, looking for the air bladders I wanted. I finally found some out at Sarge's Second Hand place on Wiscon. He has all kinds of neat stuff there. I picked up 6 bladders. They were about six inches in diameter, heavy rubber construction, maybe inner tube weight rubber. When they had

enough air in them to stay in shaped, they were two feet long rubber 'hot dogs.'"

"Actually, they looked a lot like long boat bumpers, the kind you throw over the side of your boat to stop the boat from chaffing on the dock. When you filled them with air, they expanded laterally, growing in diameter but not in length. Sarge told me that they would easily double in diameter. They had Schrader valves built into one end. I told him they would serve my purposes perfectly. If I snugged the sleeve around the prey, all the expansion would be in toward the center, gradually making it impossible for her to breathe."

"Now that I had the bladders, I could give them to Mom to sew into the sleeve. I still needed to come up with some kind of arrangement to connect each of the bladders to one another, so they could all be filled simultaneously. I talked this over with Gary."

"He said he could build a manifold out of strong, reinforced rubber tubing. Have one line run all around on the inside of the sleeves' two pieces, on the top of the bladders. And have one end free to fill them with. All he needed was the tubing, some plastic tees and ells, some rubber sealant, zip ties and a Schrader valve for where you attach the compressor hose. It would be a lot easier to deflate once we were done if we removed them from each bladder and just have the one on the end of the tube where it was filled."

"We decided that we'd need to take a look at the whole thing before Mom finished. Gary said he wanted to install the filler manifold before she sews it all together. He said to make sure she didn't finish it before he got the manifold installed. He planned to look in Dad's shop for any extra hardware he'd need before going out to buy anything."

"I had six bladders, so he thought he'd need 10 feet of tubing, 6 tees and a few other things.. "This was going to be our most complicated adventure. It took a long time to get everything ready. Mom had the sleeve, or maybe a better term would be the vest, ready in about a week. There were a couple modifications I had to make, like compartmentalizing the bladders, each in its own little pocket. Then, I had her install three web belts around the outside, one top, one bottom, and one in the center. I could use these to snug-up the vest once it was on the prey. This would make it work more efficiently. Gary got all his components and he installed them just before Mom closed everything up."

"We had to wait another two months before we were ready to go. McNabb was reluctant to let Gary use the garage after hours. He kept telling Gary it was a safety thing. Finally, Bobby agreed to let him use the place. He gave Gary a spare set of keys. We were ready! We had a place and we had the vest."

"The only down side to the garage is that anyone could come knocking, especially if we were in there late at night and the lights were on. Maybe once would be okay, but we should have a place of our own. I promised myself I'd look into that."

"Then it occurred to me. If we could tape everything, we could re-live each moment over and over again. I had thought about this before, but we were always working at night during the full moon. It would be difficult to make a video with moonlight, I thought. As it turns out, I was wrong. Some of the cameras, well at least the later models, were really, really sensitive and you could do videos by moonlight. So, I picked up a small video cam – one that uses the mini cassettes – and a tripod for this upcoming venture. That purchase slowed things down too. I had to come up with the cash to buy it. So, most of the next few paychecks went to the purchase of the camera."

"Where is the camera and the videos you took? There is no mention of either in a report I received from the police.

"They're safely stored away. And I'm the only one who knows where they are. For now, I'm not willing to divulge that information to anyone. Maybe someday, but not now. Please don't ask any more about them."

I wanted to say, his some days were coming to an end in less than three weeks but, then, I thought better of it. If he didn't tell us where the tapes were very soon, he wouldn't be able to. Time was running out very quickly. I let it lie for now but those tapes could be unbelievably important. I could not know just how important they would be for me. In the end, they would change my life and destroy almost everything I had come to believe in.

"Finally, we were ready."

"The waiting was good. This was going to be our most elaborate undertaking. During most of my waking hours, I rehearsed what would happen. I'd go over every step and detail. When everything was firmly etched in my mind, I said to Gary, 'Let's do it!' And, that night we drove down to Hudson, just down 19. We didn't want to be driving all the way back to Brooksville from Tampa with a woman in the back of the van."

"This time, there were no screw ups between Gary and me. Everything went like clockwork. Gary brought out our next prey, I chloroformed her, he tied her up in the van and we headed for McNabb's garage. We'd picked her up around 10:00 and we wanted to wait until about 2:00 before we got to the garage. We had about an hour's drive back to Brooksville, so we had to kill time before we thought it would be safe to go to the garage. So, we just drove around, checking on our cargo every once in a while. I

had to chloroform her a couple more times before it was time. She woke up just before we arrived at the garage. She was groggy, but that soon wore off. It was probably the adrenaline that cleared her head so quickly after we arrived."

"We went around to the back of the garage. There was no one around. No lights in any of the other units. A contractor, who owned the entire complex, had storage trailers back behind the building. Unfortunately, they shielded our arrival from the wrong direction. There were some big oak trees, but it was clear all around them. We were shielded, however, by some bushes along the fence line that separated the complex from an undeveloped portion of the Brooksville Cemetery next door and the lane that connected the complex to the main road."

"Gary got out, unlocked the back door and returned to the van for the video cam and tripod. He went in and set the camera up and started it rolling. He came back for our prey. We each took an arm and walked/dragged her into the back of the garage. With each step her attitude seemed to change. One step she was cooperative. The next she was struggling and resisting. We took her into the center of the garage. One of the bays was empty. I guess they had left it free so we could work on Gary's car or use the hoist. We laid her down with her head on the lift. I returned to the van and got the vest."

"Once Gary was done, it was my turn to have fun. We stood her up, slid the vest over her. It fit like it was made for her. I cinched up the straps nice and snug. In the garage we had left the gag in her mouth. Someone might hear her screams if there was anyone around."

"We sat her down and Gary got behind the camera so he could keep her in focus and zoom in and out."

"I went over, picked up the air hose, removed the air-powered impact wrench and installed an air chuck. I approached Sarah. I reached down, held the air stem with my left hand and pressed the air chuck to it. I could see the vest inflate. I added a little more air. So far, the vest was operating perfectly, just as I'd hoped. As she felt the pressure increase, she looked up at me with doe-like eyes. She couldn't quite see the headlights bearing down on her, but she could feel the pressure of the bladders squeezing her from every direction. Then, as I added still more air, she realized what was happening. She had finally seen the headlights of her death and she couldn't get away. Soon I could hear her fighting for air. I applied more air to the vest. Her face was turning a reddish-purple. Still more air. She was trying to struggle, but she was losing strength and, just maybe, the will to fight. She looked up at me, as if to say, 'Why are you doing this to me?' I felt I owed her a response, 'Because I can,' I said. I applied more air to the vest. Her chest was moving less and less with every addition of air. I added more air. There was virtually no movement at all. Her chest was no longer moving. Her eyes were still but slightly bulgy. Her face changed from a reddish-purple to pink and, then, a slightly ashen color. Then, she toppled over onto the concrete floor. Her head hit with the strangest sickening thud I have ever heard, but I also realized I had heard that sound somewhere before. I checked her pulse. Strangely, there was the slightest beat, and then it stopped completely. It was over."

"We let her lay there for ten minutes more. Just to be sure. We deflated the vest, put her in the van, packed up the camera and tripod and left. As we were about to pull away, I asked Gary if he'd locked the door. 'I think so.' And he jumped out to check. He came back with a big, sheepish grin on his face. 'Good thing you asked. I'd forgotten to lock it. Thanks.' Now we were ready."

"I'd already chosen the place for the burial. Gary and I had agreed that we would not bury any of our victims in Hernando County. This kill represented a problem. We were nearly in the center of the county and it would be a good drive to anywhere that would make a suitable burial site. For a moment, I started to rethink my plan. There was a large woodlot right behind the garage that was bounded on the east by Jasmine Drive, what I thought was cemetery property on the south, and the power lines right-of-way on the north. We could simply drag her into the woods there and bury her. But without scouting the area first, it would all be new territory for us. We could make a mistake. And I knew there was a lot of swampy areas in that block of woods. No, had better stick with the original plan, no matter how inconvenient. We needed to stick to our agreement."

"We drove out to SR 50 and headed east. Once we got into Sumter County, we turned south on CR 471. Down about 6-7 miles is a small dirt road – Center Grade Road. We turned and headed toward the Weeks Pond area, a large stand of uncut hammock. I'd scouted this area out a week or so before. I had tied a small piece of hunter's orange tape on a bush where I wanted to go into the woods on the north side of the road. No one would be curious about the tape on the bush. All up and down the road you saw old and new strips of tape of different colors. Fall was fast approaching and hunters were already scouting out where they would hunt for hog and deer. My little strip would be just one among many. I did, however, make sure that it was not close to any other tapes. I didn't want some hunter stumbling over the grave during hunting season."

"It was a tangle for the first few yards and then the underbrush gave way to large, Spanish moss blanketed oaks. We went in about 50 yards. It was not full moonlight, like usual, so it was a little more difficult to navigate through the underbrush to the spot I

had selected. Fortunately, I had used my GPS to mark the spot I had selected. I pulled it from my pack and it directed us right to where I wanted."

"The digging was easy. Most of the ground in this area was only slightly dryer swamp. All this area was water-logged most of the year. Some of the higher areas did dry out some. It was one of these areas I had chosen. We dug the grave and slipped our package in, crossed her arms over her chest and gently covered her up. Gary hand raked some debris over the grave, and topped it off with some good-sized limbs that had broken off some of the oaks during a recent storm. We checked for anything left behind and we left."

"By the time we got home, we were really tired and filthy; after showering, we went to bed and dreamed of our little adventure. As I lay there in bed, I thought to myself, I missed the treed areas of I-75 around Tampa. They made it so much easier and quicker to dispose of the bodies. Maybe we should go back to what worked for us. Driving out to Sumter to bury bodies took too much preplanning. Disposal was not my favorite part of the experience. It was too much like work digging the grave and burying the victim."

"Then I had another logistical problem I had to resolve. What was I going to do with the video tapes? I couldn't just stack them up on the bookshelf. Where could I store them so that no one would find them and, at the same time, I could get to them? I'd have to work that one out. I had lots to think about. I also needed a new method. As I began to doze off, I assured myself that I'd come up with something."

"It took me almost two months to devise the method for the sixth kill. You know, it's a lot more difficult to dream up different ways to kill someone than you would think. The thing that made it all

the more difficult was that I didn't want to repeat myself and, as I've already told you, I was not especially interested in a lot of blood and gore."

"From my reading, one thing that always seemed to trip up killers, especially killers like myself, was the use of one method of killing. They established a pattern. I didn't want that to happen to me. We really should have changed how we snatched up the girls but it seemed to be working flawlessly. So, right up to the end, the abductions were basically all the same."

"No one ever caught on. And besides, we were careful about getting rid of the bodies. None of them was ever found. It is surprising. There is some truth in a comment I heard in an old movie. This guy was talking about 'hiding in clear sight.' People expect you to dispose of your kills in secret, out-of-the-way places. We chose to dispose of them right under peoples' noses. The last place anyone would think to look. Apparently, that strategy worked perfectly. I don't think anyone has found any of my kills, well at least not until I told them where to look." Billy smiled contentedly.

"I had thought about poison but the stuff I could lay my hands on took too long to work. The ones that worked What was I going to do with the video tapes? I couldn't just stack them up on the bookshelf. Where could I store them so that no one would find them and, at the same time, I could get to them? I'd have to work that one out. I had lots to think about. I also needed a new method. As I began to doze off, I assured myself that I'd come up with something."

"It took me almost two months to devise the method for the sixth kill. You know, it's a lot more difficult to dream up different ways to kill someone than you would think. The thing that made it all the more difficult was that I didn't want to repeat myself and, as

I've already told you, I was not especially interested in a lot of blood and gore."

"From my reading, one thing that always seemed to trip up killers, especially killers like myself, was the use of one method of killing. They established a pattern. I didn't want that to happen to me. We really should have changed how we snatched up the girls but it seemed to be working flawlessly. So, right up to the end, the abductions were basically all the same. No one ever caught on. And besides, we were careful about getting rid of the bodies. None of them was ever found. It is surprising. There is some truth in a comment I heard in an old movie. This guy was talking about 'hiding in clear sight.' People expect you to dispose of your kills in secret, out-of-the-way places. We chose to dispose of them right under peoples' noses. The last place anyone would think to look. Apparently, that strategy worked perfectly. I don't think anyone has found any of my kills, well at least not until I told them where to look." Billy smiled contentedly."

"I had thought about poison but the stuff I could lay my hands on took too long to work. The ones that worked faster were really hard to come by. Except for the administration, I would have no part in the death. It was unlikely I could get a person who was already sure I wanted to kill her to open her mouth and just knock back a glass of poison. I could have tried injecting it, but I didn't like the idea of needles. What to do?"

Marcia Howard and Janice Lee

"As it turned out our next kills were a little different from any of our earlier ones. She was not someone we picked up at a bar. Well, she was not a patron. She was one of the waitresses. Gary had struck up a conversation with her. They got talking to one another and the topic of coke came up. "How would you like to do a couple lines? I've got some really good stuff hidden away in my van."

"Of course,' she said. I'd love to but I can't do it until my shift is over."

"Gary told her we would wait until she got off at midnight. Her name was Marcia Howard of Temple Terrace."

"Gary and I talked. I said, 'If we wait for her to get off work, we have to stick around this place for at least two hours. That would be too much exposure.' So we agreed to go to another bar and come back for Marcia at midnight."

"Gary told her he'd be back for her. She agreed. She'd be ready."

"We went to another bar. While there, we spotted this really cute girl. Her name was Janice Lee. Without even thinking, Gary went on autopilot and picked her up. He's taking her out to the van. I had assumed he was just going to substitute Janice for Marcia. So, I go along with the revised plan. I chloroform her just like all the others before her. We tied her up and Gary looks at his watch and says, 'It's almost midnight. Let's go get Marcia.'"

"What the hell was he talking about? He surprised me with his comment. But he wanted Marcia, too. I told him it was out of his fucking mind to think we could do two in one night."

"We'd never had a double. I had to admit it might be a challenge. My only real reservation was that I had not planned for a twofer. It took me a few minutes to come to grips with what he was proposing."

"Finally I agreed because the challenge got to me. We pushed her toward the back of the van and covered her up with a tarp. We didn't want Marcia to see her."

"Gary crawled into the back of the van as I drove to the bar where Marcia's worked. It only took Gary a couple minutes to slide Janice's body toward the rear doors and cover her up. We got there just before the end of Marcia's shift. Gary went in and got her. He brought her back to the van and I gassed her. She toppled into the van, we bound her with the zip ties and we were on our way, heading north on I-75. Man, was this easy, I thought to myself. They're like sheep. This is getting to be almost too easy. There's no challenge. It seemed that these women had absolutely no sense of danger. No sense for self-preservation. Who, in their right mind, would walk out into a parking lot with some guy she had just met to do a line of coke? To me, that just would have seemed like a prescription for disaster, and it was for our victims. But these women seemed to give no thought to what they were doing. They just cheerfully followed Gary out to the van. I find it hard to believe the lure of any drug could be so strong that they would throw caution to the wind. Or, Gary was just an amazing manipulator. Either way, it was the last mistake any of them would make."

"I don't mean to sound callous but people should be wary or downright afraid. These college women just seemed to think they were invincible. Nothing could happen to them. It was always someone else that got abducted, raped, or killed. It couldn't happen to them in their town or at their school. If they only knew just how vulnerable they really were."

"We had agreed that the East Fowler disposal area was no longer a good idea. And besides, I had prepared for only one kill. Gary had screwed up my plans by wanting to take both of the women. If we had had a place to keep one of them for another night, that would have been one thing. But we didn't. I needed to come up with an impromptu second way to kill and some place where we could dispose of two bodies at one time."

"I told Gary to drive to a construction site we had been working on that day. I said to Gary, 'Here's what I have in mind for tonight. The Jacobson House is going to have its slab poured tomorrow morning. We got our inspection this afternoon. What if we pull back the wire mesh and vapor barrier, bury them, then replace the plastic and mesh? They'll pour right over them. They won't know anything. They'll never know there is anything under that mesh and plastic. What do you think?"

"Gary replied, 'You're an absolute genius. How are you going to kill the second girl?"

"Since I hadn't planned on two, I had to improvise. I'm going to bag the first one. What can I do for the second? I've got it. It's so simple. Use duct tape."

"You're going to love this one. I wrapped her head with duct tape. All I left exposed were her eyes. I started with tape over her nose, leaving her mouth free. Then, one more wrap over her mouth and she suffocated.

Pretty neat, huh? Gary thought so."

"Suffocation is so cool. You can just see that spark of life, light fade from their eyes and face. It is such a satisfying feeling to watch them fade right before you."

"The Jacobson House was being built out in the middle of nowhere. There were no neighbors for a mile around. What was even slicker was the fact that you had to have a key to get through the locked gate. If we went in, we could lock ourselves in and no one would disturb us. And besides, there was a big street light that illuminated the construction site. We wouldn't have to work by moonlight alone. It was perfect."

"It took us the better part of an hour to get to the work site. We let ourselves in, locked the gate behind us and drove right up to the area where we were pouring tomorrow. We pulled Marcia out of the van first and sat her against a cube of concrete blocks. Then we pulled Janice out and sat her against a second cube, so they were facing one another. After they regained consciousness, Gary had sex with Marcia. At first she was kicking and screaming but after a while she calmed down. Janice watched everything. Then Gary asked me to wait. He did Janice and he was through."

"I had brought with me a clear, heavy duty plastic bag. I blew it up, pulled it over Marcia's head and quickly slipped a large zip tie over the bottom of the bag and tightened both around her neck. You could see the horror on her face as she breathed in and the bag collapsed on her face. It expanded and then sucked harder on her face. Pretty soon she just keeled over, eyes wide open."

"Janice was now really kicking and screaming. She knew she was going to die. I had Gary hold her head still. I began wrapping the tape around her head, making sure that I didn't cover her eyes. I wanted to see her eyes. The first wrap covered her nose. The second covered her nose and part of her upper lip. I stood back and just looked at her for a minute, as she breathed through her mouth. Then I ran a wrap over her mouth. I could see her suck in on the tape. The outline of her mouth showed through the tape. In a few moments she toppled over."

"We pulled up the steel wire reinforcing mesh and pulled back the plastic vapor barrier. The plan said that this area of the house was going to be the breakfast nook. We dug two graves side by side. The digging was easy. It was all fresh sand fill. We slid their bodies into the holes, crossed their arms over their chests, covered them over with the sand and compacted it. Then, we replaced the plastic and mesh, making sure that everything was laid out as it was

before and no one would think twice about it. We had done so many of these slabs that it was just second nature to get things back to their original state. The only thing we had to do was get the surplus sand outside the forms. We used it to back fill the forms. We didn't want the forms to blow out during the pour tomorrow. We tidied up and went home."

"Bright and early the next morning, the concrete trucks arrived, the slab was pumped, screeded and finished before noon. Tomorrow or the next day, the block masons would begin laying up the block walls. Later we would come back and do the rough framing and dry-in. It would be fun working on this house. It held fond memories for Gary and me."

"The Jacobson house was located at 15797 St. Joe Road, Pasco County. Just go west on 52 to the Bellamay Brothers Blvd., north to St. Joe Road. Take a right, go down about half a mile on your left. You'll find their bodies in the dead center of the current owners' breakfast nook."

"I'm getting a little tired. Could we break now and get back together after lunch?"

The speaker came to life. "Yes. I think we all need a break. We'll see you after lunch. The guard will be in shortly to escort you back to your block." The guard came in, detached Billy's shackles from the O-rings and led him from the room.

We all went to the cafeteria for a well-earned break.

Chapter 6

Raiford, UCI, April 29

Before the afternoon session was to start, all of us involved in the interviews met in the in the hall leading to the observation rooms. I asked Mark why I missed him at lunch. He said he needed air to avoid the queasiness of listening to Billy describe what he'd done to those poor women.

I told Mark I wanted to explore his relationship with his mother and father and try to get him to explain why he felt it necessary to use a different method to kill his victims each time. Maybe this wouldn't be quite as gory.

I need to explore why Billy's aversion to blood and gore seemed to disappear with the last seven victims. I also was going to try again to find out where the videotapes were. No one had given me questions for today, so I asked for any that had come up. Mark asked for the coordinates for the crime scenes he described before lunch, and I promised to give them to him during the next break or as we left that afternoon. We decided we'd do this when the warden wasn't around to see.

The warden confirmed that we were all ready to take our places for the afternoon and announced that Billy was on his way to the building. He made his way up the hallway to his observation

room, as did Mark and everyone else that had assembled in the hall. I walked down the hall around to the interview room.

I took my place at the table and pulled out a legal pad as Billy was escorted into the room; where he was shackled to the table and floor, and the guard left, closing the door behind him. Everything had been accomplished without a word being exchanged between anyone. The speaker came to life once again, "Are we ready to proceed?" asked the warden. Both Billy and I indicated that we were.

"Billy, I'd like to start off this session with a couple questions, if you don't mind."

"Shoot."

"You mentioned that your dad was abusing you and that your mother stepped in and took matters into her own hands, and the abuse stopped. Did that have an impact on you?"

"Of course it did! Mom put an end to Gary and me getting the crap knocked out of us. Dad slowed way down on his drinking. I think he finally realized that it was getting in his way. He never admitted that he might be a drunk and he never went to AA meetings, or anything like that, but he did quit drinking pretty much. That, alone, made all our lives easier. It took a long time to get over wanting to kill him, though. He had just been plain mean. You could have done something, or done nothing, it didn't matter. He'd whack us around either way. It was unfair. That sense of unfairness stuck with me. It really hammered home the fact that the world is an unfair place. I was always looking over my shoulder, trying to see where the next attack would come from. I wanted to turn the tables on my dad and the world. I wanted to be, what's the word, oh yeah, preemptive."

"In many ways, when Mom took matters into her own hands, I had a number of feelings about it. First and foremost, I was afraid for her. As I was told later, by Mrs. Venecour, Mom had broken Dad's leg with my baseball bat. Mom never said anything about the incident to Gary or me. I mean never. I was afraid the cops would come and take her away. Even more scary was the thought that Dad would seek revenge for what she had done and kill her in her sleep. He never laid another finger on her after the broken leg. Secondly, I was really proud of her. She had stood up for us kids and herself. That had to have taken a lot of guts. I admired her a lot after that. Before, I couldn't understand why she had not protected us, or why she had been unable to protect any of us. Finally, I realized that she had been scared shitless by Dad and his drunkenness and the beatings he'd handed out. I suppose, she had finally had enough."

"Much later, a distant relative, a doctor, stopped by the house on his way from somewhere in Ohio to Naples for the winter. Mom was his blood relative somehow. It was the first and last time I ever saw him but his visit was memorable. He told Mom and Dad that he had just quit his job as the head of surgery at the hospital he had worked at. Mom asked him why he had quit. His response was absolutely fabulous. He said, 'They put too much shit in my sandwich.' At first I didn't understand, but, later, it made a lot of sense. I guess that is where Mom had gotten to in her life just before the leg incident and she had to take some action. As it turned out, it was the right action at the right time. How often does that happen? Usually women wait too long. They hope some miracle will come along, when they can't do anything. Or it's too late and they wind up dead. Mom timed it perfectly. I was really proud of her. Even though I was proud of her, there was this layer of resentment against her for not having acted sooner. She could have saved all of us a lot of unnecessary misery."

“Did you ever want to harm your mother as a consequence of her failure to protect you and your brother?” I asked.

“I know I was angry with her but I never got to the point where I wanted to actually pay her back for Dad’s beatings. I know, as a kid, I wanted to punch her and let her know how it felt but, at the same time, I knew she was getting it too. In many ways, she was in the same boat as Gary and me. We were all victims.”

“Did you ever want to harm your father?”

“Oh, yeah. I dreamed about punching his face in, day and night. I would daydream about it sometimes but, mostly, I’d have night-time dreams about it. The dreams were kind of weird, though. In one part I’d just be punching him and my fist would sink into his face like it was a large marshmallow, right up to the elbow. I could hear him moaning and groaning. That made me feel so, so good. It made me feel like there was justice in the world, a payback time. Then, later I’d be sitting there with his punched in head in my lap, trying to get the head back in shape. You know how, when you drink from those big plastic bottles of pop, how they cave in, and you have to pop them back into shape by squeezing them? Or, maybe, a lump of dough. That’s what I saw myself doing to my Dad’s head. I became more interested in fixing him than hurting him more. Strange feelings: hurting and fixing. I suppose, as a kid, deep down inside, I loved my dad but I hated what he had done to us, all of us, himself included. I’m sure this probably doesn’t make much sense to you, does it?”

“Sure it does. I think everyone, to a certain degree, has a love-hate relationship with their parents. On the one hand, they care for us. They nurture us. They love us. On the other, they have the responsibility to discipline us. It’s when discipline becomes arbitrary or excessive that things start to break down and our emotions get all

mixed up. Most parents never cross the line between discipline and abuse. Some do, and as you said, everyone pays. Some pay more dearly than others. From where I sit, it's the children that end up paying the most. I think some kids just get lost. The 'Lost Child' syndrome. They start living in their own protected world and as things get worse, the deeper they go into that world. Some get pulled back to reality, others simply never make it back."

"That's pretty insightful. Where do you think I'm at?"

"I'm not quite sure I understand your question."

"Am I one of those kids that crawled into a fantasy world to escape?"

"I really don't know. I know something happened to you and you built up natural defenses to protect yourself and your identity within the world you lived in, but I don't know if your fantasy world consumed you. I almost get the impression that reality and your fantasy world coexisted, side-by-side but that the fantasy side was not all-consuming. My experience with other serial killers always left me with the impression that, at some point, their fantasies or fantasy life seemed to take over and, eventually, it became their life. I haven't gotten that impression from you. I get the impression that somehow you were able to compartmentalize your fantasy world, and you could enter that compartment whenever you wanted but the door to that world never closed and locked behind you. It does for so many others."

"Interesting observation. I would tend to agree with you." Billy gave me a smile that seemed to say he thought I was pretty observant."

"How do you believe you escaped being consumed by the fantasy?"

I don't know if fantasy is the right term. It may be but it may be a matter of, what's the word I'm looking for? It means something like the same difference between words?

"You mean 'semantics'?"

"Yeah, that's it. It's probably just a matter of semantics."

"Hold that thought for just a minute. Here's a question for you along that same line. You seemed almost obsessed with the planning phase of each murder. On a scale of 1 to 10, how satisfying was just the planning process for you?"

"I have to admit, planning probably falls in the area of maybe a 7 or 8. The first kill was kind of spontaneous. I felt the need to vent on someone, but I'd made no plan to actually kill someone. Yes, I'd made the *garrote*, but I wasn't sure when or if I'd actually use it. I kept it stowed away in the car, just in case. Somewhere along the line that night, I guess I made the decision to go ahead but I don't recall making it consciously. Looking back on it, it was all pretty spontaneous but once I had killed her, and there was all that blood, I knew I had to think through what I was going to do. I'd either have to plan better or quit. Obviously, I chose the former course of action."

"When I plan now, I see every detail of the kill in slow motion. I can replay the kill in my head second by second, point by point, step by step. If something doesn't seem quite right, I correct it, until it is flawless."

"In the case of Mary, I hadn't developed that attention to detail. I was in a place where I still wasn't sure it was necessary to kill someone. Then, there I was in the bar, there was Mary, and there was the opportunity. Somehow, and I don't know how I actually made the leap from idea to action, but I felt I could and, more importantly, I wanted to kill someone. I wanted the complete control and power that came with the killing. I looked around me. The people with money had power. I knew I would never have money. So, how could I get power? I had to take it wherever I could get it. I could get it by controlling the life of someone else. I could do whatever I wanted with their life. I had the power within me to say whether they would live or die. Now that's power!"

"Are you trying to tell me that, because you couldn't control people, because you didn't have money, you chose to control them by deciding whether or not they lived or died?"

"I suppose, that's the long and short of it. I substituted one for the other. Had I been born rich, I might have been satisfied just being able to control things in the normal manner of things. I didn't have money, so I had to find a way that I could assert control. Murder, as it turns out, allows you to have that control. If I could control people today, without killing them, I suppose I would be satisfied. Only now, time has pretty much run out for me, as well as my options."

"But you preyed on the weak and defenseless, young women. Why not focus your need for control on the people you despised, the rich? Wouldn't that have given so much more satisfaction?"

"It probably would have but, for a guy like me, it would have been impossible to get close to the people that I would have liked to victimize. So, I took what I could get. It's like a guy who goes deer hunting. He can afford to hunt deer but most cannot afford to hunt

exotic big game, where the challenge is greater and the rewards, as well. I was a deer hunter."

"Did you ever exercise your power by letting your proposed victim go free?"

"Actually, no. I knew I had the power to let them go and live but I never did. I almost let Pauline Trudox go, but I couldn't. In her case, things had gotten so screwed up and chaotic I just wanted to let her go but she had seen our faces too well. I needed to protect Gary and me. If I let her go, she could easily identify us. I wonder why I never gave it any real consideration? But, you are very right, I did realize I had the power to do it, I just never exercised it. What do you think that means? It would have been really something to hold a person's life in your hands and, then, simply tell them they were safe and they could go home unharmed."

"I'm not a psychiatrist, so I couldn't tell you. What do you think it means?"

"That's another of your very good questions. I'm going to have to think on that one. I wonder why I never let a single victim go once I had them? I'll think on it for next time. Is that OK with you?"

"Sure. I look forward to hearing about it. It should be an interesting exercise. Let's get back to the issue of planning. Based on your felt-need for planning, how would you rate the kills you have described so far?"

"Because I hadn't had a plan to guide me, I'd rate the killing of Mary a 4 at best, maybe a 3. I didn't want a repeat of that mess. I suppose, that is why the electrocution of Tammy had been so upsetting to me. It was revolting. It showed an unanticipated outcome on my part. I needed to plan so I'd know exactly what was

going to happen. I needed to control every facet of the kill. Planning a kill is like designing the perfect football play. You wouldn't want to practice a play day after day until you executed it perfectly each time and then go out on the field on game day and try to run plays you had never practiced. It just doesn't work. I wanted every detail to be just as I had envisioned it. Tammy's death lacked that. So, it was far from satisfying. Without the outcome I had anticipated, I have to confess, she lost her life for nothing. That one I would rate a low 2. The rest would be in the area 8 or 9, but no 10s. I was shooting for a 10. Perfection. To be very honest, I never got a 10, no matter how hard I tried."

"Who is Tammy? You haven't mentioned her before."

"She was victim 10 on our list. We'll talk about her later. She changed everything for me."

"If you don't mind, I'd like to change the subject for just a minute. You have mentioned Gary often in your descriptions of the murders but I don't find much mention of him in the information that I received from the police. The information I have relates to the last seven murders, the ones you were charged with. Can you bring me up to speed on this omission?"

As soon as I asked the question, I could see an observable change in Billy's demeanor. What had I said that seemed to piss him off?

His response came through clenched teeth. "The reason you don't have any mention of him in those files is because he's dead!" He virtually spit out the word 'dead.'"

"I'm sorry. I had no idea. Do you want some time before we continue, or would you like to call it a day?" I felt like the guy who had run over someone's puppy. I felt terrible. At the same time, I

couldn't believe I was feeling sorry for a serial killer but Billy's response surprised me. "No, let's keep going."

"Your brother is dead, can you tell me what happened and why you got so angry?"

"The little bastard killed himself in jail shortly after we were arrested. He left me to clean up the mess. He skated on me. He left me hanging. He should have stood up and taken what the judge dealt us. But no, he goes and hangs himself instead."

"You seem more angry than sad about his death, if you don't mind my saying."

"You'd be right. I'm still pissed off that he couldn't or wouldn't stand with me during the trial. We had killed as a team. We should die as a team. They were going to try us together since we had acted together. When I played football in high school, you won as a team. You lost as a team. A team becomes one and disciplined. We had been a team. But, he bailed on me. That's what pisses me off. He should have stood up and been counted, like I'm doing. On top of that, I was not even allowed to go to his funeral. That just rubbed salt in the wound. I know why he did it. He was afraid to tell what he knew. He was afraid of the repercussions."

"Was he afraid of what you'd do to him?"

"Oh, hell no. I loved him too much. I may have hurt him when we were kids and horsing around, but I can't think of a time I ever hurt him on purpose. I just wouldn't do that. I don't think I ever intentionally hurt anyone in my family. I know all this is hurting my parents now, and I wish I could remedy that but it's unavoidable. I have to pay for my mistakes. That's only fair. Don't get me wrong. I don't like it. But it is fair. I can't believe I said that."

"You almost sound remorseful?"

"I won't kid you but I have really mixed emotions about everything that happened. I'm not eaten up with guilt over having killed those women. That was unavoidable under the circumstances. It couldn't be helped. Were my methods humane? No. If I had it to do over again, would I? Yes. It's not that I couldn't stop myself. I didn't want to stop. This may sound barbaric, but I enjoyed the killing. I don't think I can give you a reason that you would understand. The basis of the killing came from the ability to control someone's destiny and the knowledge that whether they lived or died lay in *MY* hands. Like I said before, I will give some thought to why I never chose to let anyone go free. Considering the power I felt, logic tells me I should have probably let at least one of the victims go, just because I had the power to do that, too."

"You said you loved your brother. You made your first kill a solo action. Why did you allow Gary to get involved? Didn't that take something away from your personal satisfaction, having to share it with someone else? Didn't his inclusion put him at risk?"

"I did love my brother. I guess I never thought about the possibilities of getting caught. If I wasn't going to be caught, he wouldn't have been caught either. I wanted to share my excitement with him. I suppose that's why I included him. I wasn't worried about giving up anything. It was more like sharing something. It made everything better. The killing was all mine. He never injured any of our victims."

"Some of the things I could not have done alone. When he wanted in, I didn't agree because of his abilities. I let him in because he was my best friend and confidant. Even though we were two years apart, we were always together. It was rare for me to go anywhere

without him. Sure, he had mechanical skills I didn't, but that had nothing to do with his involvement."

"Even as little kids, I knew he was a little different. Not retarded or anything like that, just somehow different. He got excited about stuff, like his car. I wasn't into cars. He loved women. I wasn't all that interested. Don't take that the wrong way I'm no limp wrister. I liked women, and I dated a lot. I got a lot too. But there just wasn't that connection between women and me. Somehow, I just knew, in the long run, nothing long term would develop. The sex was just about as intimate and sharing as I wanted to be. Gary loved every aspect of women, sex, body, hair, teeth, smell. You name it. He liked it. If I hadn't allowed him into my little private world, he'd probably be married with a couple of kids by now and treating his wife like a queen. Instead, he's dead. I hold myself partially responsible for that."

"He'd tell me about how he would dream about doing some lady, making her do whatever he wanted, no matter what. When he was out with someone, he was always the absolute gentleman. All that domination bullshit was just in his head. He never did anything about it."

"When I made my first and only solo kill, I had to tell someone. Who better than Gary? So, I confided in him. He said it sounded like fun. He wanted in. Reluctantly, I agreed and from that moment on we were the two musketeers. Righting wrongs and protecting the American Way. We were the cowboys of the new West."

"I was upset that he wouldn't be here to enjoy and appreciate the poetic justice of being sentenced to death. You know, if others had not become involved in the way I went about my murders, Gary would not be dead now and I wouldn't be here waiting to be elec-

trocuted. You guys . . . he looked straight into each of the observation room mirrors . . . would probably never have caught us. Look how many women we had killed. All you ever discovered were seven. Did you ever ask yourself why only seven were ever found?"

I had expected his statement to be associated with an air of contempt or superiority. It was not. It wasn't even a taunt. He was right. Only the last seven kills were ever discovered. Why only seven and why only the last kills? Why the marked departure from a pattern that had worked? This was becoming the core question for me. And what did he mean by 'if others had not become involved . . . ?' What the hell is he talking about?

'Others!?'

If he had not gotten 'sloppy' as he had said, it is quite possible he could have continued his killing spree for many more years. Each murder was calculated, almost no detail of action had been overlooked and disposal of the victims' remains was virtually flawless. He was absolutely right, without a victim, it is damn difficult to tie the suspect to the crime. Sure there was always circumstantial evidence, but it can almost always be viewed both ways. He was not leaving a preponderance of even circumstantial evidence that would ever have convicted him, even if he had ever become a suspect. And with the victims' bodies going undiscovered for so long, much of the circumstantial evidence and micro-evidence would have deteriorated, making it useless for forensics' purposes. Witnesses' memories fade over time. DNA deteriorates. Blood deteriorates. Hair and fiber could survive. Some might not. Equipment would surely survive, but fingerprints probably wouldn't. Was the equipment unique enough or their materials traceable after so many years? Maybe, but probably not. He had been good at what

he did. Why change and open himself up to detection and apprehension? I needed to know what happened.

"You just mentioned 'others.' What others?"

"I won't comment on that. Just leave it alone."

"You can't throw something like that out and not explain."

"I can and I'm going to. End of subject."

"Okay. You mentioned that you wanted each murder to be unique and you devised individual ways to kill your victims. Toward the end, according to the police reports, you killed each victim in some unique way, but two things stand out for those murders. They were much more brutal – you virtually destroyed the bodies – and they were messy, or as you said 'sloppy'. To be honest, they look like the work of someone else. The others? If they are the work of someone else, why take credit for them?"

"I told you that is a closed topic."

"Why change a methodology that had worked and protected you from apprehension? Did you want to be caught? Could that have been a subconscious motive? Was the change in the condition of the bodies the result of Gary taking a more active part in the killings?"

"That last part of that question was uncalled for! I've already told you Gary never hurt any of the women. Let's just leave it at that!"

"I can appreciate your wanting to protect your brother, but let's get real. Gary lured the women to your vehicle. He tied them up. He carried their drugged bodies around for you. He raped them.

He helped you kill them by holding them. He helped you bury them. How can you say he never hurt any of the victims? You two were a team. You know, all for one and one for all stuff. He may not have actually caused their deaths, but he's far from innocent, as you seem to want us to believe. What's going on here?"

"Just leave him out of this! He never killed anyone. Sure he helped me, but I was the one that did the planning and I'm the one that caused their deaths. He didn't have anything to do with it."

"In your mind he may have been innocent, but in the eyes of the law, he was as guilty and as responsible for their deaths as you were."

Billy's demeanor changed dramatically. He spit out the next few sentences through clenched teeth, "I asked you to come here and listen to my story. I'm not interested in your opinion. I said he was innocent, let's leave it at that!"

I knew he was really upset and angry and that I had to back off. Gary was a topic that was, apparently, out of bounds for him. He really doesn't want to deal with the issue of Gary's real part in the killings.

"Okay. Didn't you think that the condition of the bodies of the last seven victims and the fact that their remains were less well hidden would lead to your capture?"

"I don't think anyone who kills more than one victim plans on getting caught. For people like that, killing is either a business or a pleasure. If it is the former, it's for money, and you don't make any money in prison or after you have been executed. For those who kill for pleasure, who would want to stop having pleasure? The answer is, no one in either group plans on getting caught. It is only

when they become cocky or they lose their attention to detail that they get caught. This is what I mean by becoming sloppy. Blood has nothing to do with it really. It is only the guy who goes out in a rage and pops someone that is not thinking ahead. He has no plan. He only has adrenaline going for him. And once the adrenaline kicks in, the brain switches off. If you are going to kill repeatedly, you have to have a plan and stick to it. Otherwise, you're done and done quickly. You can't leave things to chance."

"Why change the way I killed? That question is best addressed on the last day of our interviews, and let's make it your last question on that day."

What the hell is going on here?! He's going to spring something on us. I don't like the sounds of this. Is he setting the stage to prove he's innocent? That might be a stretch no one could get their mind around. No. He has already said he is impatient to die for what he'd done. What was so important to him that he changed his entire ritual? I guess we'd have to wait for an answer on that one.

"Let's just say, for now, the changes were made to keep everyone satisfied. Enough said."

What? What the hell was he talking about, 'everyone'? I was completely confused, baffled now.

"Can we take a quick break? I need to go to the can," said Billy.

The PA speaker crackled a bit. "Sure. I'll send in your escort." The escort came in, released Billy and they went out and down the hall.

I turned toward the glass, put my hands out in front of me, palms up and, without saying a word, I asked: 'What's up? What's going

on here?' The speaker came to life again. "No one in here has any idea what game he's playing. Don't you have a clue?"

I just shook my head in bewilderment and said, out loud, "I don't have the slightest clue what the hell he's talking about, or not talking about. He seems to be playing us. I have no idea where he's going with this. This little cat and mouse game is not the Billy I've come to know. He's been so forthcoming so far. I'm confused. Almost everything I've asked him he has answered and, as far as I can determine, forthrightly. Why is he being coy now? Whatever it is, somehow I just feel we're going to be in for a shock.

"It was interesting before. Now it's gone beyond interesting," the warden said.

Billy came back into the room. He had a smile on his face. It was one of those smiles that said, 'I'm very proud of myself. I'm important and you know it!' He returned to his seat and was shackled in place. As soon as the escort had completed his work, Billy turned to me. "I can only imagine what was said in here while I was gone. You all are probably scratching your heads. Confused. Right?"

"To be honest, yes. What is going on here? Why are you teasing us like this? You lay something out there for us and pull it back."

"Like I told Tammy, 'because I can.' Everything will become clear in the end, I promise. Let's just say, for now, you will find my revelations just a little more than interesting. Everything will make sense. You have my word on this. Just be patient, please."

"Where are you storing the tapes and stuff from the interviews?" asked Billy.

"Why do you ask?"

"Just curiosity." 'Curiosity my ass. What is he up to?' I thought.

"Are they being stored here or by someone in Brooksville?"

"Someone in Brooksville. I have a good friend who is an attorney and he has the stuff in escrow in his safe, if you must know."

"May I make a small request? Would you leave today's materials with the warden?"

"I suppose I could, but why?"

"Just do this one thing for me. I will make it well worth your while. I promise," said Billy smiling.

"Warden, would you have a problem holding today's package in lieu of my taking it to Brooksville?"

"I see no problem with that. We'll do a repeat of the other day. We'll package everything up, seal it and provide you with an inventory."

"Thank you."

It was hard to get back into the groove of an interview after what had just happened. Everyone was more focused on the conjecture of what Billy might say, when he was ready to say it, than on the remainder of today's interview. Okay, compose yourself. You're a professional, I said to myself. I wasn't sure I could or would. I thought, let's start off with a topic that seems close to his heart. His mother. "What was your mom like?"

"Mom was the best. She'd do anything for Gary and me, well at least after the leg thing with Dad. Up 'til then, she was always un-

der Dad's thumb. She was treated and acted like a well-trained dog, when it came to my dad. He said jump and she jumped, until the night Gary and I were sent to Mrs. Venecour's. When Dad came home from the hospital, he was a changed man. We all expected this good temper on his part to evaporate after a while. We all thought he was waiting for Mom to lower her guard. Either she let him know she was never going to lower her guard or he had actually changed. Either way, they never talked about it and there was never another incident. I don't know if Mom really had her guard up. She wasn't doing anything differently than before, except she was not marching to Dad's drumbeat any more. Whatever she said to Dad in the hospital had changed him. More likely, however, it was the broken leg that caught his attention. I suppose, if she was worried about Dad reverting and taking revenge on her, she was prepared for that. Things had changed and changed for the better. The house seemed like a home. It was a peaceful place for the first time ever."

"I suppose whatever damage had been done to us kids had been done by the time of Dad's return. I know I had a love-hate feeling toward him. Whenever I thought about what he had done to all of us, I wanted to literally kill him. Then he became the father most guys would love to have in their lives. It was like day and night. When I started playing football in middle school and, later, in high school, Dad would come to most of the practices and all the games. He went to every game I ever played. In fact, he went to more of my games than I did. One time I was sick and couldn't play. He and Mom went anyway. They went out onto the field and talked to the guys just before the game began, when they were all huddled up saying the game prayer and getting the last bit of encouragement from the coach. I was told later that they urged the team on with 'win this one for Billy.' Everybody cheered, raising their helmets as if to salute. Mom and Dad told me what happened when they

got home from the game. It made me really proud. By the way, the team did win the game."

"That was really an important point in my life. They really went out of their way for me and Gary. For Mom it probably wasn't a difficult change. For Dad, I am sure it had been. I wonder why it couldn't have been that way from the beginning. I am sure it would have made a difference in all our lives."

"It almost sounds like you are placing some of the blame for your actions on your mother and father. Am I correct in making that assumption?"

"I'd like to say no, but the reality is, and it has taken me a long time to accept this, both Mom and Dad's behavior toward Gary and me made our lives miserable until we were just about out of middle school. I know Mom tried to protect us. She would get between Dad and us when he was knocking us around. She even got slapped around when, trying to protect us. We thought, on those occasions, she was being really brave. The next time Dad blew up, she didn't lift a finger to protect us. We couldn't understand why she would protect us one time and not the next. Dad was just out of control half the time. I never wanted to be out of control like that. He seemed like a beast. I never wanted to be weak like Mom had been either. Those experiences made me stronger, but they made me angry as well. It looks like I overcompensated."

"The real irony about the change in Mom and Dad's relationship was a kind of a reversal of roles. It seemed like she was now the king of the roost. Dad became the one that was controlled. I would love to believe it was Dad having come to realize he loved Mom and that changed him. Instead, it was more probably fear. I honestly believe that, if he had attacked her or us again, she would

have smashed his head in and killed him on the spot. I never wanted to be lorded over by anyone, let alone a woman."

There it was. He didn't want a woman in control. "Were there any other adult role models in your early life?"

"Not really. We were pretty much stay-at-home types. When we got into middle school, both Gary and I started playing football. It was rough and tumble. I was a good-sized kid, but not big enough to play on the line. So my coach put me in the backfield on offense and I played linebacker on defense. Since I was just about the biggest guy in the backfield, I played fullback. Later, when I got to high school, I was moved to halfback. During this time in my life, things were good and my coaches became my role models. Gary followed me by two years. He wasn't big enough or fast enough to play first string. I played first string from the first day I set foot on the field in middle school and all the way through my junior year in high school. In fact, I was all-State two years running as a running back. Everyone seemed to think I was going to get a scholarship to play football somewhere after I graduated."

"After my junior year, our long time football coach was recruited by a much bigger high school. He took their offer. We met the new head coach just before spring training. I didn't like the guy from the minute I laid eyes on him, and the feeling seemed to be mutual. I was kicked down to second string. If I wasn't on first string, I wouldn't get much playing time and, without playing time, especially during senior year, you might as well forget scholarships and college ball. I took a wait and see attitude all through the summer before school started. I worked and trained hard. I wanted to be in the best shape I could be in. When preseason practice started, I was prepared. I was strong. I was in condition. The coach refused to use me. I got half way through the season and I quit the team. The coach replaced my father on my hate list.

What he did was wrong, both for the team and for me. I was the best back they had. Everyone knew it. No matter how people might stand up for me and try to persuade the coach to let me play, he would always tell them that it was his team and he'd run it the way he wanted. Everyone finally gave up. Me included."

"I couldn't afford to go to college without a scholarship. So, when I left the team, I had to give up my dream of playing college football somewhere. I had to give up my dream of being the first person in our family to go to college. Inside, I was enraged and that rage never seemed to completely die away. It would die down, but it never disappeared completely."

"After a couple weeks, I quit school altogether. I started working construction with the company I had worked for during the summer. I was pulling in a good money, not a lot, but enough. We built houses in Spring Hill. Spring Hill was booming and they couldn't build houses fast enough. We were always busy, year round.

"One day, after a morning rain shower, I was sheathing a roof, preparing for the dry-in. I lost my footing on the wet sheathing and fell off the roof. I hit on my back and my head hit really hard. I was unconscious for two days. I was in the hospital for four days. I had some brain swelling, but that went down with medication. I could have died the doctor told me. He said it was close. If they had not caught the swelling inside my head, I could have either died or suffered permanent brain damage. He said that the scans they did of my head showed two or three areas of previous damage. One he said was particularly large, and he asked if I remembered having any major head trauma. I couldn't recall any. He kept asking questions, and each time I told him I couldn't remember any incidences or any of the after effects of the injuries he was describing. I went back to work after a couple more days of rest. I made sure I didn't repeat my fall in the future. I became almost

compulsively safe. That concern for safety seemed to permeate everything I did from then on."

"I was probably 18 or 19 when I really started thinking about and feeling the need to vent on something or someone. For a while I thought it was the result of the head injury I had received at work and it would just go away. It didn't. In fact, it got worse. I mentioned it to my mom and dad. They said that it was common to have strange thoughts after a head injury like mine. They said they would call the doctor to make sure. I don't think they ever did call and ask, but they told me they did and the doctor said it was normal. So, I didn't give it much thought after that. The ideas and dreams just got worse and more vivid and increasingly compelling. I resisted the urges that seemed to get stronger and stronger each year, until I didn't think or want to resist any more. That is when I would head to one of the local bars and I could see myself picking up some girl and hurting her. I had already dreamed of using the *garrote*, so I made one. Then, one night I was at the Hill Top bar and I saw Mary. I just knew what I had to do. And I gave in and did it. My career had just begun. Although that was a pretty grisly affair, I still found it, somehow, satisfying. There was no turning back now."

"As I said before, from that point on, I became a planner. The plans and their execution became a primary driving force in my life. About the only time that I was not working on my plans was when I had to concentrate on something else, like my work. Even my work began to suffer, as the daydreams became more intense and more time consuming. Pretty soon, my plans were just about all I could think about. After a while, I got fired because I wasn't able to concentrate enough to do my job properly. I couldn't understand. I had always been a good worker and always paid attention to detail. Very quickly, I really didn't give a damn about working, and I had loved it. I was good at it. It all started to fall apart on me."

"Except for Gary, I had no friends. I had no girl friends. All I had in my life were my mom and dad, Gary, and my dreams. I realized I had become obsessive and, maybe, compulsive about my dreams and plans. Unless I was willing to go to a psychiatrist, and that would mean I was nuts, I knew I wouldn't get better. In no time at all, I didn't even care if I was nuts. I was having too much fun with my thoughts and plans. And when I was able to put those plans into action, there seemed no way for me turn things around."

"Did you have any remorse or guilt about what you were doing?"

"That's a curious question. The answer is yes and no. It may not come through, but it is unfortunate that those women had to die so I could feel good, so I could feel complete. I regret Mary's and Tammy's deaths the most. However, had it not been for Mary, the time and place, I might not be here now. And, no, I'm not blaming her. It was fate. My life had been building up to that moment for a long time, over a year. It all came together at the Hilltop that eventful night. Tammy's death was all wrong. I blame myself for that. I didn't do it properly. As I said earlier, I wish I could take that death back. Knowing what I know now, if I had a 'do over' she just might have been the one I let go free. But, in life, there are seldom any do-overs. And there seems to be very little justice."

"Do you think it is unjust for you to be here awaiting execution in light of the crimes you've committed?"

"Oh, God no. I always knew that being caught was a possibility, just not highly probable. No, what I meant by injustice is that so many crimes are committed and nothing is ever done about them. So many people who get arrested for one crime or another, because they have good lawyers, have lots of money, or are famous, just walk away without so much as a slap on the wrist. It goes back to what I said about being rich and having control over

people. You don't see many rich attorneys, bankers, businessmen, etc., going to jail for their crimes. They have immunity. It's the little guys, like Gary and me, who take the falls. Every town has them. You know what I mean?"

"Yes. I would agree that that is what it looks like. The rich and powerful don't have to play by the same rules that average Joes have to play by. They should, but the reality is, they don't and they know it. That scenario is not likely to change any time soon. That's the way it has always been, and that's the way it will be long after we're both gone."

Billy smiled at my comments.

The speaker came to life. "Gentlemen, it's almost 4:30. Are you at a point where you both would feel comfortable by calling it a day? If need be, we can continue for as long as you would like. It's up to you."

"Billy, what would you like to do? Continue or call it quits for the day?"

"I think it would be okay to call it a day for now. As I understand our schedule, we won't be getting back together until Monday of next week, right?"

"That's right."

"Can we do this? Let's get back together on Wednesday instead. In the meantime I can sort through what I need to say to finish all this up. It will give you guys time to do your thing. The execution is scheduled for the Thursday week following. I'd kind of like to be alone getting ready. I know I'm going to die, but I need to prepare myself so I don't make a fool or spectacle of myself. I want to go

with some dignity left. Can we plan on a kind of marathon session on Wednesday? I will discuss the last kills and you can ask your final questions?"

"Warden?"

"I don't see any problem with that schedule. In fact, it makes a lot of sense. Consider it done."

"Warden?"

"Yes, Mr. Weatherford. What can I do for you?"

"Can I make a request to have Roger be one of the witnesses at my execution?"

"I am sure that that can be arranged. Anything else? If there isn't anything more, we'll consider this interview over. Thank you for your cooperation."

Billy leaned forward and quickly and quietly said, "I'll have something for you Wednesday Don't say a word to anyone about today or my surprise, please." He emphasized the word ANYONE.

The escort came in and Billy was lead away.

I packed up the few things I had pulled from my attaché case and was about to leave, when I reached in my pocket and felt the folded note I had prepared for Mark, with the coordinates on it. I palmed it.

Out in the corridor, the people from the observation rooms were filing out into the main hallway. Mark saw me, and approached.

"That was a great interview." Simultaneously, he thrust his huge hand toward me offering to shake. I pulled my hand from my pocket, note neatly concealed, and shook his hand, transferring the note. "Thanks. Thanks for everything." He withdrew his hand, note included.

I smiled and said, "It was my absolute pleasure. Are you going back to Tampa this afternoon, too?"

"Yeah. I have some things I need to get back to and some information I need to share with Miller. I may even have to call him from here so he can get a jump on things. I probably won't see you back at the motel. So, I'll see you next Wednesday. Sounds like next week will wrap it up for all of us. Been an unbelievable ride hasn't it?

"Sure has. I have to hurry to the warden's office to take care of the interview materials package. I wonder why Billy wanted it to stay here? Oh, well. See you next week. What would you say if I took you and your wife out to dinner this weekend, say, Saturday night. I could come down, we could meet and have some fun for a change?"

"Let me check with the boss and I'll give you a buzz. Right now, it sounds good to me. I do have a soccer match to go to with my sons, they're playing on Saturday morning, but other than that, I think our schedule is free. There might be a game Sunday morning as well. I'll call and confirm. Take care." He hustled down the hall, heading for the gate. By the time I arrived at the warden's office, Irene had our box closed, sealed, and the contents inventoried. She was getting way too efficient.

"Here you go, Mr. Bainbridge. Just sign where indicated and we're finished. Any questions?"

"I have a quick one for the warden. Is he in?"

"No, I'm sorry. He had to go out to a meeting. He'll be here bright and early tomorrow. He doesn't stay away from this place very long. He really does take his job seriously."

"I've noticed. Thanks. Take care and have a good week-end, Irene."

She turned and returned to her office and the door closed softly behind her.

I contemplated staying over the night and driving home in the morning but decided to just pack up and go back to Brooksville. It would feel a whole lot nicer to sleep in my own bed. It was only a three hour drive. As I drove home, Billy's last comments kept repeating in my head: 'Don't say a word to *anyone* about today or my surprise, please.' That was a curious request. And why had he insisted that today's interview materials remain in the prison? I would not mention the interview to anyone, just because he had asked me not to say a word. I had long ago become used to keeping things secrets between my informants and me. So, it wasn't unduly difficult to keep quiet to protect an informant.

As I drove, I began to feel the tension of the day lessen. This was going to be a good weekend. I was sure of it.

Chapter 7

Weekend Pleasures

Brooksville, April 29

It was after 7:00 when I arrived home. I needed a shower badly. The stress of the day and the drive home had finally caught up with me. I was bushed and nixed my plan to check in with Ronny, as it was already getting late and he liked to be with his family on a Thursday night. If I had had one, that's what I would want after a week of work. Snuggle with the kids and the wife. It is strange how unmarried people can romanticize what goes on in families. I began to think about why I was still alone. 'What is wrong with me?'

I went to bed thinking about my non-existent social life. I know I never seemed to make time for my softer side. I didn't date much. I've never really found someone that made that big an impression on me. Now I have to recant to a certain degree, Mrs. LaFave made an impression but it was the Mrs. part of her name that was a pretty big obstacle. Why had I not found someone in Chicago? It's not like there weren't opportunities.

All day Friday I moped around the house. I couldn't shake the mild depression. I felt I needed to do something with my social life. I didn't like being the guest of honor at my own pity party.

I admitted to myself that I always seemed to put my career ahead of my personal life. Maybe I was escaping from myself when I decided to come home to relax. Escaping from a life that was devoid of anything but work. What a dreary existence. All work and no play *has* made Roger a dull boy. I needed to change that, and this break could give me time to start living. With that resolution firmly etched in my mind, I decided to take myself out on the town. Who was I kidding? There is virtually no 'town' here. If I wanted nightlife, I'd have to go to Tampa or St. Pete. Tampa it was!

I showered, shaved and put together my best Friday night-on-the-town rags. I headed for Tampa and Ybor City, the Cuban quarter of Tampa. The old cigar-making center had become the center of Tampa's nightlife and a definite tourist trap. It would be a wonderful change of pace for me.

I was not disappointed. There were lots of tourists and locals wandering around the streets of Ybor, in and out of clubs and restaurants. There were young and old. Everyone seemed to be enjoying themselves. It was refreshing. Since I had returned to Brooksville, about the only things I had been doing were interviews with Billy and traveling back and forth to Starke and the prison. I hadn't made much time for any kind of

recreation. Now it was time to enjoy a night out. Since I had virtually no friends, outside Ronny, in Brooksville and no one in Tampa, I would have to do the bachelor thing tonight – party alone. Even that thought seemed overly pathetic. The last gasp of an unattached middle-aged hack. That thought was downright de-

pressing. I felt it was too last minute to contact Mark, but what the hell, I called anyway.

"Mark, this is Roger. What plans do you have for tonight? I know we talked about Saturday, but what about tonight instead? I'm already in Ybor. You've got to be kidding me. Well, let me suggest something to you. It's kind of spur of the moment, but what say you to coming down to Ybor City and joining me for dinner and a few drinks? Fantastic, don't forget to bring your wife. Great. See you in about 45 minutes. Let's meet at, let's see. You know, it's been so long since I was here last that I don't remember what is here, and it's changed a bit in 20 years. Okay, the Columbia Restaurant? What's the address? Got it. See you there."

Rather than wander around on my own, I made my way to the Columbia. Then I wouldn't get lost or be late. I'm prone to doing both. When I was in high school we would sneak to Ybor and party. Then, the best you could hope for was to slip in and get a beer at one of the cheaper establishments. In college, all I could afford was the cheap places. Now, I could go pretty much wherever I wanted and I'd never stepped foot in the Columbia. It had always been way out of my league. But, now, here I was. Fancy bar and restaurant, and I could afford to be here. Life was good.

After nursing a *Dos Equis* for half an hour, Mark and his wife arrived. Mark did the honors. "Barbara, this is Roger, the guy I have been telling you about. The reporter from Chicago who's working with us up at Raiford."

She extended her hand and we shook. She was of average height, but beside Mark, she looked almost petite. She carried herself like a confident, self-assured woman. She had an elegance and grace about her. She was a honey-blonde with just the slightest hint of premature grey, neat and attractively coiffed. She was beautiful in

a demure sort of way. I remembered I'd always thought that pro athletes somehow always attracted much more beautiful women than journalists. Mark and Barbara did nothing to dispel that thought.

Ever the gentleman, "I know now why Mark has been keeping you a secret from me. If you don't mind my saying, Mark is a very lucky man." She blushed ever so slightly. Her blue eyes twinkled. She was really quite beautiful. Even Mark got one of those shy looks on his face. He knew he was, indeed, lucky.

"Come, come. Have a seat. Can I get anything for either of you? I've been nursing this beer for a while. What would you like?"

Barbara spoke first. "I'm not much of a beer drinker, Mark is your man for that. I'd like a strawberry daiquiri."

"Mark, what's your poison?"

"I'll have a Corona, in the bottle, with a wedge of lime. Thanks.

I called to the waiter over, "Can we get a strawberry daiquiri for the lady and a Corona in the bottle with a wedge of lime and one more *Dos Equis* for me, if you please?" The waiter nodded his acknowledgement. A few minutes later he arrived with our drinks and menus to read while we chatted.

"You haven't eaten already, have you? I assumed we'd have dinner together."

"Normally, by now we would have but no we haven't eaten. Our two boys are staying over at a friend's house. The friend's father will take all three of them to the game on Saturday. They're 17 and 15. The arrangements for the overnigher weren't finalized until

shortly after I got home this evening, so we didn't have a chance to eat. Your phone call was both timely and fortuitous. A few more minutes and we'd have been out the door on our way to some local fast food joint for dinner. This is way better."

"Well, I am delighted I caught you. It could have been a very long and lonely night in Ybor for the likes of me. You have saved me from a potentially very long evening. Thank you, thank you."

"Mark has been talking about you almost non-stop for the last few days. He is so impressed with what you're doing," said Barbara. I looked over toward Mark, now he did have a sheepish look on his face. "He says everything is hush-hush for now, but you have gotten this serial killer talking a mile a minute. Mark said you were a reporter or something like that?"

"Yeah, something like that. I was a journalist in Chicago for longer than I care to remember. I came home to Brooksville because of a call I received from Billy Weatherford. Even before his call, I had quit my job. I'd had enough. I want to try my hand at writing something beside crime stories. I've been involved with his story since I arrived. As a consequence, I haven't had the time to think about writing anything."

"He's an interesting case. He's a confessed and convicted serial killer but he feels the need to talk about some formerly unsolved murders. If he had not come forward and asked to be interviewed, we may never have learned about these murders. So far, no one seems to know why he's talking so freely. He hasn't asked for anything in return. Usually, convicted felons want to make some kind of deal. He only has a couple weeks before he's to be executed, and he hasn't asked for anything. I'm really more than a little puzzled, but I'm also the lucky one. Mark solves unsolved cases and I get the interview of a lifetime. Almost anyone could have interviewed

him with the same results. He's just offering up the information as free as you please. I'm just a listener in this whole affair."

Mark replied, "Roger is being much too modest. He has a way about him that makes Billy feel at ease and that's what makes him comfortable enough to speak freely. Roger has been a real standup guy with Billy. He does exactly what he says he will do. He even got into it with the warden over a note Billy asked him to deliver to an attorney. I think Billy appreciates that. It doesn't sound like he trusts many people, and probably for good reason."

"The whole affair sounds very exciting," said Barbara.

"To be really honest, and unlike the popular readership of magazines and newspapers, I don't share their prurient interest in the blood and gore that is usually associated with the stories of serial killers. I am much more interested in what makes them tick. How did this one individual evolve into the social monster that could so freely kill innocent people? How could he have so little remorse or guilt? I step on a bug and I feel badly. These guys butcher people without blinking an eye. It's almost incomprehensible."

"How did you get involved in this affair with this guy, exactly" asked Barbara.

"I have a life-long friend who is an attorney in Brooksville. He referred Billy to me. Apparently, Billy wanted to get something off his chest, and my friend, Ronny, suggested Billy contact me. When I was in Chicago, I had the good fortune to cover a couple of headline stories having to do with serial killers. One being John Wayne Gacey. That got me started. Now, I'm 'the serial killer guy.' So, in a nutshell, as they say, I was in the right place at the right time."

“That’s so exciting. Mark says you are having great success with this guy. He says you have helped his office solve half a dozen unsolved disappearances/murders in just two days. That’s fantastic.”

Glancing over to Mark, she said, “I know Mark is having the time of his life with this case. Sometimes it takes years to solve these kinds of murders, and here you two are solving handfuls of cases in just a matter of days. Congratulations to both of you.” She clapped her hands and gave a small bow to both of us. She was proud of her husband, and it showed.

Mark piped in, “I don’t mean to change the subject, but what were you working on before this Billy thing came up? You said you were writing.”

“To be honest, nothing. I’ve known for some time that I wanted to write, and maybe try my hand at fiction. Billy hat, at least for the time being, detoured that idea. I don’t know if anything truly important will come out of the stuff I’m doing with Billy, but I have a feeling it will. So far, he’s just a serial killer rattling off information about his kills. He’s not doing the usual boasting, but it’s like a catalog, an inventory of sorts. I keep getting the feeling that he’s leading up to something, but I have no idea what it might be. Simply put, he’s running out of time and options. He’s an enigma to me. I don’t mean to minimize what he’s doing. He’s solving a lot of cases for the police and potentially giving closure to families whose daughters, sisters, or wives have gone missing. I suppose, that, in itself, is worth the time.”

“Maybe he just needs to clear his conscience,” Barbara said.

“That’s not how most serial killers work. Most are so internalized that they don’t want to share their exploits with anyone but themselves. Every shred, every scrap of their murders is theirs and

theirs alone. It's part of their own private little world, their fantasy. Few are ever allowed to penetrate and get inside that world with them. About the only thing that really seems to come to spur Billy on is his preoccupation with perfecting the method of the kill. It's like he's doing clinical trials; the victims are only peripheral to what he's doing. I don't understand what is truly motivating him. I'll try to probe that next week. I just wonder if he will be as forthcoming about that. Barbara, I'm sorry. This must be boring you to death."

"Quite the contrary. Mark's work intrigues me. I may be a stay-at-home mom now, but before the kids were born, in Minneapolis, I was a forensic psychologist. In fact, just before we left Minneapolis, I finished up my masters. During the off-season, when Mark was playing for the Vikings, he attended the Minneapolis Police Department's Police Academy. Even before he was injured, and his football career was over, he wanted to be in law enforcement. He already had his degree in criminal justice when we met. We met while he was working on a case."

"When Barbara and I met, she was consulting on a murder case I was investigating with my trainer. We started dating. After only a year of dating, we got married. That was just before I got injured. When we got married, I thought I had married a trophy wife. As it turns out, she's as intelligent as she is beautiful. I ended up with the absolute best of both worlds."

Barbara interrupted, "Stop that. Let me finish what I was saying. Mark worked for the MPD for a few years after football. We had the boys, and then we moved to Tampa. I chose to be a stay-at-home-mom and that has been all well and good, but I have to admit, lately, I've been thinking about getting back into the thick of things. Maybe I could help you guys with Billy?"

I could see a veil of shock come over Mark's face.

"What!? I thought you liked being home with the boys?"

"I do, but think about it. They're teenagers. Every day I see them less and less. What do I have to do? They're out with their friends or at one practice or another. When they were little, I had to care for them. They're almost young adults now. They don't need, nor do they want, their mommy. Maybe it is time to think seriously about going back to work. It's not the money. It's that I feel my brain is going to turn to mush if I don't start doing something with it soon! In fact, I've been thinking seriously about starting my own forensics consulting business."

The only word that came out of Mark's mouth was, "Wha . . . ?!"

Not having the sense to stay out of an intra-family discussion – I admit I haven't had a lot of experience with this kind of thing – I put my two cents in. "That sounds great." Mark shot me a look. Apparently, Barbara's revelation was just that, a revelation. He never saw it coming. If I didn't know better, I could have sworn the look on his face was like that of a deer looking into oncoming headlights. He was dumbfounded.

"But, but . . .," were the only words he could muster.

"Why are you looking so shocked? We've talked about this. Don't you remember?"

"But I thought it was just, ah, ah, mommy speak. I didn't think you were serious about it." That was the wrong thing to say and he knew it as soon as the words tripped over his lips.

Barbara turned to me and said, "Excuse us for a minute. There's a man at our table that needs a small intellectual tune-up. This will only take a minute." She turned back to Mark and looked directly into his slightly owl-like eyes. He could see the headlights were almost on top of him. She began to speak in amazingly controlled tones, "We've been talking about this for almost a year. You keep saying you understand. Why is it such a shock now? Don't answer that; it was just a rhetorical question. Now listen. I want to go back to work. My work as a mommy is pretty much over. I'm done being a fulltime mommy. I'm going back to work, either for someone or for myself. Do I make myself clear? This one you can answer."

"Yes."

"Thank you."

For such a big man, this little woman had pretty much evened things up. Not waiting for any kind of response, she turned back toward me, "Now where were we?"

She had left me virtually speechless after setting the record straight. There was very little room for interpretation, and Mark knew his next words had best be chosen wisely. There might be a discussion once they got home, but there would be no debate. I think he knew that his best chance of surviving this whole thing would be to say, 'And how can I help?' But, that was only if he were a wise man, and I think Barbara had instilled a certain amount of wisdom in him in the last few minutes of instruction.

About the only thing I could say was, "What does a forensic psychologist do?"

“More often than not, we aid the prosecution in trying to determine what motivated the suspect to commit the crime he is accused of. Sometimes, what seems obvious, on the surface, is not what is the underlying motivation for the crime.”

I knew that the time was not quite right to open the discussion to what I wanted to say next, so I took the safe route. “Maybe we could talk about this more later. How about if we order something to eat. I’m starving. How about you?”

We all began pouring over our menus. The rest of the evening was absolutely delightful. We chatted, drank and chatted more. We did not, however, broach the issue of work or forensic psychology or consulting. That was best left for another time. Finally, we all agreed it was time to make our way head home. We were showing the effects of the week. Before leaving, Mark asked if I would like to come over for dinner, and checking with Barbara, it was decided that Sunday would be good.

“How about coming over about noon. I don’t know if you’re a sports fan or not but there is always something worth watching on the tube If you’re not a fan, come over anytime. Dinner is usually served around 5:30 on Sundays. BBQ okay with you?”

“Sounds perfect. See you then.” With that Mark handed me a map sketched out on a cocktail paper napkin. I looked it over, saying, “This looks easy enough to find. If I have any problems, I’ll just buzz you on your cell for more directions. Thanks for coming, and it was an absolute pleasure meeting you, Barbara. We will talk more, honest.”

That last comment was not lost on Barbara and definitely not lost on Mark. I could see that ‘Oh boy’ look on his face. We all shook hands, and I gave Barbara a kiss on the cheek. Somehow, I felt

close to both of them. They seemed like good, down home people. I liked them very much. I hoped the feeling was mutual.

Saturday was a lost cause. There was nothing pressing that I had to do. And, for that matter, I didn't have much ambition driving me to do much of anything anyway. So, it was a lost day. About the only productive thing I accomplished was to make a call to Ronny. When I called, he was already on the fairways. For a golfer, the Country Club was a perfect place to live. It was especially so for Ronny. His home was across the street from one of the club's back 18 fairways. Had he been the least bit larcenous, he could sneak onto the course, play a few holes and no one would have been the wiser. But that was not Ronny's style. If he played, he went through the front door. Nan said he'd be back around 3:00. "Would you have him call me when he gets home? Thanks."

Almost three hours later, "Well, how did you do? Two over. Is that good? How would I know? The last time I played golf was back in college, and, if I'm not mistaken, that game was with you! Since then, I've forgotten more about golf than I had learned in the first place."

"Very funny. What's Billy saying?" asked Ronny.

"Actually, about all he's doing is describing murders he committed before he was caught and that no one knew about. Apparently, there are nine or ten murders that he's claiming responsibility for. All he's been doing is describing the victims and how they were killed and where they are buried. He told us yesterday that we'd be finished with his list on Tuesday, the next and last meeting. I don't know how he got caught. He was so careful and, then, all of a sudden he starts making mistakes. He showed a remarkable progression in his killing pattern in a very short period of time. He said he wouldn't talk about those last seven killings. Everyone knows about them and there is no reason to talk about them any-

more. Based on what I've heard so far, except for the disclosures to the cops about the unsolved disappearances, it's pretty much yada, yada, yada. Every once in a while, he'll give me some insight into what prompted him to commit the murders, but nothing really new is coming out."

"What kinds of stuff is he telling your about himself?" asked Ronny.

"He's been talking about being an abused child. The unfairness of his life. It's basically the same old routine."

"With so many victims, in such a short period of time, you would almost think he had help."

"He did have help."

"Really? Who? Did he mention anyone else?"

"His brother was his accomplice. From everything he has said and from all indications, there was just the two of them. I have never heard of a serial killer with more than one accomplice. If he had mentioned that there was someone else involved, now, that would be news. But, nothing of the kind. Sorry to cut this short but I have some things I need to take care of. Say hi to Nan for me. We need to get together for dinner, you, Nan and me sometime soon. Can you guys shake free early in the week? I have to be in Raiford on Tuesday for the last interview. Check with Nan and your busy social calendar. Talk to you then. Bye."

Nothing much to do. I thought a little nap might be in order.

Brooksville, April 3

Sunday finally came.

Around 11:00 I made my way to Mark and Barbara's.

The Barnkowskys lived in north Tampa, not far off Dale Mabry, in a nice upscale gated community. Like so many of the new houses being built in this area of Tampa, most of the houses lacked the character that exemplified the houses of Ybor City or the Hyde Park area. The new houses, built by the hundreds, were not quite tract houses, but they were similar enough to cause the first time visitor worry about the need to find the house again from memory. Almost all the exteriors were Spanish, big entry pillars, large double entry doors, lots and lots of stucco and manicured and edged lawns. The garish pinks and greens of the fifty and sixties had given way to taupe and off white. Also gone, along with the bright colors, were the ubiquitous pink, plastic flamingos that adorned front yards. I can still see my parents' flamingos planted squarely in the middle of the front lawn. Thinking back on it, it is too bad when progress and modernity takes over some rather quaint traditions. Pink plastic flamingos were a Florida icon.

Mark answered the door. As I stepped inside, the new, true South Florida home beckoned. Vaulted ceilings towered above me. A spacious entry opened to a cavernous great room that gave way to the kitchen eating area and, then, out through the glass doors to the enclosed pool. The house, from the outside, looked much smaller than from the inside. Compared to my little townhouse, this place was gargantuan. Mark showed me around the house. There wasn't a single modern doo dad missing. The place was wired for every conceivable electronic gadget, and many that had not even been invented yet. After a quick walking tour, we made our way to the den and entertainment room off the living room.

"Where's Barbara?

"Oh, she's out picking up the boys. They had an early morning soccer game and since I was not sure when you might arrive, she went to pick them up, leaving me home to tend the family hearth."

"You have a very nice place here. I haven't had much time to do a tour of Brooksville, let alone Tampa. The houses are so different from the kind of house I grew up in. It seems they are getting much bigger and fancier than when I was as kid. Almost everything was frame construction back then. Now, its concrete block, towering ceilings, and stucco instead of cypress siding and then there is A/C. No A/C when I was growing up."

"It's changed a lot even since we moved here about ten years ago. And you're right, the houses seem to be getting bigger and bigger. I couldn't have afforded a place this size back in Minneapolis on a detectives' salary. Now, many patrolmen can get into these kinds of places. New homes are being snapped up as soon as they're built. Most are even sold when they are still just drawings. The developers lay out their developments and before the first street is finished, almost every lot is gone. So, you have to move quickly. We moved in here about two years ago. What do you think of the place?"

"It's really very impressive."

"After Barb gets back, we'll take you for a quick tour of the community. I'm really impressed with what the place has to offer. There's something here for everyone."

"Oh, and before Barb gets back, I have to tell you, we had a long talk yesterday about her going back to work. Let me rephrase that. She told me what she is planning to do. She wants to get into con-

sulting, doing what she had gotten her Masters in back at the University of Minnesota, forensic psychology. She's going to want to talk to you about her plans and she's going to ask your advice. I've already given her mine. After talking with her, her heart is set on doing this, and I'm going to support her. She really knows what she wants to do and, you know, she'll probably be good at it too. She was a very accomplished lady, even before I met her."

"Oh, the game is just about to start. Have you ever seen Australian Rules football? It's kind of somewhere between soccer and rugby. A little like our football without pads. It's really rough and tumble. I think Adelaide is playing Fremantle. This should be interesting for you."

I didn't want to confess but I knew about as much about Australian football as I did about brain surgery. In other words, nada. Even so, it was almost as much fun watching and listening to Mark as it was watching the game and listening to the announcers. Together, they made the game sound fun

Finally, Barbara showed up with two good-looking young men. At 17 and 15, they were very good-sized boys – Todd and Zackary. Zackary was the eldest. After introductions, they both informed us that they needed to take showers. They promised they'd be back before the first quarter was over.

Barbara sat with us. "Are you a sports fan, too?" I asked.

"It would be difficult to be married to a former pro player and not like sports, but I have to give it to Mark, he never made me feel like I had to like it. He hasn't once pushed the boys to play football. They both do, but not because we're football parents. They know they can stop playing anytime. In the off- season, they are involved in other sports. They both play soccer in a local league, nothing

serious, but, I have to admit, they are both good athletes. Besides soccer, Todd does some wrestling and Zack leans more toward gymnastics. I can see the end of Zack's gymnastics career though. The football program, unofficially, is a year round training affair here, and he's bulking up to the point that it's starting to interfere with his gymnastics. It doesn't get in the way of Todd's wrestling. It just means he can't wrestle in exactly the weight class that he would normally wrestle in. Not much extra weight to lose to get down to the next lower weight class, where he should probably be wrestling."

"You sound like a bona fide sports mom. You know what your guys are really doing and you sound knowledgeable about the sports. I'm impressed."

"I'm not just a pretty face you know. Beneath this dishwater blonde mop of mine lies a reasonably functional brain, not that it's gotten over used in the last fifteen years. But, I'm hoping that will change soon. Did Mark mention my plans to you?"

"He mentioned you and he had talked about your going back to work." I was trying to be diplomatic and avoid getting involved. It was too late. I had stepped into the snare already. I knew my football watching was over for the day."

"I was just thinking. I could just test the waters, if you didn't object, by coming along on the next interview with Billy. Maybe I could just sit in and afterwards, I could give you my impressions of what I think is going on. I know I'm a little rusty, but I could just see how it feels to be back in the real world. Would you have a problem with that? What about you, Mark?"

She caught us both off guard. I hadn't expected it, and I don't think Mark was quite in the loop either. His attention was jerked away from the game on the TV.

"What?" This was becoming a fairly common response from Mark the last few days. "What about the kids? Who's going to take care of them?"

"We can work something out. I can drive up with you on Monday night. We can have a little mini-honeymoon getaway. What do you say, sweetie?"

I liked the sweetie part. That was a nice touch. How could he refuse?

"I, I . . ."

"You were trying to say, I'd love to, right?"

"Ah, ah. . ."

"I thought so. What about you, Roger?"

I was only somewhat less unprepared. "Has he always been so articulate? I don't have a problem with it. Why not? If Mark is up to it, it's fine by me."

The car's lights had just passed over the deer in the road. Mark was a goner. What could he say and live to see another day? Barbara's gambit had been played like a grand master. Check and mate.

All that needed to be done now was work out the details, but until then we would just play it by ear. We decided we would each

think on what we thought should be our approach and what we expected to come out of this little arrangement. We'd talk about it tomorrow evening and work out the details. I could see the wheels in Mark's head turning. His life was about to change and he had no idea what those changes would entail. The whole 'family Barnkowsky universe' – Todd, Zach, Barbara and Mark – was about to experience its own little Big Bang, and I was going to be the recipient of some of the shock wave.

The remainder of the day was wonderful and relaxing. Mark and Barbara showed me around their community. It had one or more amenities for everyone in the family. At the clubhouse were exercise classes for men and women. There was tennis, badminton, squash, handball, racquet ball, and 18-hole professional course with pro shop and instruction, card groups, and even a library that was really quite impressive. There were dining facilities, arts and crafts studios, and a woodworking shop completely outfitted with the best woodworking machinery I'd ever seen outside a professional shop. No expense, it seemed, had been spared. In jest, I asked, "Where's the movie house?"

"Oh, the theater and show are in the works." The word 'show' had given away Mark's upper mid-West upbringing. You didn't hear theaters or movies referred to as shows any place else.

"There are a lot of actor wannabes living here. So, the developer agreed to build a small community theater that could double as a movie house. These guys haven't missed a thing. They're really pretty sharp entrepreneurs. It will mean our community common fee will go up a couple bucks a month but, in the long run, about the only thing we won't have will be a grocery, and I bet in their next development there will be one of those too. They want the community to be all but self-contained. About the only thing people will have to leave the community for is work, and with the

increase in the number of jobs that can be done by telecommuting, some people won't have to ever leave the confines of the community. We pretty much have our own world here, our own little Shangri-La."

"What do you think about that? All the isolation? Isn't that a bit elitist?"

"I guess it has its downside, but there is an upside too. We have virtually no crime. No home invasions. No burglaries. No assaults. And when you have a wife and children, those kinds of concerns become important considerations. That's not why we bought here, it just turned out to be an added bonus to living here. We have a small security force here. So, for all intents and purposes, we are pretty much self-contained. It's not like we're confined here, but it's a nice little sanctuary in the middle of a growing chaotic world outside. I know, I'm one of the guys that has to deal with controlling that chaos out there. It seems, every day, the world is getting more and more messed up. Here, I probably get a false sense of security, but it's somehow reassuring. It's hard to explain."

"I think I know what you're talking about. Being alone, like I've been since my parents died when I was still in college, all you seem to worry about is your own safety. You don't give much thought to the welfare of the people around you. They're taking care of themselves too. Marriage and a family really do carry with them certain unspoken responsibilities."

"You better believe it."

As Mark pulled up to the house and we waited for the garage to open, I said, "That was really quite a tour. And what you said is a lot of food for thought. I have missed out on a lot by not opening myself up to the world. I can see how, in many respects, I have

closed myself off from the world. I'm in contact with the real world only when I'm working, and that always seems to be the seedy underbelly of life. Not a really nice picture to be

carrying around with you day-in and day-out. I'm probably a lost cause now. Over the hill, so to speak."

"What, just because you're not married? Nonsense. If you were 70 and thinking about getting involved with someone romantically, maybe, but you're about my age, right, 40? You're not old enough to have to be worried about buying green bananas yet, my man." Mark grinned. He was obviously proud of himself.

"Actually, I'll be 40 in June. So, yeah, I'm just about your age. Barbara, you don't have any sisters do you?

"Well, as a matter of fact, I do."

"No, no. I was just kidding."

As the garage door opened, Mark turned to Barbara with that look that little boys get on their face when something just stupendous has occurred to them. "Are you thinking what I'm thinking? What about Susan?"

Barbara's face lit up. "You're absolutely right! It hadn't even occurred to me. They'd be perfect for each other."

All that came to mind was 'Oh shit.' I could see it now, a blind date. 'Oh my God!'

Mark turned to me. "I can imagine what you're thinking. Relax. Before you let your mind run off with you, I want to show you something. Come with me!"

We all went into the den again. Mark went over to the picture wall and picked a portrait off the wall, brought

it over to me and said, "This is Barb's sister."

I was prepared to gaze into the face of something from a graphic novel but, to my surprise, the face I saw was equal to Barbara's and Mrs. LaFave's. She was absolutely gorgeous. Simultaneously, I remembered a picture of an absolutely stunning lithe thing standing in a model's pose, wearing a string bikini that had been circulated in the city room back at the Journal. The caption read, 'She's a bitch to someone.' At the time I thought it was cute. No matter how beautiful someone might be, no one is perfect.

"OK, what's the catch? I find it hard to believe that this woman is available. Or more importantly, that she would be interested in meeting a broken down reporter like me. What gives?"

"No catch and no promises. And no pressure. Just listen to my proposal. Susan is unattached. She just moved down here to be close to Barb. Would you be willing to take a chance and trust me?"

"Now let me get this straight. This woman is unattached. She lives somewhere here in Tampa. And you think she would be interested in meeting me? Are you out of your mind?!" I turned to Barbara, "I hope you don't take this the wrong way but, what's wrong with her? Is she an axe murderer or just out on parole, or something I should know about?" I was saying this tongue-in-cheek but, deep down, I knew there had to be some kind of catch. Women who looked that good were NEVER alone.

"Okay, let me explain before your mind runs away with you. Susan is a year younger than me. So that makes her, ahh, thirty-something. She was married, but her husband died about three years ago. She has no children. She's a schoolteacher, middle school English. Her students just adore her. She moved down here late last summer. She and I have always been very, very close. It broke her heart when Mark and I moved down here. She has always trusted my judgment, and I'm not about to jeopardize that, even for you. But, Mark is right, you two would be perfect together. And, yes, she is quite beautiful, maybe not as beautiful as me, but she's nobody's fool, nor is she a bimbo. Would you be willing to meet her with no strings attached and no expectations?"

"When you put it that way, how could I refuse?"

"Would you be willing to meet her this afternoon?"

"Why not? All she can do is run away screaming and waving her arms in fear, like that kid in *Home Alone*." As the image of McCauley Caulkin running down the hall in the movie shot through their minds, they both grinned and chuckled slightly.

"I don't think it will be quite that traumatic for either of you. Trust me," Barbara said.

Barbara went into the kitchen and called Susan. I could hear bits and pieces of the conversation on this end. "Susan, Barb. What are you doing this afternoon? We're having a barbeque. Would you be interested in coming over for dinner? Great. Also, there is someone I'd like you to meet. A friend of Mark's. No, he's not a cop. He's a journalist. No. He's originally from the Chicago area." Barbara yelled to me, "Who did you write for?"

"The *Sun-Times*," I replied.

"The *Sun-Times*. He's really, really nice. About 6 feet. Brown. Just get your butt over here and see for yourself. You won't be disappointed, honest. No need to dress up. Let him see you as you really are, my kid sister. Great. See you in half an hour or so. Bye."

"She'll be here is about half an hour. She doesn't live all that far away. I'll get things started for dinner. Mark, anything special you want me to take out?"

"Nope. The ribs are already marinating. Thanks."

The boys trotted into the den and joined their dad watching the game.

The wait was dreadful, even though it didn't take her half an hour to arrive.

Before Susan arrived, Barbara pulled me aside. She said, "I want to warn you about Susan." My heart sank. Here it comes.

"Susan is not pretentious. She is who she is. You have to accept her at face value. She is guileless, genuine, never disingenuous and always upfront. What you see is what you get. She knows who she is. She is self-confident. She is fiercely independent. She has definite opinions about most things, but is also open to alternative points of view. She is loyal to a fault. She is kind. And when she loves, she loves without reservation."

These were the virtues Barbara saw in her. I would learn, later, those were only a short list of her qualities.

♦♦♦

As Susan came in through the garage, Mark looked up from the game long enough to say, "Hi Susan. Susan, this is Roger. Roger, this is Susan." The boys looked up and waved but immediately returned to the game.

She was wearing a pair of well-worn, slightly baggy sweat pants and an oversized jersey pullover. On her feet she wore flip-flops she must have just slipped on as she walked out the door. These she quickly kicked off and went barefoot. She was about the same height as Barbara, maybe, 5-6. Not blonde, but light brown hair that probably hung to her shoulders, but was tied back in a short ponytail with a red scrunchy. Her tanned skin complemented her hair. Riveting blue-green eyes. Although the sweat pants and pullover camouflaged her figure, you could still see she was slim but sturdy. She had a healthy out-of-doors look about her. She was one of those rare people who genuinely lights up a room when they come into it. Somehow, she seemed to sparkle and give off positive energy. I could see why her students loved her.

I thought back to when I was in middle school. I know I never had a teacher that looked like Ms. Susan. She was beautiful in every sense of the word.

We all sat around chatting about one thing or another.

Susan was not only beautiful, she was intelligent. She was up on current affairs. She could give and take on any topic that happened to come up. And she had a wry sense of humor, trading barbs with Mark, Barbara and me without missing a beat. She was, indeed, a rare woman.

After dinner, Susan and I found ourselves sitting alone beside the pool. Mark and Barbara were just out of earshot. We would catch them looking in our direction and, then, leaning toward one

another, surely they were comparing notes about the reporter and the kid sister.

We talked about her late husband but it was not a maudlin series of recollections of better times. The death of Robert had been devastating. Robert had been a consulting engineer and was killed on a construction site; killed by a piece of structural steel that, somehow, had gotten loose from its choker cable. Surprisingly, she could talk about the accident without succumbing to the flood of tears you could hear in her voice. It still hurt, but it was no longer all-consuming pain. It was, now, the pain of remembrance. She would never be over him, but she had worked through the pain. Robert would always part of her life but life went on, and his death had made her a stronger person, and maybe, a better person. She didn't know what the future held in store for her, but she was open to whatever it did.

Before her move to Florida, she had finally felt it was time to begin dating again. She had not found anyone who she felt serious about but she knew there was someone out there for her. There was no rush. Someday, someone would come along.

We talked about her life in Minnesota, about living in a small western Minnesota farming community and her move to Minneapolis, where she went to school. Her fondest memories of the farm were the fields of wheat and sunflowers. She glowed when she talked about how they waved in the sunlight and how the flowers always kept their faces toward the sun. What a marvel they were.

She talked about her students. Each had a story and owned a piece of her heart, even the inconsolable or intractable. I could see the love she had for what she did and her charges. Both she and the students would benefit from having known one another, even if

for only a year. When she spoke about them, individually or collectively, she glowed with pride. I wish I had had a teacher like her. All I can remember is my third grade teacher, Mrs. Walsh. She had been around so long that my father had had her as a teacher. She looked as old as we students thought she was. The term 'mummy' somehow comes to mind.

We discussed my life and career. Once I started to talk about having covered the Gacey case, she said, "So, you're *that* Roger Bainbridge. I thought you were much, much older. Oops, that didn't come out quite the way I had intended."

"I used to be older, but like most wizards, we live our lives in a reverse chronology. We get younger as we get older. When I get really old, you'll be able to cradle me in your arms like a baby." She smiled at that.

"Not an unpleasant thought, when you come to think about it," she replied.

"It's getting a little late, and I have an hour's drive ahead of me. So, as much as I regret it, I'm going to have to excuse myself. But, can I call you? I'd like to talk more. I've had an absolutely delightful time tonight. I can't remember when I've enjoyed myself more."

Susan got a piece of paper and scribbled her phone number on it. "You can call any time. I'll be up late. I'd like to talk a bit more myself."

"You've got a deal." Turning to Mark and Barbara, "I have had the best time ever, here today. And thank you for introducing me to your sister." I knew Susan could hear me, "She is one very special lady. I had trepidations about meeting someone new, but she is

one phenomenal woman. Thank you." Susan, Barbara and Mark were all smiles.

Mark walked me to my car. "Well?"

"Mark, I don't know what to say. She's great! I better get home, I've got a call to make. You know, when you talked about Susan before she arrived, you had me really worried. I appreciate everything you've done for me today. I don't know how I can ever repay your kindness."

"Assuming things work out between you and Susan that would be my reward. I've come to like you a lot. I

feel you're a good person. And I may be prejudiced, but Susan really is quite a woman, every bit the equal of my bride. They both come from sturdy stock. I count my blessings every day. Oh, and I hope this thing with Barbara works out for you, too. She's really excited about the thought of getting back into her career. It'll be good for her. She may surprise you. She's very astute and a quick learner. Drive safely."

"Again, thanks."

The drive home that night was the longest drive of my life.

Susan dragged Barbara aside, as Mark walked Roger to his car. "He's fabulous!" exclaimed Susan. "Where did you find him?"

Barbara related what she knew about the interviews and Billy Weatherford. "Mark and Roger kind of got thrown together during the interviews. Mark's boss couldn't be there, so Mark was the designated to fill in. Roger is in the room with Weatherford. Mark is in one of the observation booths. Mark has really, really been

impressed with how Roger has handled himself and Billy. And you know Mark isn't easily impressed any more. In a very short time they seem to have struck up a friendship. I like Roger, too. So, what do you think, other than he's fabulous?"

"He's so easy to talk to. He's like a pair of your favorite jeans. You slip them on and they just feel good. Something about him makes me feel good. He's one of the few men, outside Robert, who seems to know how to listen."

"I think that comes from his being a reporter. He's trained to listen. That's his job to listen and write. But I know what you mean. I think he hears and listens at the same time. That's good in a man."

"He said he'll call me. If he doesn't I'll just die. Oh God. I'm listening to myself and I sound like a love struck teenager. What in the world is going on here? Look what you've done now."

"What I've done? All I did is asked you over for dinner and to meet a friend and you go all ga-ga. I didn't have anything to do with that. That's all yours, sis."

"I know. It will be just my luck that once his assignment is over he'll be on his way back to Chicago, and I'll never see him again."

"Wrong."

"What do you mean wrong?"

"He lives in Brooksville now. He moved there a few weeks ago. According to Mark, he's even bought a house up there. Apparently, he got involved with this Weatherford character by accident and everyone seems to be in a win-win situation. Billy's getting his story out. Roger is getting all kinds of information about Billy. And

the police, and my Mark, are solving cold cases left, right, and center. Everyone wins. I'm even getting involved."

"You? How?"

"We haven't worked out the details yet, but Mark and I have been talking, well I've been talking and Mark has been listening. I'm going back to work. What I want to do is somehow get involved in this Weatherford thing. I don't know how yet, but I want to be part of this. It could be the beginning of something for me. I'm so ready to do something other than being a mother."

"Barb, I have to go. Did I tell you, I'm expecting a call?! Bye."

Mark was just coming in as Susan whooshed by him. "Bye sweetie. You're the greatest. See you soon. Say good-bye to the boys for me."

To Barbara, Mark said, "Am I mistaken, or was our Ms. Susan floating out of here?"

"That Roger must be some kind of wizard. He's thrown a spell over my little sister. I thought she might like him, but this is crazy. Crazy in a good way. I've never seen her like this, ever. Somehow, they've made a connection. She's never acted this way before, not even with Robert. He was a comfortable love. The way she's talking, Roger feels comfortable and, at the same time, he's exciting. Nice combination, don't you think?"

"I'm a guy. We don't think quite the same way you women think."

"Whatever happens, I just don't want her to get hurt. Can you promise me he won't hurt her?"

"I honestly don't think he'll hurt her. He seems equally smitten. I would like to see them together, but we've done all we can do. The rest is up to them. We're good aren't we?!" They both smiled, hugged and kissed. Yes, they were good.

I knew an hour would be more than enough time for Susan to get home but I waited another half hour before I picked up the phone.

We talked well into the morning hours that night. We didn't talk about big and important things. We were getting to know one another. Over the next two days, we were on the phone with one another every chance we had. Just talking for hours, about seemingly unimportant topics, but as we talked, we learned much and what we learned we liked. Somehow, over the phone seemed so much more relaxed. Had we been going out on dates, we would have had to put on our "courting behavior" faces, with each of us being on our best behavior, weighing each word, so as to not say the wrong thing. Not wanting to offend the other person. The phone insulated us. We could just talk, exposing our inner most thoughts and fears, without being concerned about being vulnerable or appearing silly, which, to any outsider, I am sure we would have.

Brooksville, May 1

When Susan was in school, I had time to take care of what business I had. On Monday, I called Barbara. I had to thank her for the fantastic time I had had on Sunday. We also discussed what role she might play in the interview process. It was decided that she would be my assistant. What I hoped she might do was watch Billy's face, posture, and movements and try to discern any particular behavioral patterns. Also, she was to watch for tonal and inflection changes. All these behavioral markers could prove useful, especially if we were to use the video-tapes to catalog behavioral changes as he talked, especially when he answered questions.

Barbara would drive up with Mark and be at the Best Western, where Mark and I had been staying during each of our overnights. I agreed I would pick up the tab for any extra cost Mark might incur. He couldn't be expected to pick up Barbara's part of the tab using the city account. Technically, she was working for me.

When it came time to prepare for the trip to Starke, I genuinely was not looking forward to it. I found I preferred talking to Susan.

Chapter 8

Interview Three

Brooksville, May 4

Before leaving for Starke on Tuesday afternoon, I called Mark. "What time are you and Barbara leaving for Starke? Good, I'll probably be there before you. Have you made arrangements for a room? Would you like me to make a reservation in your name when I check in? Do you want a double or two singles? Double it is. I'll make all the arrangements for picking up the difference between the costs of the rooms. Okay, see you two around 5:00."

I called Susan at home, knowing full well she wouldn't be there until sometime after I was on the road. I left a quick message for her on her answering machine. I felt like a schoolboy leaving little messages on his girl-friends' answering machine. How cute.

I arrived about 4:30, checked in, and arranged for a room for Mark and Barbara. "Detective Barnkowsky will be bringing his wife with him this trip. He will pay his regular room rate and I will pick up any additional charges relating to his wife. They want a double."

Steve informed me that there would be no additional charge since all the rooms had double beds in them, unless two singles were requested.

"Mark is a big guy, do you have any rooms that have king sized beds?"

"Detective Barnkowsky usually takes a room with a regular double bed in it," said Steve.

"I understand, but that's when he's sleeping alone. He probably has to sleep diagonally on it. It probably works then. But, this time, he'll have his wife with him and a regular double probably won't work. Put them in a room with a king and I'll take care of the difference."

"Not a problem Mr. Bainbridge. Anything else?"

"Yes, when they check in, could you let me know? I'd appreciate it. Thanks."

Around 5:00 my phone rang. "Yes. Oh good. What room are they in? 203. Thanks."

I gave them a few minutes to settle in, and then I called. "Mark, Roger. Where would you and my assistant like to go for dinner tonight? You want to go back there. Fine with me. Stop by my room around 7:00 and I'll drive. See you then."

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

There came a tap on my door. I answered the door and there were Barbara and Mark. "You're looking exceptionally lovely this fine evening, my dear."

"How come you don't talk to me that way, bud?" She gave Mark a quick glance.

"We've been married fifteen years. After ten you don't have to talk that way."

"You better review the terms of our agreement. I have the right to extend the nice talk terms of the agreement. So, I'm invoking that right for the next ten years."

"Yes, dear." All the while he was smiling like a Cheshire Cat.

"Let me grab my jacket and we're off."

We drove to Mate's Billabong Inn. Barbara was pleasantly surprised that two guys could navigate their way to a reasonably good eating establishment on their own, and not find topless waitresses. "Hon, I knew there was something wrong with this place, but I couldn't put my finger on it."

"You better not be putting your finger on anything you shouldn't," Barbara said.

"Does your sister have a sense of humor like yours?" I asked.

"Oh, no. Hers is so much better, or worse, it depends on how you take it. Believe me, she can dish out just as much as she takes. She can definitely be the lady, but she can also be right down there with the guys.

"Interesting."

The waiter came and took our drink order and handed us our menus.

"We'll take a few minutes to go over this," I said to the waiter. He excused himself and put in our drink order. "Barbara, the steaks are really quite good here. We had a couple the last time we were in here. I saw a couple platters go by with a variety of seafood and it looked pretty good too. Stick with the steak unless you're adventurous. Otherwise, order whatever you like. Me, I'm a steak man."

Over dinner we chatted, just having a good time. I tried to not mention Susan, not because I wasn't interested in talking about her, I was, but I didn't want to drone on and on about how great I thought she was.

Barbara, tongue in cheek, asked, "Okay, Mr. Bainbridge. How come you haven't said two words about my sister?"

"All we do is talk. You know, she's a very good talker?"

"Can you believe this guy? 'She's a very good talker.' You're supposed to be extolling her beauty, charm, wit, and it never hurts to mention she has a great body. We women like our men to recognize all our virtues and none of our faults. I hate to admit it, but I can't find many faults with Susan and she's my sister!"

"Yeah, she has a great body," Mark piped in.

"Hey! He can say that, you can't. You may be right, but you never mention your sister-in-law's body in front of your wife. You're only allowed to mention your wife's body, but only in the most glowing terms, nothing tasteless."

These two were cute together. Before I met Barbara, Mark had seemed pretty much all business. They both had a clearly playful side.

"I really can't comment on her body. I can assume or imagine what it's like, but talking over the phone limits things a lot. And the clothes she was wearing Sunday, well, let's be honest, they did nothing to accentuate her figure. But, in all honesty, what I found most intriguing was just how easy it is to talk to her. Neither of us seemed to have any reservations about talking about anything. I've never found anyone I felt so at ease with. And talking over the phone seems to have given us the freedom to be who we are, not who we might think we ought to be to impress the other person. It's really refreshing. So, yes, she's a great talker."

I could see both of them looking at me and just saying to themselves, "Hmmm."

Had there been anything to do in Starke after dinner, we might have done it but, alas, there was nothing to do. Starke was typical small town, central Florida, America. The sun goes down and the town closes up. We could have gone to one of the local bars, but that didn't seem all that appealing to any of us. So, it was back to the our rooms, and a cable movie. For me, I needed to make a phone call.

Starke, May 5

In the morning, even without making prior arrangements, we all met at the breakfast bar. Then, it was off to the prison and the interview with Billy. At the check in, I had to explain Barbara's role and obtain the warden's permission, since I had not made proper or prior arrangements with his administration regarding Barbara. That bridge crossed, we sat for a few minutes in the warden's office to exchange pleasantries. Tim didn't have any objections to Barbara's participation. All that needed to be done was add her name and signature to the master agreement. That accomplished, we made for to the interview room. Barbara would be in Observation Room 2, along with Mark and the FBI guys.

Shortly after 9:00 Billy was escorted into the interview room. He seemed in good spirits.

"Is everyone ready back there?" I asked.

The speaker rattled, "Yes. Proceed."

"How are you today, Billy?"

Billy responded, "About as good as can be expected under the circumstances."

"Do you have anything you would like to say before we begin this final interview?" asked Billy.

"Not really. Let's just get started. There are only three more victims left on my unsolved list, numbers 8, 9 and

10. After our double of Marcia and Janice, it took us a while to 'get in the mood,' so to speak.

Jennifer Hanson

"Number 8 was Jennifer Hanson of Hudson. We were a little pressed for time, this night. So, we didn't make the drive to Tampa, like we had done previously. That night, we went down US 19 to Hudson. There's a little saloon located out front of a shopping center that got built but never really opened. I can't remember the name of place. It was a funny name somehow. Oh yeah, it was called Bob Katz. Well, we parked out back in the shadows. Gary started talking with a couple of the ladies there and settled on one. I bet we hadn't been in the place 20 minutes before Gary was walking her out the door. He had given me the heads up a couple minutes earlier, so I left ahead of them. Just like every other time before, Gary was in the van digging around for something, she was

straining to see what he was pulling out of his stash and I gassed her with the chloroform. The whole process was becoming so routine it was almost no challenge to lure them to the van and, clunk, they were sleeping pretty on the floor of the van. One heavy duty zip tie around the wrists and one around her ankles and we were off.

"We drove up 19 to Sea Ranch Drive and picked up Old Dixie Highway. We headed north, and just past Gulf Way, there is an open area of swampy land that is cut by drainage canals on the west side of the road. We carried her down the side of one of the drainage canals a couple hundred yards. I chose this area because of the water that was usually standing in the canals."

"I don't know what it was, but it took her the longest time to wake up. I bet we were out there with all the mosquitoes for almost an hour before she came to. Gary had sex with her, but he asked me to hold her down. She was struggling a lot. After we had taken her ankle zip tie off her, she started kicking and flailing around. I could see Gary was getting upset. So, I told her if she kept it up I'd gas her again. She calmed down, but not completely. Gary, for the first time, put her clothes back on her. Later I asked him why he'd done that, and he said he didn't know. It just seemed like the right thing to do. I never did understand that one."

"I found a place in the drainage ditch that had about 3 feet of water in the bottom. It had been fairly dry, so the ditches weren't as full as they usually were. I laid her on her back in the water. The water helped her sit up. Her hands were still tied behind her back. Then I asked Gary to find some good- sized pieces of lime rock. There were pieces all over the place, pieces that had been dredged or shoveled out of the drainage ditches. I put the first stone in her lap. She didn't seem to know what was going on. Then I put another one higher up on her body. It became more difficult for

her to keep her head above water. Every once in a while her head would slip under the water for a second or two. The third stone was pretty much in the center of her chest and her head went under the water and never came up again. I shined my flashlight into her face through the water. There was a frantic look on her face. She sucked in water. I could see her cough and tried to expel it but her breathing reflex kicked in and she sucked in water again. A few minutes later she was just looking up at me with unblinking eyes."

"I was tempted to leave her in the water since the surrounding high ground was made mostly of lime rock that had been scooped up. It would be almost impossible to dig a grave. So, we dragged her down the canal closer and closer to the Gulf. There was no way we could get her all the way to the Gulf but, if we got her closer, the crabs and other little crawly critters would clean off her bones in no time. Then, assuming no one found her, they might wash out into the Gulf during a storm. Since no one seems to have found her, it must have worked. I was a bit worried about that disposal. We didn't own a boat so we couldn't actually take her out into the Gulf and drop her off. I think our one water venture showed that it was probably a potentially good way of getting rid of bodies. I will admit, however, it was a bit more risky."

"I am very surprised that someone never found Jennifer. Until later, this disposal was the most open disposal we ever did. It did not feel quite right. It worked but it was a fluke. I had expected to read about her body being discovered but it never was. Amazing."

Pauline Trudox

"Number 9 was Pauline Trudox of Claremont. We picked her up in one of the trendy student bars near the USF campus. This is one kill that I'd like to forget, but I owe it to you to let you know what happened to her. I'm just not very proud of this one. I had planned

a fairly elaborate method of killing her; during her abduction, I guess I didn't have enough chloroform on the rag I was using and she simply wouldn't go to sleep. She was kicking and thrashing about in the van."

"Head crusher?"

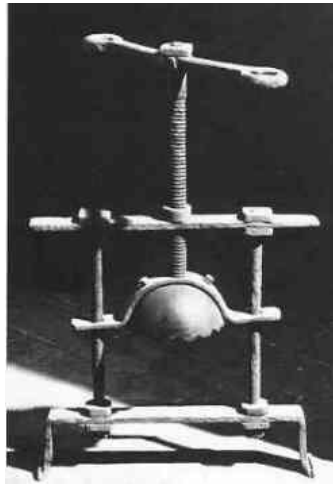
Billy continued, as if I had not said a word. "The head crusher was in the way when we were trying to subdue her. I lifted it out and set it on the ground. Somehow, neither Gary nor I put it back into the van. When we finally subdued her, and because of the ruckus she had caused, we just jumped into the van and got out of there in a hurry. We simply forgot it."

"I don't know what ever happened to it. I never read in the paper that it had been found, or if it was found, it never got tracked to either Gary or me. I'm a little surprised by that. If the police had gotten their hands on it, my prints or Gary's should have been on it. My only idea about what happened to it is that some student picked it up and took it home with him. Maybe he used it for his own purposes. Interesting idea, huh?"

I interrupted. "Wait, wait a minute. A head crusher? Can you tell me more about it."

"Sure. I had seen this device in a book about torture during the Inquisition. It was called a skull crusher. You put a person's chin on a kind of chin rest or anvil and a headpiece, attached to a screw was above the anvil. The idea was to crew the headpiece down until the skull was smashed. It was a good sized piece of equipment, and we simply lost it."

I had an image of what he was talking about in my head but later, I looked up head crushers. As I looked at the photos and read about them, I shuddered. They were gruesome. I don't know what Billy's looked like but this is a photo of one I found.



Billy continued, "but since we didn't get a chance to use the device it is irrelevant. So, let's not waste time talking about it? Okay? We're wasting time." I could see from Billy's face and the tone of his voice that he was simply not going into any more detail about his device but, it must have been something special. We'll never know now.

"Usually, we didn't like to transport our victims too far after we killed them. We usually tried to kill them right where we were going to bury them. Circumstances caused us to have to change our normal routine. When we went to where we were going to kill and bury her, there were a couple of kids parking there. I had to improvise. Now you have to realize, improvisation is not my preferred way of doing things. It just throws everything I've planned

and rehearsed in my head to the wind. It's a very unsettling situation to be in. You feel out of control. I like to have control over what and how my kills work. For some reason, I found myself having to improvise more and more and this became frustrating to me. I tried to make sure I had everything planned out, but for the life of me I couldn't stick to the plans. They just started to unravel before my eyes. It started with the double and something always seemed to go wrong after that one. And here I was, again, having to come up with a good alternative to what I had planned."

"Here we were with our victim and no tools. Then, the two kids right where I wanted to kill this woman. I even went so far as to contemplate actually letting her go. With everything going haywire, I probably should have let her go. I just couldn't. I had pumped myself up for the kill and I needed to go through with it. The only problem with letting her go is that she could identify us and the van. She had had plenty of time to etch our faces into her memory. So, we didn't have much of a choice. We had to make the best of a very bad situation."

"I decided we needed to go somewhere where I felt comfortable. That meant taking her back to Hernando County. This violated one of our basic rules, but things were getting out of hand and we needed to get this over with as quickly as possible. If we went very far, it would take us hours to get everything done and get home.

We had to be up in the morning for work."

"I decided we would drive out to Chassahowitzka Swamp. Dad had taken us up there fishing and hunting from time to time. It was a pretty desolate area and almost no one ventured off the beaten paths. We drove to Brooksville, headed west on 50, then north on US 19, to where Zebrafinch crosses 19 and then west toward the Gulf. We came to where Zebrafinch dead ends. From there we had

to back track a mile or so and entered the woods on the south side of the road. By this time, Pauline was awake. We carried her into the woods. I told Gary to hurry with what he needed to do. He was feeling the pressure too. "Not having anything else to work with, I took off my belt, put the end of the belt through the buckle, slid it over her head and pulled tighter and tighter. Soon she was dead. I felt bad about this kill. It was too rushed and too unplanned. There was almost no satisfaction in the end."

"Gary ran back to the van, picked up the shovel and we buried her. Everything was so rushed that it was, overall a very unsatisfying experience.

Tammy Walker

"Since Pauline's kill had been such a disaster, I decided to take my time planning every detail of the next one. I bet it was more than six months before I was ready again. My final kill was number 10. It took me a few months just to settle on how I wanted it to take place. I thought of a variety of ways to kill but it was not until one day, while at work, that I saw a guy take a jolt of 220 volts from an exposed dryer wire. He was rushed

to the hospital and would be okay but it gave me an idea. I had to study up on electricity to see how it killed. Once I had discovered it was not so much the voltage that killed a person, as it was the amperage, I knew I could devise something I could use. I did my research and found that electrocution did a number of things. It stopped the heart. It immobilized the diaphragm. It short-circuited the nervous system. In the end, you either died of a heart stoppage or suffocation. Either way, you were gone. So, electricity it was."

"Now, here is something that will make you smile. I killed Tammy Walker, essentially, the same way I'm going to die in a week or so.

There is a certain poetic justice about it, don't you think?" Billy got a wry smile on his face. I started to wonder how this guy could disengage his sense of self-preservation like this. It was as if he were standing outside himself and seeing himself more or less impartially and finding a certain humor in it."

"The method I had come up with was based on using an arc welder. I'd wrap one ankle with a piece of copper. I'd place a copper collar on her. I'd attach the welder electrodes to the copper anklet and the collar and simply switch on the welder. I had no real idea what would happen. I was in for a huge surprise."

"Dad had a welder in the workshop but we couldn't do it there. It looked like we'd have to use McNabb's place again. I asked Gary if he could arrange for the garage again. He thought that that shouldn't be a problem. We'd have to plan around when no one else was scheduled to use it."

"Once the method had been settled on, everything else fell into place rather quickly. As before, I had to hunt down a disposal site. I didn't like having to cart the bodies all over the place to dispose of them. So, after I talked to Gary, we decided that the non-Hernando rule was hampering our activities. Looking back on it, we should have stayed with the rule. Not that anyone ever found Tammy, but it was a pain in the ass burial."

"We returned to Tampa and scouted out some of the bars around the campus. We finally found one that we liked. I was thinking about changing how we snatched the girls, but decided to leave well enough alone for now. It took much longer than Gary had planned to coax Tammy out of the bar and to the van. Once there, however, our little plan worked almost flawlessly."

"Gary had her half way in the van, looking at some weed, when I came up behind her and chloroformed her. She fell into the van. Just as I had let go of her and she fell flat faced on the bed of the van, a couple walked past the van. The guy looked our way and asked if everything was all right. I said, 'She just passed out. A little too much to drink.' He seemed to accept it and walked on down the drive toward his car with his arm around the girl's neck and holding on to her shoulder. She had her arm wrapped around his waist. He was probably more interested in getting into her pants than about some other girl passing out in a van. Apparently, he never put two and two together, even later when the report of Tammy's disappearance showed up in the paper. Duh. People just aren't very observant, are they? Or is it, they just don't care?"

"Since it had taken an hour longer than usual to get our victim, we only had to wait about an hour to make sure everyone was gone from the garage and the rest of the complex. By 2:00 we were in the garage. We followed our little routine. One of us would take in any gear we needed and set up the camera. This time I was the one setting up. Gary watched her in the van. I got out the copper cuff and collar and had them ready. He brought Tammy in. She was still unconscious. After he laid her on the floor, I put the collar on her neck, and threaded the bolt through the holes so I could close and secure it. The ankle cuff was put on like an old leg iron. Both the collar and cuff had a tang extending out so I could attach the electrode."

"It was not until Gary had had his fun that she seemed to notice the anklet and collar. She began to move her head around like she was trying to figure out what was around her neck. You know how some guys stretch their necks when their collar is too tight? That's what she was doing. I wheeled the arc welder over toward her. I uncoiled one of the leads and attached it to her anklet. I uncoiled the other lead and attached it to the collar's tang that was ex-

tended over her left shoulder. Once I had attached the lead to the collar, she had figured out what I was going to do. The look of shock on her face was priceless. It had all become clear to her. She knew she was going to die and how. I poured a cup of water on her neck and on her ankle. With pleading eyes focused on me, I turned on the welder. Sparks started flying from where the leads were attached to the copper. I could smell burning flesh. That is one God-awful smell! She began to jump, shake, twitch, and spasm all at the same time. I didn't know a body could contort itself in so many ways all at one time. Her eyes bulged, and spit and blood began to pour out of the corner of her mouth and nose. I guess I left the welder on a little too long. More and more smoke started coming from around both the anklet and collar. There was the sound of flesh snapping and popping. And a small fire started around her neck, above the collar. Without thinking, I got ready to dash the fire with some water, when Gary grabbed my arm and said, 'Are you crazy? You'd get electrocuted if you throw water on her now!' I stopped midway in my arm swing. He was right, too. I turned off the welder and looked at her. Her neck was all black and red and the skin was either bubbled up or scorched. Her ankle was just as bad. Some of the flesh had burnt away and small pieces lay on the floor. Blood was starting to flow out of her ankle, neck, mouth, and a little was running out of her eyes, nose and ears."

"All I could do was look at her. I shook uncontrollably. My God! That is grotesque. Jesus! What the hell have I done?! Until that instant, all the kills had been pretty much planned and executed. I knew pretty well what to expect. I was not prepared for this one. Electrocution is not the way to go. It may be quick for the victim, but Christ Almighty, if the victim felt what the body looked like, what a way to go. She was a mess."

"We had to put her in a big plastic bag. Wherever we touched her skin, the flesh beneath seemed to move separately. It's kind of like chicken skin on a piece of boiled chicken. It made her feel kind of slippery. I have to admit, I almost puked. After getting her into the bag, we had to clean up the blood and gore that was left on the floor. Scrub as we might, we could not get all the spots off the floor. McNabb was surely going to have questions for Gary. We knew we couldn't be that sloppy in the future!"

"Gary's only reply was, 'You're the one who came up with the idea to electrocute her!' He was a bit overwhelmed by what had happened too. Neither of us had expected anything like what we had just witnessed."

"The plastic bag was not strong enough to tote her into the woods behind the shop. We grabbed a piece of that plastic coated tarp used to cover loads on semi-trailers, and put her on it. We carried her, Gary on one end and me on the other, into the woods. We didn't want to drag her body into the woods. That would leave a drag trail. So, we carried her all the way into where we eventually buried her."

"We went back to the shop, finished cleaning up our mess, at least the best we could, and finally went home. I told Gary, "That was fucking awful! I never had any idea that's what happens when someone is electrocuted. I almost puked in there, man. I can't do anything like that again. It has to be enjoyable, not gut wrenching."

"I'm, with you on that one, bro. Doesn't burning flesh reek?! I could go without ever smelling that smell again. Oh, I don't know if that stench will be gone by tomorrow when the shop guys come in. How are we going to explain it, if they ask?"

"I haven't a clue.

"And what about the body scum that we couldn't get out of the concrete? I would have thought that all the oil and grease on the floor would have stopped the body juices from sinking into it, but it didn't. That shit is everywhere. We're going to have some serious explaining to do. Where to now?"

"What's this 'we?' You'll have some explaining to do. McNabb thinks you were the only one coming in tonight. Keep me out of the conversation. Do you understand?" Gary nodded. "As for where to now, home!"

"That kill was the worst of the lot. I never would have expected all the damage that was done to her. It was like we'd cooked her like a giant hot dog. I have to admit, of all the kills, previous and henceforth, I did not enjoy this one. It still lingers in my memory with no redeeming value. It's more of a nightmare. It has, for me, no positive content. If I regret anything, it was Tammy's death. There was no satisfaction derived from her death. That would mean that her death was meaningless. If I could have a do-over, I wouldn't do it. It bothered me for a long time."

Was that remorse I was hearing? Then Billy said in a very calm voice, "Well gentlemen, that's about it. Does anyone have any questions.? If not, I'd like to go back to my cell."

One could hear a pin drop. There wasn't a sound. The loud speaker did not come to life. Only the escort guard came in and took Billy away in total silence. A moment later, the warden came into the interview room. "Can you believe that son-of-a-bitch?! I honestly felt ill listening to him describe the electrocution. But, I will give it to him, it got to him, too. Not enough for him to stop, but it must

have been something for that heartless bastard to have been revolted."

"You've got a point there," I said. This had really gotten to him.

Tim continued, "It is truly amazing what one human being can do to another human being and all for some misguided desire for personal satisfaction. I simply can't fathom how anyone could get pleasure from doing something like that."

The warden began to calm down. The veins in his forehead and neck had softened and lay, again, under the skin, no longer pulsing and bulging through the skin of his forehead and neck. "Man's inhumanity to man. You learn something new every day, but this kind of stuff verges on being unbelievable. And yet, we know it happens." He walked off down the hall toward his offices shaking his head.

I wanted to say to Tim, "But, isn't this exactly what the State was planning to do to Billy? Weren't they going to cook him like a hot dog?" When Billy was describing what had happened to Tammy, I thought back to when I had been a Cub Scout, and we had cooked a hot dog by inserting a nail in each end and connecting them to a model train transformer. They bubbled and sizzled. Was that what they were going to do to Billy? My God!

I did not see the Barnkowskys. Maybe I could catch up with him after lunch. I went to the cafeteria and had lunch. I didn't recognize anyone as I looked around the room. Where were all the videographers, the FBI agent, and Mark? None of them were here. I guess Billy's description had proven a little too graphic for everyone. Oh, my God, what about Barbara? What a way to introduce her to Billy. She must have been horrified.

After lunch I found Mark and Barbara sitting on a bench in the main hallway leading to the interview room. Their chins rested on their chests. Even now, they both looked a bit dazed.

“Are you two alright?”

Mark raised and turned his head and looked up at me. “I cannot believe what I just heard. Can you believe how coolly he described Tammy’s death? Admittedly he was affected by it, but he described it so nonchalantly. So matter-of-factly. I pretty much have a cast iron stomach, but I have to admit, I was becoming nauseated.”

Barbara raised her head. “I found Billy absolutely fascinating. The description was grisly, but his reactions were fascinating. His ability to recall details. It was like he had everything memorized. How in God’s name does the human mind catalog all that information and just be able to recite it on demand? I am sure he doesn’t have any reference materials in his cell, so everything he is talking about has to come from his memory. Unbelievable. If you had told me about how he described the circumstances surrounding his murders, I would, probably, not have believed you. I’m a believer now! What he does is a lot like what illiterate societies do. They have people who memorize their entire oral history and can recite it, just as they had learned it. That’s an amazing ability.”

“When do you get to review the videotapes? I would be really, really interested in going over them. There is only so much you can take in and evaluate during the actual interview. The tapes will be unbelievably useful in putting together an emotional profile or assessment. Right now, I believe he is withholding something, and it will be huge when he finally feels comfortable enough or is prepared to let it out of the bag. Are we going to have an afternoon session?”

"Originally, he told us it was going to be a marathon session today but we finished before noon. There's time for a second session. I'll have to check with the warden."

"Mark, are you alright?" she asked.

"Not really. That was almost too much. I've seen people in car accidents and people who have been shot up but somehow this guy has gotten through my emotional armor. My feelings about this guy are all over the place. I appreciate what he is doing for us, but the pain and suffering he caused his victims, and the pain and suffering he has inflicted on his victims' families. It's almost too much. How in God's name can someone do what he has done and remain calm and appear so otherwise normal?"

Barbara jumped right in, "That's the beauty, if you can use that word, of the serial killer psyche. Billy is different in some respects. He does seem to have a sense of guilt and remorse. It's like he lives in two worlds that coexist but the normal part seldom gets in the way of his monstrous side. Occasionally it does, it would seem, but not with enough force to change the course of his original intent. Did you hear what he said about his feelings about Tammy's death? I found that hint of humanity not in keeping with what I know about the serial killer mentality. There is a lot more going on with Billy than meets the eye. It's too bad that he hadn't spoken up earlier. We may have been able to learn so much more from him. Now time is running out."

"Are you saying he's remorseful?"

Barbara continued, "I don't know if I can safely say he's remorseful. It's more like he has a selective guilt/remorse mechanism. Some things bother him, while other things don't seem to faze him at all. Take for example, how he felt that Pauline's and Tammy's

deaths were a waste. That's remorse. Not so much the death of the person, as it is the fact that his plan had not been workable or fulfilled. Part of him is rebelling at his inability to control every facet of the act of killing. That's his remorse. Not for the taking of their lives. I don't think he actually sees them as anything more than a vehicle for his plan. They were little more than animate objects he was trying to manipulate. I see a spark of humanity left in him. Not much, but a spark nonetheless."

"I would have liked to have been there during his earlier interviews, I have no baseline from which to evaluate his current behavior. That's why the tapes will be so valuable. He is building up to something, but I just have no idea what it might be. I don't know enough about him to even make any kind of educated guess."

I looked at Barbara in amazement. "You got all that from just this one interview? I wish you had been involved from the beginning, too. We might know so much more. And we could have been putting questions to him and gotten even more information we could work with. I'm looking forward to this afternoon now. Can you draft some pointed questions? We'll see if he is willing to open up about his motivation. Let me go talk to the warden. I haven't seen him yet. He was very distraught when he left."

As I entered the reception area of the warden's office, he was coming out of his inner office.

"Are you free right now? I'd like to talk to you about this afternoon's session with Billy."

"There isn't going to be an afternoon session."

"What?! Why not?"

"Mr. Weatherford has informed me that he is not going to say anything more until just before the execution. He's to be executed next Wednesday at midnight. Depending on how you look at it, that would be 24:00 on the 15th or 00:00 on the 16th. Take your pick. He wants to talk to you, us next Monday afternoon or Tuesday morning for the last time."

"We like to transfer our death row inmates to FSP's facilities about a week prior to their execution. They are, then, placed under what we call the death watch. Sometimes the pressure for some inmates becomes so great that they try to commit suicide. So, they are placed under a death watch and we keep a close eye on them. We like to have at least one day between the last visitors, other than immediate family and clergy, and the execution. Because of the need to make adjustments in our normal schedule, to accommodate this last interview, we won't be transferring Mr. Weatherford to FSP until sometime on Saturday. Monday or Tuesday at the latest would be the last day we would normally allow non-family to talk to the condemned. Which would you prefer?"

"Tuesday makes more sense for me. I'd come in Monday evening, have the interview Tuesday morning and stay over for the execution the next day, as Billy has requested. Has my attendance as a witness been approved?"

"I'll inform Mr. Weatherford that we will get together Tuesday morning. And, yes, you have been added to the witness list. I'm sorry about the changes in the schedule, but this is his show now. I hope you understand. All this has been very irregular. We've tried to accommodate everyone's best interests, but we do have to do some things by the book, especially when it comes to something like the execution. We get enough flak from the anti-capital punishment people as it is. I think it would die down some if we went to lethal injection, instead of the electric chair. The chair

simply has a bad reputation. These people see it as inhumane. The anti-capital punishment people only see us executing a person; they seem to forget about what the convicted did to other human beings. It's a difficult debate either way. I may not agree with them, but I respect and will defend their right to protest."

"Well said, Warden. If that's it, I'll collect my assistant and we'll get out of your hair. Has Irene taken care of the paperwork for today's interview?

"I believe she has but I'll check to make sure." He went into Irene's office. "She'll be right out with the package and the sign-off slip. Take care, and we'll see you next week. Oh, before I forget, you should know that once Mr. Weatherford is transferred to FSP, across the road, he becomes the responsibility of Warden Crosby. I'll make the necessary arrangements for the interview with him but he'll be the man in charge. Okay?"

"I understand completely."

Irene came in and we took care of the paperwork. As soon as we were done, I returned to Barbara and Mark with the news. "It looks like we're done here for now. Billy doesn't want to say any more until next Tuesday morning, just before his execution. They have a policy of no interviews or no non-family members seeing the condemned one day before the execution. He'll be executed on Wednesday at midnight. Barbara, do you want to come up for the last interview?"

"I'd love to. Here are some questions I jotted down. We can discuss them later. Any chance of getting me in to see the execution?"

"I kind of doubt it, but we can ask on the way out. Thanks for the questions. I'll look them over when I get home. Mark, I'm going

back to the motel and check out. Do you want me to make a reservation for you or both of you for next Monday night?"

"We're leaving for home, too. We can take care of the reservation. Oh, by the way, thanks for arranging for the king sized bed. It was a lot more comfortable than the regular double would have been with both of us. Usually, I can sleep diagonally on a double and it's okay. But, with both of us, it has to be a king."

"My pleasure. I kind of thought that might be the case. If I don't see you back at the motel, have a safe trip home. I'll give you a call in the next couple of days and we can discuss the questions."

I stuffed the sheet of questions into my attaché case for safekeeping.

They left for the motel and I went back to the warden's office to see about Barbara's attendance at the execution. I found the warden in his office. I stuck my head in, "Tim, I have a quick question."

"What is it?"

"My assistant, Barbara, would like to attend the execution with me. Is there any chance of that happening? She'll be here on Tuesday anyway. Can you take care of Barbara's attendance request, or should I talk to Warden Crosby?"

"I'll look into it but it will be Jim's call, sorry. If it were me, there would be no hesitation but this is Jim's decision. Can I let you know on Monday?"

"Do I have much choice?"

"Not really." He gave me a grin. "I promise I'll see what I can do. I have a question for you. Who is your assistant anyway and how did you meet her? She wasn't with you for the previous interviews. What changed?"

"Well, to be honest, she's Detective Barnkowsky's wife. She is a forensic psychologist by training, and I didn't find this out until this last weekend. She's opening her own consulting firm, and I thought I could use her expertise in analyzing Billy. I wish I had known her before all this started. So, I'm trying to get her up to speed as fast as I can. She has already developed a couple of ideas and she's going to put together some questions, which I hope to use during our last interview."

"Get in touch with me next Monday some time and I should have an answer for you about her interest in being a witness. It will depend entirely on how many official witnesses will be allowed. We only allow so many witnesses. Sometimes we have to accommodate political types, if you know what I mean. But, again, I'll have to check with Jim."

"I understand. Take care and thanks for everything. You've been a great facilitator."

By the time I got to the motel, Barbara and Mark had already checked out. I'd call them tonight, after I called Susan. I checked out and began the long drive home.

Chapter 9

Hiatus

Brooksville, May 7

When I got home, I called Ronny. It had been several days since we'd spoken to one another. "How's it going, guy? I just got back from Starke. Today he discussed the last of his murders, the ones the police didn't even know about. One of them was really rather brutal and grisly. The folks in the observation booths got a bit queasy. Most of them were green around the gills. I can't talk about it in any more detail. I had to agree to a gag order if I wanted the videos and all the other supporting documentation from the interviews. You know that. Nobody is supposed to see any of that stuff until after Billy has been executed, which is scheduled for a week from today. I'm going back up next Monday night. Hopefully, I'll get a chance to talk to him one more time. I have to be there anyway for the execution. He asked if I'd be a witness. I agreed. I've never been to an execution. It should be interesting, but rather gruesome, especially in light of the description of one of his kills, where he electrocuted his victim. It gives me the heebie jeebies just thinking about it."

"The interview stuff. Well, for whatever reason, Billy requested that everything stay with the warden. They package it up, just like the box you're holding. They give me an inventory sheet, so I know what's in each box. When this whole affair is over, I get all the boxes, including the one you're holding. Oh, don't worry, we're just trying to accommodate Billy so he keeps talking. Sure, as soon as I get everything, you can take a look at it. You'll have to sign a waiver. Just kidding. Your input might prove indispensable. Yes, I'll give you credit in the book. Man, you are a lawyer aren't you?"

"By the way, I have an assistant now. She's Susan's sister. Her name is Barbara. She's a forensic psychologist, married to one of the detectives from the Tampa Police. She's been out of the loop for a few years and she now wants to resume her career. I told her I could use her skills. We were all prepared to hold a second session this afternoon, but Billy said he was done talking for now. So, I'm home again."

"Who is Susan? Oh, I guess I didn't mention that. I met someone over the weekend, Susan. You know, I don't even know what her last name is. I've been talking with her almost every night since Sunday and her last name has never come up. She's a middle school teacher in Tampa. I think she's really quite beautiful, and, miraculously, she actually seems interested in me. I'll see if she can make it up here this weekend, and maybe you, Nancy, Susan and I can get together. I'd really like you guys to meet her. She's smart, witty, and she's got a killer sense of humor. Check with Nancy and let me know if you are free one evening. How about the Fireside Inn? Get back to me on that, okay? See you. Bye."

I called Mark at home. "Mark, in the aftermath of that interview with Billy and the interview schedule change, I forgot to give you the GPS coordinates for the burial sites he talked about today. Do you have an e-mail address? Give it to me and I'll e-mail the coor-

dinates to you. That way you'll have them for tomorrow morning. Is Barbara available? Thanks. Barbara, I talked to the warden about your request to attend the execution. He couldn't give me a firm answer immediately. It all depends on the warden at Florida State Prison, where the execution will actually take place and how many politicians have to be accommodated. He said he'd let us know Monday."

"Are you going to be busy over the next couple days? What I was thinking is, if you could come up here, or I could come to your place, we could sit and discuss a strategy for Tuesday's interview. I've taken some notes during the first two interviews, but most of the information is on the videotapes, which I won't have access to until after the execution. Once I get my hands on those tapes, we can sit down and view them and you can give me your feelings on what was going on with Billy. I liked what you had to say this afternoon. I thought that, under the circumstances, your instincts are right on. With more exposure to him, I think we can start to put together our own profile. I know he's not like any of the other serial killers I've written or read about before. This could turn into some interesting stuff. I also have some other stuff that you might find interesting as well. No. I don't have any etchings. You're a naughty girl. I like it. No seriously, I'm looking forward to your input. No. Not yet. I'm going to give her a call as soon as we're through. We're through. I'll give you a buzz tomorrow and we can firm up our plans. Good night."

"Hello, Susan? This is Roger. I wish I could say that it went great but things didn't go quite as well as we had hoped. We got through the scheduled interview. Since the first session wasn't as long as we had anticipated, we thought we would have a chance to get in an afternoon session. When Barbara, Mark and I got back from lunch and asked when the afternoon session would begin, the warden informed us that there wasn't going to be one. Billy had

decided he'd had enough. He does want to speak to us one last time next week, a day or so before he's scheduled to be executed. So, Tuesday morning we have another appointment with him. It looks like Barbara and Mark will be going up again then. Barbara asked if she could attend the execution. We won't know if she'll be allowed to attend until Monday some time."

"She was great. After only one session, she has some ideas about what's going on with Billy. Hopefully, we will be able to get together sometime this weekend and compare notes. I know it's too late for tonight, but what would you say to a candlelight dinner tomorrow night? Can you work it into your schedule? Great. What would be a good time to pick you up? Seven it is. I have two questions. First, what is your last name? I didn't realize I didn't know what it was until I was telling my friend about you and all I could say was Susan. Spencer. Is that your maiden name or your married name? And your maiden name was? Amundsen, like the explorer?

You really are a Minnesotan. That's Norwegian isn't it? I knew it had to be Norwegian or Swedish. Okay, what is your address? Got it."

We chatted for more than an hour. Among other things, I found that her favorite color is royal blue. Her favorite male actor is Anthony Hopkins and her favorite female actor is Nicole Kidman. I thought that was a strange combination. I'd have to find out why those two. Her favorite food is dependent upon her mood, either Mexican or a well-grilled steak. In an instant, I knew where we were going for dinner tomorrow night.

It felt so comfortable talking to her, not about anything special, because just talking with her was special. I was looking forward to seeing her again.

“Oh, before I forget, could you be free Saturday or Sunday to come up here to Brooksville and have dinner with a friend of mine and his wife? Yes, and me too. That was cute. Ronny is checking with his wife to see which day would be better for them. I told them I wanted to introduce you to them. Ronny was excited for me. He said it was long overdue for me to find someone special. And I think I have. I have to run. I’ll call you tomorrow. Oh, you got my message. I wasn’t sure you had. Good night. Talk to you tomorrow.”

I was starting to believe my life was turning around. It felt too good to be true. If this is what living is all about, I like it. Life was good. Somehow, Susan had the ability, with just a word, to brighten my day. Her enthusiasm for life was infectious.

The rest of the evening was spent preparing for tomorrow, or Saturday, depending on Barbara’s schedule. I wanted to put the impressions I had stored in my head onto my laptop’s hard drive. I needed to organize the notes I’d already made about the first two interviews. Barbara and I could go over them and work up a strategy for next week.

I called Barbara in the morning. She could be free later in the morning or Saturday, whichever suited me best. “Can I get back to you a little later? I’m waiting on a call from a friend of mine who wants to have dinner with Susan and me this weekend. If he wants to get together on Saturday, I could drive down in the morning, we could get together and I could pick Susan up and bring her back here for dinner. If it’s Sunday for dinner, either today or tomorrow would be good for me. I’ll give you a buzz in a little bit. Thanks for understanding.”

About a half an hour later, Ronny called. Saturday was best for them. "Then Saturday it is. Say 7:00 at the Fireside? I'll call right now and make a reservation for us. See you then."

....

"Barbara, it looks like Susan and I are on for Saturday night. Do you want me to pop down today or come tomorrow? If I come down today, I could, maybe, save making two trips down to Tampa. Susan and I have a date with a steak tonight. We haven't even had a first date yet, but we've been talking almost every night this week. The talking has been really refreshing. There's an honesty and freedom about our talks that just makes me feel good. Does she have the same effect on everyone? Let me rephrase that. Does she have the same effect on every man she meets? Okay, I'll wait for your answer until I get there. I'll see you in about an hour."

I gathered up all my stuff, dressed for the evening to come and headed to Tampa. I'd have to call Susan as soon as she gets home and let her know where I was. I could do that from Barbara's.

I got to Barbara's a little later than I had planned. She was prepared to get to work as soon as I walked in the door. She really was pumped up about everything that was happening. She was diving right in. Who was I to stop her?

"Before we get started, how about an answer to the question I asked over the phone?"

Without hesitation, Barbara began, "I don't want what I have to say to be taken the wrong way but, the answer is no. She doesn't have the same effect on EVERY man she meets. Yes, she's a good looking woman but I've never known her to flaunt it. She knows she's good looking but, at the same time, she is self-deprecating

about it. If anything, she tends to downplay her looks with the clothes she wears. Look at what she wore to the house to meet you. I could never go out of the house, even to buy a bunch of bananas, dressed like that. That's the difference between us. Her beauty, and the beauty I think you see in her, is all on the inside. You just don't strike me as someone who is fooled by superficialities. For a lot of men, all they see is her face, boobs, butt, and legs. That kind of beauty is only, as

they say, skin deep and it's fleeting. If the man she is with doesn't see the beauty inside her, she comes across as cold. Obviously, she doesn't with you. So, with all that said, she's special, and it takes a special man to recognize just how beautiful she really is. Her students see it. We see it. Others get trapped by superficialities. Does that make sense to you?

"Oh, yes. It makes perfect sense."

With that said, Barbara pulled out a yellow legal pad on which she had already scribbled down more than 20 questions she would like Billy to answer. I looked at my pad and all I had were three measly questions. Hers were better and subsumed mine. We'd go with her questions. I wondered if the warden would allow Barbara to be in the interview room with Billy and me? I'd have to ask him on Monday before we left for Starke. I'd give him time to check on it, and he could give us his answer on the morning of the interview.

We went through each of her well-thought-out questions, talking about what she hoped each would produce in terms of relevant information. She knew exactly what each question was supposed to elicit. I was impressed. I guess forensic psychologists were better trained in asking the right questions than were journalists. I felt like a student at the foot of a master. And she'd been away

from the professional side of her life for 15 years?! Hard to believe.

Once we had reviewed and discussed each of the questions, I had to ask her, "If you're my assistant, and I'm not sure it shouldn't be the other way around, how much am I paying you for your services?"

She gave me a very coy look, "You have to remember, I'm married to a cop. If I give you a price, you could be wearing a wire, and I could go to jail for solicitation."

"No. Seriously."

"Okay. I really haven't given it any thought. Let's not worry about that right now. For now it's not important, at least to me. Remember, you're helping me as much as I'm helping you. Who knows, maybe we can collaborate on part of that book that you came here to write. After all, isn't that why you came to Florida in the first place? To write a book? Here's one that has just been dumped in your lap. Would you have a problem collaborating?"

"Well, no. To be honest, I've been so involved in collecting information I really haven't given a lot of thought to what I might do, but you're right. It begs becoming a book and I'd love your input. It would bring a scientific element to what would otherwise be just a journalistic exercise. Collaboration it is. Are you all right with my word or do you want to put something in writing?" I asked.

"I have an insurance policy. I don't need anything in writing."

"What do you mean you have an insurance policy?"

"I have a sexy younger sister. Need I say more?"

"Oh, so that's how it works? I guess, in that case, you don't have a worry in the world."

"That reminds me. I need to call her." We finished up and I phoned Susan.

"Hi. I'm at Barbara's. We've been working on a series of questions we want to ask Billy next week. We're almost done here. What time do you want me to come over and pick you up? You haven't forgotten about our dinner tonight, have you? I have some other information, but it can wait until I get there. I'll see you in a few. Bye."

....

"And where are you two kids off to tonight?" Barbara asked with just a hint of sisterly curiosity.

"She says she likes steak, so I thought I'd take her to Iavarone's Steak House. Have you ever been there?"

"I'm not sure. I think we went there once. If it's the place I'm thinking about, it was great. I can see that look in your eye; and the answer is no."

"What look? What question?"

"You were thinking about asking if Mark and I would like to come along, weren't you?"

"Well, maybe the idea had crossed my mind."

"You men are all the alike."

"I'm really looking forward to having her alone and all

to myself tonight. Thanks. I'd better get going. I'll call you tomorrow. If you have any more ideas, just jot them down and we can discuss them. Say hi to Mark for me," I said as I walked out the door.

As I was about to close the door behind me, I could hear Barbara say, "I didn't like that 'all alone' comment, buster. Remember she's my kid sister." She laughed.

It only took me a few minutes to get to Susan's apartment. When I knocked, she answered the door in sweatpants, a baggy T-shirt, and a towel wrapped around her head. She looked great, even without a hint of makeup. Barbara had been right. Susan was who she was, and you either accepted her the way she was or you didn't. Most women would have never answered the door for their first date dressed in sweat pants and a T-shirt. But Susan was not most women.

"Come on in. Do you want something cool to drink? I'll just go get dressed. Help yourself to whatever is in the fridge. I think there are a couple beers and some diet pop." She disappeared into the bedroom. She left the door ajar so we could continue talking. From the bedroom she asked, "What did you need to talk to me about?"

"Ronny got back to me. He and Nancy are free tomorrow night. I made arrangements to go out to dinner at a place in Brooksville – the Fireside Inn. I was wondering, would you consider staying over tonight at my place and save all the back and forth driving between here and there?"

"Here." A small overnight bag dangled from her hand on an arm that stuck through the opening of the partially closed bedroom door. "Does that answer your question?"

"Well, yes. Yes, it does."

"All I need to know is just how fancy is the Fireside?"

"It's a nice place but nothing overly fancy. Casual dress will be just fine."

"Okay. Then where are we going tonight? Casual or upscale?"

"I'm taking you to one of the finest steakhouses in Tampa – Iavarone's. Have you heard of it? Dress, only slightly better than casual. Remember, this is Florida."

"Yes. I've heard of it. Never been there, but I've heard it's really good. Good choice for a first date."

"Thank you. Do I have enough time to finish this beer?"

"It depends on how fast you drink. I'll be ready in about 10 minutes."

She was a woman of her word. Ten minutes later, the bedroom door swung open. She stood there looking stunning, even with tomorrow night's clothes neatly hung over her arm. She was a vision. She was wearing a knee-length, white pencil skirt, that accentuated her tanned legs. Her shoes were red 3-inch T-strap high heels. Her blouse was a deep V-neck red and white

print that plunged deeply enough to show just enough cleavage to tantalize the imagination of any man. Her hair hung down, cover-

ing her ears, but you could still see she was wearing gold, dangle earrings, accentuated by a red stone. Surprisingly, she wore very little makeup. Even without the makeup, she seemed flawless standing there.

She could not help but comment on the look on my face. I must have looked like a starving wolf. "Well, do you like what you see?"

"Oh, yeah. You look phenomenal. Do you always dress like this?" I asked.

"I think you can answer that one yourself. Was I dressed up when I met you? Actually, I dress to fit the occasion, not the man I'm with, except that I wanted you to be proud to have me your arm. If you're ready to go, so am I."

I felt under dressed in my best sports coat and shirt with no tie. In Chicago I would have had to wear a tie to get into almost any restaurant after 7:00. In Florida, you hardly ever saw men sporting ties in almost any restaurant. They wore ties at the office, but once they walked out of the office at 5:00, it was gone. Everything was extremely casual in Florida. Sometimes too casual.

As we walked into the restaurant, every man drank Susan in. She was stunning. People could not keep their eyes off her; and she was with me. Unbelievable. I was living the life every man dreams of -- a beautiful woman on his arm and sauntering into a restaurant.

Life was very, very good.

During dinner, we chatted and every once in a while, Susan would lean over toward me and whisper in my ear. Each time she did so, the gold necklace she was wearing -- a gold chain attached to a

gold medallion encrusted with red stones and a length of gold chain from which hung a large red stone – would fall forward from where it had been nestled between her ample breasts. It would, then, fall back into her cleavage and almost disappear. I don't know if she knew just how exciting that single maneuver was, but I found it breathtaking. If she was aware of what an impact it was having on me, she was being heartless. Either I didn't get out much, or this woman was an absolute temp-tress. Whatever it was, and if she wasn't aware of what she was doing, it worked. And she was teaching 8th graders! Lucky kids. There were going to be some heartbroken 9th grade boys next year.

I don't even remember what I had for dinner. It must have been good. It was Iavarone's. After dinner we drove to Bayshore Boulevard and walked along Tampa Bay. It was a clear, starry night, with a full moon. It was cool and Susan had not brought a coat or jacket with her. I gave her my jacket to wear as we walked along the walkway above the bay. The white art deco railing shone almost illuminesciently in the moonlight. It was a night for lovers. After half an hour of walking hand-in-hand, we drove to Brooksville.

....

When we got to my little townhouse, Susan made herself at home. "Would you mind if I changed into

something a bit more comfortable?"

"No, go right ahead. If you don't mind my saying, you looked fabulous tonight."

"Thanks. That was the reaction I was going for. I'm glad you noticed. It was for you, no one else."

Notice was nowhere near what I felt.

"And every other red blooded male in the place!" She simply smiled, grabbed her overnight case, and padded up the stairs. A few minutes later, she returned. Her hair pulled back into a pony tail, she was wearing a pair of light jersey lounging pants, and a loose fitting T-shirt, without a bra. On her feet were her flip-flops. Even when she dressed down, she looked good.

"I think I'll change into something else as well." Out of the corner of my eye, I could see she was watching me as I climbed the stairs.

In the master bedroom I found her overnight case tucked neatly in the corner of the room. Her clothes for tomorrow night were hung in the closet, along with the clothes she had worn tonight. I changed into a pair of sweat pants, a T-shirt, and my pair of sheepskin slippers. This was pretty much my around the house uniform. When I came down, Susan was curled up on the sofa, watching CNN.

"I see you found some closet space. I'm glad you chose that closet. There's a lot more room in that one. Would you like some coffee or tea?"

"Tea would be great. What kind do you have?"

"Actually, there's only a choice between Lipton's orange pekoe and Lipton's orange pekoe. Since I've been here, I haven't had much time to do any grocery shopping. Which would you prefer?"

"Whatever you're having will be fine."

"As you can probably tell, I'm pretty much a Lipton's man."
"Do you take it black or white?"

"Black is good," she replied.

"That makes it simple. That's two black Lipton's."

I brought the teas in and settled in beside her on the sofa. She snuggled up. I put my arm around her. She smelled of Chanel, a perfume I hadn't smelled on her before but was quite familiar with. I remembered Mom wore Chanel on special occasions. I loved that scent and had missed it since Mom died. It was so good to have that fragrance back in my life again. I smelled her hair. She put her tea down, turned to me and kissed me gently. "I couldn't wait for you to get around to making the first move. I hope you don't mind my being forward. I wasn't sure when you were going to kiss me."

I put down my tea and kissed her. "It wasn't for not wanting to. I wanted to kiss you ten minutes after you walked into Barbara and Mark's place last Sunday. You're a magical woman and I didn't want to appear too forward and scare you off."

"You're not going to scare me off. I hope you don't take this the wrong way and it may not sound overly sappy, but you feel like a pair of old comfortable shoes. The kind you don't ever want to wear out," she said.

"I feel the same about you. Somehow, right from the beginning, I felt we fit. And on a purely informational basis, we hardly know each other. On a gut level, I feel like I've known you all my life. When I talk to you it's like we've known each other forever. I don't feel the need to be coy, shy, or reserved. I don't feel like I need to edit everything I say to you, just so I don't say something wrong. I just have the feeling that whatever I say you will understand what I'm really trying to say. I'm not used to talking about feelings, and

I'm not sure I say what I really mean, but you seem to know despite the words. Does that make any sense to you?"

"Oh yes, yes. Talking on the phone over the past week has been absolutely wonderful. Not being together, but talking allowed me to learn so much about you, without the pressure of courting behavior getting in the way, and without sex getting in the way. It seems, nowadays, everyone is hopping into bed an hour after they've met. I guess I'm a little old fashion that way. I need to know someone before I'm willing to give that part of me up. And, just in case you were wondering, I haven't been with anyone since Robert died. It has been a wonderful way to court one another. It feels like we are having a long-distance relationship, somehow. I feel so lucky to have met you and that circumstance forced us to get to know each other on a non-physical basis first."

"Believe me, the feeling is mutual."

We retreated to the bedroom. I removed her top. She removed mine. I removed her pants. She removed mine. I ran my hands over her firm, tanned body. It was even more magnificent than my mind had told me it would be. We kissed. We made love. We both felt complete.

....

Saturday morning came all too early. Susan was up first, dressed and ready to go. "Okay sleepy head. Time to rise and shine. It's breakfast time. I checked the fridge and there is a conspicuous absence of food in there. How am I supposed to cook with no food'

"She's beautiful and she can cook, too?!"

"You bet your sweet cheeks I do. We can go buy some groceries or we can go to the Country Kitchen down the street, whichever you prefer. Get dressed. Let's get going."

"Are you like this every morning?" I asked.

"I try to live every day as if it were my last. That way you don't put off what you can enjoy today. And today, I want to enjoy you," said Susan.

"Then come back to bed and we can enjoy each other for a while."

"Oh, no you don't. Don't be a slug-a-bed. Let's get going."

"Can I shower first?"

"Sure, while you do that I'll pack my bag and be ready to go."

"No," I said. "Please don't pack; you're staying another night at least."

Her only response was a broad smile, accompanied by an ever so shy, "Okay."

After a shower, I was dressed and we were out the door. First breakfast, then, for the rest of the morning, we toured Brooksville. We saw things that I had forgotten even existed, and found things I never knew existed. It was an exceedingly pleasant day. It could have been raining cats and dogs, and it would still have been a beautiful day with Susan in it. Damn. Is this what love feels like? It wasn't lust. It was genuine old fashion love. How could it have happened so quickly and with so little reinforcement, I couldn't tell you but everything felt right with the world.

There is a term a Jewish friend of mine back in Chicago used to use to describe one's soul mate. The word was *Beschert*. I was sure Susan was my *Beschert*. I felt blessed.

As the kids would phrase it, we just hung out all day. By the time we had exhausted the sights of Brooksville, including the Christmas House, it was time to head home and get ready for dinner with Ronny and Nancy.

We showered and dressed. I was out and dressed before Susan. I asked her if she'd like a drink before we left. She said yes and left what kind to me. I went down to the kitchen and made two martinis. Susan followed me a few minutes later.

As she descended the stairs, I was enthralled. Believe me. This woman looked good in everything she wore. I had thought she looked good last night, but she had topped last night without question. She was wearing a pair of black Capri pants, a leopard print spaghetti-strap camisole, over which she wore a short black jacket. To complement the look, she was wearing 3" leopard patterned high heels, gold earrings and a simple gold necklace. Again, she wore very little makeup. She didn't need it. Her hair was pulled back into, what I was beginning to believe, was her favorite hairstyle – the pony tail. And it looked sophisticated on her, not excessively casual. She made it work.

"Oh, my God." Those were the only words that came out of my mouth.

"You like?"

"Like is not the word." I was having difficult time breathing. "Here's your martini. I hope you like it. They're not necessarily my

favorite, but I didn't have much to work with here. We can change that with a little grocery shopping.

"I'm flexible," said Susan.

"Oh, I know! I know!"

We finished our drinks and drove to the Fireside, only a few blocks away. There we met Ronny and Nancy just as they were getting to the door. After introductions, we made our way to our table. As we filed in, Ronny took my arm and pulled me aside. "You weren't kidding she's a knock-out. Don't let this one get away."

"She's everything I had hoped for in a woman, not that I even knew what I wanted before I met her."

As we talked, the women were immersed in a conversation of their own. They seemed to be getting along famously. I thought to myself, 'She gets along with everyone.'

Dinner that night was pure pleasure. We reminisced. We traded war stories about work and family. When it was time to leave, we all felt sorry that the night could not have been longer. But we all had things to do tomorrow, and we all needed our beauty sleep. We bid each other good night and went home.

Susan slipped into her around the house uniform. I did the same. We cuddled on the sofa. I lit a fire and we sat, talked, and snuggled until it was time to call it a night. Sleeping together seemed so natural, stressless. She loved to be cuddled and I loved cuddling up to her naked body. We made love, but it was more a communion than just rabid lust. It too felt natural, reassuring, and, above all, emotionally fulfilling.

In the morning, when I opened my eyes, she was propped up on her elbow just looking at me. "What are you doing," I asked.

"I'm just trying to memorize every line, wrinkle, and curve of your face. It's kind of an inventory for my soul."

And as I looked at her face, I notice she was looking sad. "What's wrong?" I asked. "What happened to that beautiful smile?"

"Roger, to be honest this thing between us, whatever it is, is happening so fast and yet, I don't want it to end."

"But it doesn't have to," I said.

"I'm glad you said that, because I have an idea how we can spend another night together."

She sounded so excited, and she said, "Roger, could you come to Tampa and stay at my apartment? You could do your work there and, we could be together and get to know each other better, if that's possible. To tell you the truth, at this point I can't imagine going home alone, I'd miss you. I think I've fallen in love with you."

I must have looked stunned.

"Roger, say something. Oh God, I've scared you off, haven't I?"

"Oh, Susan. No. Not at all. Quite the contrary. And here I thought I was the only one love struck. I have a better idea. I think you should move in here, lock stock and barrel, sublet your apartment, and come live with me. That would really make me happy."

We looked at each other and panicked, saying, "What would Mark and Barbara say. They'll think we're nuts." Susan called Barbara.

“Roger and I need to talk to you and Mark. Can we come over? We’ll be there in about an hour.”

We slipped out of our uniforms and made our way to Tampa. Mark greeted us at the door. “What’s the problem?”

“We need your advice. We need you to be our sounding board. Okay?” asked Susan.

“Sure, come on in.”

“Okay. Here’s the deal.” Susan sounded short of breath. In an almost staccato cadence she blurted, “I love Roger. Roger loves me. We’ve spent the last two days together – nights and days. We feel we are compatible. He asked me to move in with him. We both need to be sure we’re not nuts, so we’ve come to talk to the voices of reason. You two.”

Barbara began, “Sis, I’ve never known you to make an impulsive decision in your life. I can’t remember when I haven’t agreed with any decision you’ve ever made. Well, there was that boy Stevie back in 7th grade, but that probably isn’t important any more. If you say this is what you want, that’s about all that needs to be said.”

Mark chimed in, “Susan, I’ve known you almost as long

as I’ve known Barbara. Your sister is one of the most intuitive women I have ever met. That is why she is so good with people. That’s why she has always been good at her profession. There is, however, only one person that I believe outshines her in terms of gut-level intuition. That’s you! If you say this is the man for you, I’ll support your decision. Yes, this relationship has been faster than a whirlwind. It’s been almost

instantaneous. There is no accounting for what makes two people click. If you feel it's right, it is for you. My only question is not for you, sweetie. It's for Roger."

Mark turned to me, saying, "Roger, if you tell me you love Susan, and you won't hurt her, you both have my blessing. If there is the *slightest* reservation on your part, I would suggest you wait and not do anything that you both might regret."

"Man. You know how to put a guy on the spot. But, to address your question, I have no reservations. With that said, let me add: I have never had a long-term relationship with anyone during my adult life. I have been overly dedicated to my work. In my line of work I've had to develop my own kind of intuition. My intuition tells me that Susan is the right person for me. She makes me feel at peace with myself. Not necessarily anything she says or does, it's just her being near me that does it. I enjoy talking with her about even my most intimate feelings and fears. I enjoy listening to her. I love her enthusiasm for life. She complements me. I hope I complement her. Together I feel we are greater than the sum of our parts. I love her and I want to grow old with her, God willing."

"I can drive back and forth to Tampa. That won't be a problem," said Susan. "So, how about moving my stuff next Friday or Saturday? You'll all be back from the prison and the execution will be over, right? That gives me time to pack up during the week and talk to my landlord. Does that make sense to all of you?" asked Susan.

While her suggestion seemed rather impulsive, we all had to admit there was merit in what she had to say.

"Just how long have you been thinking about all this? From the sounds of it, this was a well laid out plan. You couldn't have fig-

ured all this out in the last few minutes,” Mark asked, partly in jest.

“Actually, I didn’t have to think about it. It just seemed to make sense.”

We stuck around Mark and Barbara’s place for the rest of the afternoon. Then I drove Susan home. We both knew I had to leave for Starke tomorrow. Mark and Barbara would be leaving as well. Susan would be all on her own. It was decided that Susan would take care of Todd and Zack while their parents were away. Mark would be returning Tuesday evening. Susan could begin packing after work. Maybe the boys could help her after school, if they didn’t have practice.

Susan was bouncing around her apartment when I said I had to leave for home to get ready to leave tomorrow. She was fantastically happy. She said, “Life is good.”

“Hey. That’s my line.”

She kissed me and I left her to her happiness. I have to admit, I was a happy camper as well.

When I got home, I couldn’t help but call her. We talked for a while. I apologized for abandoning her. She said she didn’t mind. It wouldn’t be for long. Besides, she had lots and lots to do, and a week wasn’t very much time to do everything she had to do. I told her I would call every day. “I know you will.”

“I love you,” I whispered into the phone.

“And I love you. Drive safely tomorrow. I want you home safe and sound and in one piece.”

“I’ll see you Thursday evening.”

Chapter 10

Apocalypse

Brooksville, May 11

On Monday morning, Warden Jackson called with the news. Barbara would be permitted to attend the execution. When I called to let her know that her attendance had been approved, she was thrilled. She and Mark were preparing to leave and would meet me at the motel. I could tell from the sound of her voice that she was excited by everything that was going on and what she was anticipating. I was becoming equally excited, but that excitement was tempered by a slight feeling of foreboding, which I could not shake. Soon everything would be over.

I packed for a three to four night stay, got in the car and was soon on the road to Starke. Tomorrow would be the last time I would be able to talk with Billy. In less than 48 hours he would be going to the electric chair. Despite all the horrendous revelations that he had laid before us, I was beginning to feel sorry for him. I was reflecting back on his feelings about the death of Tammy Walker, the woman he had electrocuted. He was repulsed by what had happened to her. Admittedly, not enough to stop killing, but it had left a lasting impression on him. Now, it was his turn to be on the receiving end of 2,000 volts. I could only conjecture what his feel-

ings might be, knowing that he could wind up much like Tammy. It was unappetizing situation for him to be in.

Raiford, Tuesday, May 12

Unlike our previous interviews, the facilities at FSP were somewhat different. Billy had been transferred from Union Correctional's death row to FSP on Saturday. He had been placed under death watch. The death watch cell is a bit larger than Billy's former death row cell, 12' x 7', about a third larger than his cell at Union Correctional had been. During the death watch, a guard is placed outside the cell 24-hours a day, until the execution. A TV and radio are also placed outside the cell. Normally, during death watch, Billy would have been given only one legal and one social phone call. Warden Jackson, however, had talked to the warden of FSP – James Crosby – and arranged for the unprecedented interview. Crosby was reluctant to comply with Jackson's request for the interview but, based on the fruitfulness of the earlier interviews, he was persuaded to go along with the plan.

When he was escorted into the interview room for the last time, he seemed prepared. He was dressed in his regulation orange T-shirt and blue pants. They were neat, looking almost new. Why would they give him new clothes right before his execution? There weren't any photo ops scheduled. Did they want him to look good sitting in the state's electric chair!? That thought seemed so bizarre.

He sat in his chair and was attached to the o-rings, just as had been done during our earlier meetings. Nothing had changed there. Unbelievably, he looked like he was in good spirits.

The PA on the wall came to life. "Are you gentlemen ready to begin?" It was Jackson's voice. I had assumed Crosby would preside over the proceedings. Later Tim had told me that Crosby had sug-

gested that he preside, since a familiar voice might make things go more smoothly. Crosby would take a back seat. An unusual move for a state bureaucrat.

"Yes, thanks," I replied. Billy nodded.

"Good morning Billy. How are you doing today," asked the warden.

"To be honest, I feel great. It's like a weight is about to be lifted off me."

I asked, "Are you trying to tell me that you are looking forward to tomorrow night?"

"Oh, God, no. In my mind that is a fact only waiting to happen."

"What are you talking about, then?"

"I'm talking about what we're going to talk about today. What I would like is to have this session interrupted only for pit breaks. Is that okay with everyone?"

The PA responded, "Can I ask why you want to change the interview format now?"

"Because, what I have to say is important, more importantly, however, is that I don't want to stop what I have to say, except for unavoidable breaks. Warden, believe me, this is the last request I will ever make of you."

A wry smile came across Billy's face. If the situation hadn't been so damn tension-laden, I might have smiled along with him, or even laughed.

"Let me consult with everyone concerned. I'll be right back. Mr. Bainbridge, could you join us for a moment?"

I excused myself and joined the ranks of the hidden behind the one-way mirrors.

When I entered the observation room, Warden Jackson asked, "Do you have any idea what the hell this is all about?"

"No, not really. However, if you will recall, during the second interview he said he wanted to hold off telling us why he had changed his methodology. This has got to be important. Probably not for the purposes of the law enforcement folks, but it might help us understand what was going on with him. We know he changed how he killed his victims. He seems to have moved to an all new level, with regard to the brutality he visited on his victims, between murders 10 and 11. Remember how revolted he was by the murder of Tammy Walker, murder number 10? Something tipped him all the way over just after number 10. This could be important stuff, guys. I'm inclined to go along with his request. So we miss lunch. What do you think, Barbara?"

"Billy is excited about something. Obviously, we have no idea what he plans to spring on us, but my best assessment of the situation is that it's going to be important. He's been holding something back for ten years and now he's ready to rock and roll. I think it would be in everyone's best interests to hear him out. Has he disappointed anyone yet? Has he provided us with a single piece of information that we cannot substantiate? No. So, I'm inclined to let him get whatever he has to say off his chest. If it turns into some kind of manifesto or diatribe, we shut him down. But, I doubt very much if he'll do that. He has something important he wants us to hear. So, let's allow him this one last opportunity."

“While I’m opposed to any change on the basis of policy, I tend to go along with your arguments. What say the rest of you? Can you get along without lunch just this once?” asked Jackson.

Everyone indicated they thought they could. “So, we’re all agreed? Not a single dissenter.

“Jim, what do you think?”

Warden Crosby thought for a moment, then said, “Everything about this guy is unprecedented. We are allowing an interview while the guy is on death watch. I guess there’s no reason to not continue flaunting the established protocols now. So, let’s keep going. I hope it’s all worth it.”

I returned to the interview room. “Billy, everyone has agreed. We will honor your request. Do you want me to start by asking some questions, or would you rather start yourself?”

“I think I’ll start off. If you need any explanations or you are unsure of what I say, just ask.”

“Whatever you would like to do. Go ahead.” I sat back in my chair, preparing myself.

“In one of the earlier interviews,” began Billy, “you asked me why my methods had changed.”

Only one word raced through my mind: BINGO! He was going to give us an answer to a question that was pivotal to my understanding of Billy – why his methodology changed so radically after Tammy’s death. I would have thought he would have gone back to his previous ‘clean’ methods of killing his victims but, instead, he raised the viciousness of his attacks to an all- new level.

"I don't remember exactly what I said in response, but I know I asked if could wait on that one. Well, since this will be our last meeting, there's a lot you all need to know. Basically, my methodology never changed. I have always tried to avoid bloody, gory murders. The electrocution almost stopped me from killing again. If things had unfolded differently, Tammy might well have been my last victim. I was that revolted. I didn't like the blood and guts stuff. After Tammy's death, however, things changed radically for the victims and me.

"How so?"

"What changed were my circumstances. I started out alone. Then, Gary joined me. Through a series of unfortunate mistakes, other people became involved in what should have been between Gary and me."

'Others!?' I thought to myself. Now we find out what he meant. Immediately I turned toward the observation rooms, with a look that said, 'Here it comes!'

"It is their involvement that changed everything. It started with the murder of Tammy. Remember me telling you about the blood, gore, and stench that had resulted from her death? Well, Gary had been right. Try as we might, we could not clean everything up and make it look just like it had been before in McNabb's garage. There was the lingering smell of burnt flesh and the stains on the floor."

"Bobby called Gary the next morning. He was really pissed off."

....

"What the fuck did you do in the garage last night? It reeks in here. My wife opened the doors this morning and almost puked.

Roadway was running around in a frenzy sniffing stains on the floor. I've only seen dogs

caught up in bloodlust act that way. So, what the fuck happened?"

"I can explain. I'll tell you what happened? Well, last night"

"Bobby cut Gary off. 'I don't want an explanation over the phone. Get your ass over here now!'

"Gary drove into Brooksville. When he arrived, Bobby was standing in the doorway to one of the bays, the bay we had used. Bobby was a big, big guy. Gary approached. Bobby grabbed him and threatened to kick the shit out of him if he didn't tell him everything that had happened there the night before. Gary was scared shitless. He knew Bobby had a nasty habit of beating on people. It was common knowledge that he would even beat up on his kids in the name of discipline. His wife, Francine, would try to stop him, but he was huge and once he got into one of his moods, all hell broke loose. Later, I was told that he had come close to beating his son unconscious, and no one said a word. Everyone involved was afraid of him or what he might do if it ever got out."

"Even with that reputation in the back of his mind, Gary tried to lie his way out of things. He promised to pay for whatever cleanup costs it might take to get the place smelling right again."

"Intuitively, Bobby knew Gary was lying about something. He started to slap him around. Since there was no one else in the place, no one would ever be able to say, for sure, what had happened to Gary, even if he

beat the shit out of him.

"Gary finally broke down and told him that a girl had been accidentally electrocuted in his garage. He pressed for details. Gary tried to keep it simple and as close to the actual details as possible, but withholding the fact that it had been intentional."

"Again, McNabb saw through the lie."

"Okay, where is she? Is she in the hospital? Which one?"

"Gary was scared out of his wits. His world was collapsing around him. He couldn't see any way out but to tell the truth. He didn't have ready answers for McNabb's questions. He had never anticipated having to answer such questions."

"'Bobby, please don't beat me anymore.' In his mind, he was pleading for his life. 'I'll tell you everything, honest.'"

"He told him the entire story, only omitting one key element. He left me out of the picture. He had even told him about the video that had been made."

"'Okay' he told Gary, 'this is what we're going to do now. I want you to go get that tape and bring it back here. I want to see what really happened. If you don't bring it back, I will hunt you down, and kill you like the piece of shit you are!'"

"Gary knew McNabb was capable of it and he was

scared. He went home, got the video cam and tape and returned to McNabb's. He handed both over to McNabb. McNabb watched the video a couple of times."

"Gary was dumbfounded by Bobby's final reaction. All during the tape, Gary saw revulsion in Bobby's face. When he stopped the

tape and turned off the camera, McNabb said, 'Nice work. A bit sloppy in my garage, but, otherwise, nice work. Who was the other guy?'"

"Reluctantly, Gary said, "That's my brother, Billy."

"You mean the running back from Springstead?"

"Yeah, that's him."

"I thought he'd gone on to play ball somewhere up north on a scholarship. What happened?"

"He quit school and never got to go to college. Something about not getting along with his coach."

"No shit. I'm going to hold on to this tape for the time being. I promise to give it back to you once I've spoken with your brother. And no, I'm not going to turn it over to the cops. I have something else in mind. Get going and bring him back pronto."

"Gary came home and told me that we had a big problem. He went on to tell me everything that had happened."

"Tell me you're lying to me! Do you know what this means? We're going to jail and we'll be executed, if only

for this one kill. You stupid little shit!! What the fuck were you thinking? Did you tell him about any of the others?' I was angry and scared."

"No, honest. All he knows about is the second girl we killed in his garage. I never said a thing about any of the others.' Gary told me"

"What the fuck does he want to talk to us about?"

"I don't know. After he watched the tape he told me "nice work." He said he would return the tape once we'd talked to him. I have no idea what we can say to stop him from turning us in to the sheriff."

♦♦♦

"We piled into Gary's car and drove back to McNabb's. When we arrived Bobby was in his office trailer behind the shop. He was alone. On the way over to McNabb's it had occurred to me that if we killed him our problems would be solved but he was huge and I hadn't said anything about killing him to Gary, so I'd have to start and hoped Gary would jump in. Then I remembered just how big he was. He greeted us, 'Welcome, brothers Weatherford. We need to sit down and discuss this tape and your futures.'"

"What futures? Now that you know, we no longer have futures."

"I wouldn't say that. Your brother's little confession to me may well have saved your lives."

"I had no idea what he meant by that comment."

"I understand your shock, but I'm sincere. Come on now. This is obviously a well thought out killing. That would mean that you have done this before. Am I correct? Don't be shy. You don't have to be shy with me. I know talent when I see it. You two just might be able to help me and a couple of my friends. We have a small, very exclusive club, both in terms of its membership and what we do. Would you be interested in learning more about both."

"I needed to know what was in it for us."

"First, you don't go to jail. Second, we can assist you with a place to call home base for future kills. We can help you with the disposal of the bodies. Finally, we can protect you. You are having a problem with a secure place to take the women, right? And if you don't have a place to use to kill your victims, you, probably, also have a problem with body disposal, right?"

"I asked him, 'How would you know what our problems are? Gary told you didn't he?'"

"No, not really. It kind of goes without saying, since you had to use my shop as a place to kill one of your victims, I am assuming there have been others. This kill was not your first. It shows. You don't have a safe place to work, do you?"

"No. We don't. We have been killing right near where we bury our victims."

"How many have you killed so far?"

"I told him I would simply would not give him that kind of information. If he had a proposition, I wanted to hear it. 'Otherwise, let's just get on with it and call the cops. I won't be blackmailed into giving you information you haven't earned. I'm prepared to pay for what I've earned.'"

"I have some friends who will be very interested in seeing your tape. I also want to talk to them about something that may be of interest to all of us. We have similar interests. It's Thursday, and we have a Thursday evening get together. We've been meeting for years,' Bobby told me."

"You mean, you have a club that's interested in killing people?"

"In a nutshell, yes. We have been talking about it, but that is all we do. We've never gotten off the dime and done anything about it. I think the time is right to change all that with your help. In turn, we can help you. We wouldn't interfere with your activities, but we might be able to merge our activities to our mutual benefit. Would you be interested in this kind of arrangement?"

"I responded, 'I am sure something could be worked out. However, I want to make one thing perfectly clear. I will not permit silent partners. Everyone involved must be *involved*. No voyeurs. Every member must know every other member. No invisible, silent members. Everyone must swear to never give up any other member of the group no matter what the cost. Are these conditions acceptable?'"

"Bobby told us to go home and that he'd call us that night with an answer. He promised to return the video, no matter what, as evidence of good faith. He also promised not to disclose our names to anyone, either way. But he made his promises sound like threats, anyway."

"Gary and I went home. At about eleven that night, Bobby called."

"He said his group was making an offer to build a facility, a safe house, for future activities. They'd furnish it with whatever equipment we'd like. There would be viewing rooms for non-participants. Every subsequent kill would have one of the club members as an active participant, and participation would be mandatory for every member, no exceptions. Participation would be on a rotation basis. No videotaping, to protect participants from being blackmailed by any other member for whatever reason in the future. We would meet once a week to discuss kills, techniques, and kill selection. We would limit kills to selected targets or a targeted population. The frequency of kills would be a

matter of group decision. No freelancing. No trophy taking. None of the victims could come from Hernando County. Disposal would always be outside the county. Each week's participant had to participate in the disposal of the body of his kill. No one would be able to say they had clean hands. Everyone involved was to sign an agreement. He asked if this arrangement would work for us."

"I was in shock. Not only was I not going to jail, I was going to be assisted in my quest for the perfect kill. And equally shocking was the fact that there were others out there like me. I told him, 'I think this is something we need to discuss as a group. When could all the members be assembled to work out the details?'"

"We will meet again next Thursday evening. I will call you and let you know when and where the meeting will be."

"The wait for the week to pass was almost unbearable. Something that could have resulted in Gary's and my going to jail had just turned into an unbelievable opportunity. And the arrangement seemed to include security along with opportunity."

"Thursday finally came and I received the call from McNabb. He gave me directions to the meeting place and said to be there at 7:30 sharp. Gary and I showed up right on time. There were six cars parked around the meeting location by the time we arrived. When Bobby gave me the address I thought I recognized it but I wasn't sure. When we arrived, I knew why it had sounded familiar. It was in the conference room, over the bank drive-thru tellers boxes at the corner of Main and Jefferson in downtown Brooksville. The sign on the door read: *Reserved for the Brooksville Gentlemen's Club.*"

"Gary and I walked up to the door, knocked, and we entered when we were told to come in. The door was closed behind us and

locked. All the curtains were already pulled shut over the windows that looked onto Main Street and the ingress lanes of the drive thru windows. Everyone there, except Bobby, Gary and me were dressed in suits."

"Bobby addressed the group. 'Gentlemen, I have the privilege of introducing to you two new members – Gary and Billy Weatherford. Tonight, they are our guests of honor. Most of you probably do not know these two gentlemen. I can tell you, they stand head and shoulders above all of us. They have done what we have only dreamed of doing. With their help, that will all change. Billy and Gary, I would like to introduce you to the Brooksville Gentlemen's Club.' "

"There was a round of applause. There were 8 men seated around the conference table and there was McNabb. We went around the room and everyone introduced themselves. Many of the names I recognized, some I did not. Altogether, there were, now, eleven club members."

"McNabb continued after the introductions, 'Gentle-men, with Gary's and Billy's permission, I would like to show you a video of one of their last kills.'"

"We had been introduced as *bona fide* murderers. Everyone turned their attention to the large TV at the end of the room. Bobby inserted the mini cassette into a player and the screen turned from blue to a picture of Bobby's garage stall."

"At the end of the viewing I took a few questions. They wanted to know if all our kills had been as grisly as the video, but I explained that one was the worst; that I hadn't anticipated what the equipment I used would do. But this failure led to our being there that evening. Gary and I had been unable to clean up the McNabb ga-

rage and that led to Bobby's discovery. We were unable to get the stains out of the floor or the stench out of the building; it was so bad Bobby's wife got nauseated the next morning when the shop opened."

"They asked about body disposal, how we handled it. I explained that all of the women had been buried, except for one. We had mostly been burying them near the kill site, but they were scattered all around the Tampa area. None had yet been discovered. They asked us where we got our victims, too. I explained that most are from the north Tampa area, that we had no trouble picking up women in bars and clubs. They were really interested in my kill methods so I had to explain that every kill had been different. I tried not to repeat myself. The first and the one depicted in the video were the most grisly. On the first I used a wire tied to two wooden handles, and I strangled her. However, I put too much pressure on the wire and it almost cut her head off and there was a lot of blood. I didn't like that. Too much clean-up. I didn't like the kill in the video very much, either. Again, too much gore and too much clean-up. I told these guys that they had to remember everyone has their own methodology, and we were not here to emulate my kills but to work together to perfect their methodology. They seemed really agreeable to that comment."

"Bobby spoke up then, 'Gentlemen, we could probably ask questions all night. Right now, we need to sign our agreement and begin planning for our recreation center.' He pulled out eleven copies of the agreement, one for each member. He explained reading and passing the copies so we'd each end up with a signed original. Everyone read and signed, and passed it on. Finally, everyone had a signed copy of the agreement."

"Then he opened the floor for the discussion of the recreation center."

“For nearly two hours there was a heated discussion. In the end it was agreed that the club would construct a recreation hall, half of which would be constructed underground. The underground portion would include one central room, having rough dimensions of 12 x 12. It would be well lighted, so that all observers could see easily. On the outside of this room would be mirrored one-way glass and seating for the entire club membership. At one end would be 2 or 3 holding cells. Access would be possible from a protected lower level loading area and from a secure upper level entry. A security system for entry would be installed. It would take two members to operate the system to gain entrance. The land would be donated by one of the members, and all the members would contribute to the construction fund. Finally, Gary and I would be paid to supervise the construction of the facilities and as caretakers after construction was completed.”

“Finally, and this basically applied to Gary and me, it was agreed that there would be no further killing until the recreation facility had been completed. We agreed to this, despite a part of me not wanting to give up my sport.”

“It took almost a year to get the land transferred to the Gentlemen’s Club, and get the plans drawn and approved and the facilities constructed. The final budget for the facility was over \$400,000, plus the cost of the donated land, which was in an isolated portion of the county. The above ground portion of the facility was for meetings and *bona fide* family, social events. The social use of the facility was a truly inspired, maniacal aspect of the entire project. We would have BBQs and, we even had a wedding reception, above our torture and killing facilities! And to date, no one has discovered what was going on in the rooms below. Security and secrecy had been the hallmark of the Brooksville Gentlemen’s Club.”

"Who are the members of this Brooksville Gentlemen's Club, assuming that it does, in fact, exist?" I asked Billy in a hushed, stunned voice.

"Before the day is out, I will write down all the names of the club's members, past and present, as I know them. I will provide you with directions to the Recreation Center, and I will provide you with two pass codes that will allow you to gain access to the underground facilities. In return for this information, I would request that you, Roger, hold onto the list in a sealed envelope until I have been pronounced dead. Will you all agree to these conditions? And there is one more condition. No one outside this group of people here will say a word about this document until after my execution. Then you may inform all the authorities necessary to pursue the investigation of my allegations. I will also provide you, Mr. Bainbridge, with access to corroborative evidence of my allegations. You will not be allowed access to this evidence, again, until after my death. Do we have a deal? I would like to go to the restroom. Why don't you all talk about this with all the folks behind the glass and let me know your decision when I come back."

The PA speaker remained silent. Billy's escort came in and took Billy to the restroom down the hall.

As soon as he had left the room, I almost ran for the observation rooms. Everyone in the room was slumped in their chairs. Their mouths were wide open in stunned amazement. As I came bursting into the room, they seemed to compose themselves a bit.

"Can you believe what he has just told us? There is a club of killers in Hernando County!! Based simply on what he has told us so far, there are nine members, in addition to Billy and Gary. This sounds beyond the realm of possibility. They also don't sound like riff-raff, either. What do you want to do?"

No one spoke for the longest time. Then Tim said, "As unbelievable as it sounds, he hasn't lied to us even once. And Barbara was right. He hasn't exaggerated a single thing to date. We almost HAVE to believe him. Can your guys from the FBI go along with the arrangement? Mark, what about your group? I can speak for my staff. Jim?"

Mark was the first to speak up. "As much as I hate to admit it, he has been string straight to this point. There is no reason not to believe what he is saying. He even says he has documentation to support his allegations. I can't see why we can't indulge his demand. He's not asking for anything in return. Well, at least not yet. I'm in for the Tampa Police."

The two FBI guys were quietly talking between them-selves in the corner. Finally they turned toward the rest of the assembled group. "We're on board as well."

Tim addressed the other people in the room. "The rest of you are either on Warden Crosby's or on my staff. Can you keep your mouths shut until after the execution? Or until the investigative team has been able to pounce on these guys?" Everyone either said yes or nodded their acceptance. "Okay, we're all on the same page then. Jim, can you have your counsel draw up an agreement for and between all of us, pledging our collective and individual silence on this matter? Jim, do you have anything to say?"

Warden Crosby looked like he was in shock. "I can't believe what I've just heard. It's utterly unbelievable! Yes. Yes. I'll go along with this whole mess. Judas Priest!" Crosby picked up the phone on the wall and called Matt Witherspoon, his counsel. He had already broken our agreement by involving Witherspoon, but he was a bureaucrat and needed to walk the walk of a bureaucrat. His last

words to Witherspoon were, "Include your name among those agreeing and signing. Come over to the interview room and get everyone's name."

Tim started, "Roger, I have a little problem with you holding this information, but you have been a standup guy so far. So, there is no reason for us to begin distrusting you, now. I'm relying on you and your word on this matter."

"Don't worry Tim. I won't peek and I won't say a word to anyone, promise. Cross my heart," as I took my index finger and drew an invisible cross over my heart that was beating a mile a minute.

The warden smiled with the 'cross my heart' line. It somehow broke the tension we were all feeling. I returned to the interview room.

A moment later, Billy returned and resumed his seat. After being shackled, he said, "Well, do we have a deal or not?"

The PA sounded before I could even reply. "Yes, Billy. We are all in total agreement with your requests and conditions. Is there anything else you would like to add?"

"With regard to the documents no. There is one thing I need Roger to do. I would like to give him a note, addressed to a local attorney in Brooksville. This will authorize the attorney to turn over to Roger a key to a safety deposit box. In that box he will find the video evidence I mentioned and a copy of the members' agreement. I was going to suggest Roger get the tapes and agreement and return with them, so you all could have that evidence right after the execution but I really don't think that is practical. Instead, he can get everything after the execution. A day or so delay won't change anything. Can we do that?"

"I think that would be in keeping with our agreement. Yes, please feel free to give him the instruction note."

"Billy, why are you doing this? You know what will happen to all these people. Aren't you going against the agreement you signed? Aren't there going to be repercussions?"

"First off, I don't have anything to lose. Second, my best friend in the entire world, Gary, hung himself so that he wouldn't spill his guts like he had with Bobby. Rather than be frightened into doing something he felt was wrong, again, he killed himself to insure a secret that never should have been kept in the first place. Third, I was forced to become a member of this club. I had no choice. Had I had a choice, I wouldn't have joined. Forced membership does not equal free or equal membership. Finally, what I did was wrong. What these guys are doing, somehow seems worse to me. A bunch of upstanding citizens making a mockery of everything they do and touch. I blame them for Gary's death. For them, killing is a diversion. It's fun. It doesn't come from a need to kill. For them, it's a game. I took killing seriously. It was a part of who I was. It's not for these guys."

"How did you get videos of the other club members? It was agreed that no videos would be made."

"I felt that it was necessary for me to protect myself. None of the other guys in the club, except Gary, were people like me. They were all important people in Brooksville, real big shots. They had economic and political power. If they wanted, they could easily hang me out to dry on a whim. I had to protect myself against that. So, I set up a secret video camera and recorded every kill that the club members participated in. I was the construction supervisor, remember? Sometimes I wasn't even involved in a particular kill.

By convention, there were always two members participating at one time. I got all of them on tape for insurance purposes. Had Gary not died, these tapes might never have been discovered. It may sound strange, but I would rather he died with me in the chair than hang himself. He was trying to protect people who did not deserve protection. I will, however give him credit for being loyal to me and the Club. I miss him."

"Is there any more you want to add?"

"Yes. You asked why my methodology changed. And I said that it hadn't. That's only partly true. The brutality that was part of the last seven murders was not really mine. The murders I committed during my club membership were all clean. It was my partner who ravaged the bodies after I had killed them. You will see what I mean on the tapes. I would kill them, then my partner for the event would take over and mutilate them. I never understood the need for the brutality or the mutilation. Somehow, it satisfied my partners' needs but not mine. Some of the guys were worse than others. That is why there were differences in the degree of mutilation. It was not just one killer. They really represented eight different killers. The guys with the worst need to be brutal were the guys you would have least expected it from. There was this one meek, spineless banker who turned out to be the worst of the lot. He would almost mince his kill with almost any cutting tool he could lay his hands on. The last victim found was one of his kills. By the way, I'm pretty sure that the club is no longer active. I don't think they could keep it up after Gary and I were arrested. I could be wrong but I doubt it."

"One disposal method we were talking about, before I was arrested, was a system I had dreamed up. It involved grinding up victims and disposing of them at sea. The fish would simply eat up almost every bit of tissue and only small pieces of bone would be

left on the sea floor which, in time, would disappear due to sand and sea action. A perfect solution, when you come down to it. When the body has been ground up, it can be put in a barrel and transported to the boat. No real body to transport. Less likelihood of someone questioning a 30 gallon barrel being put on a fishing boat than a body. You can even transport the remains in broad daylight with almost complete indifference. Once out at sea, open the barrel, dump the contents into the water and throw the barrel in. You could even recycle the barrels if you wanted to. You know, save money. "

"Out at sea, it would look like you were just chumming for shark. A lot of the guys had big boats and were known for their interest in fishing. The perfect cover. If I were a betting man, I'd put my money on ocean disposal. And if I were investigating, I'd look into the number of barrels being put on boats heading out from Hernando Beach, especially if the barrels didn't come back."

"One of the first things I would do as an investigator would be to place surveillance on the Recreation Center, especially every Thursday. If the club still exists, and unless they have changed their routine, they will all meet there once a week. And, at least once a month, one of those nights will be a kill. The victim will have been obtained sometime earlier in the week, kept in confinement on the lower level until his or her time has come. Since the place is super insulated, no one would ever hear their screams. It's a perfect facility for what it was designed for. I know, I helped design it and build it."

"I have not talked to any of the club members since I was convicted. So I can't be sure if the club even exists any more, but having seen the need to kill among the membership, they may not have disbanded. Remember, I've been in here for about ten years. Since none of them have been caught in that time, you can only

assume one of three things. They no longer exist as a club. Or, once they realized I was not going to rat them out they had no reason to not resume their activities. Finally, if they only take one victim per month, they have disposed of 120 bodies since I've been in here. Also, I was a member for 5 years. Both the club and I were inactive for one year. So, we were active for 4 years before I was caught. During that time we averaged one kill per month. You guys found seven of, say, 48 victims. The numbers add up and become staggering, don't they? Just check your totals for people, mostly women, who have been reported missing and have never been found. Many of them probably ended up being processed through the Brooksville Gentlemen's Club's Recreation Center."

"Since I was not involved in the disposal of every victim, I have no idea where their bodies might be.

Much of the time I was a member, I had to obtain my satisfaction vicariously, since I had agreed not to go it alone. That was hard, believe me. I wanted to be in there, planning and doing. But that was no longer possible. Besides, more people could be satisfied with fewer victims if you stuck to the club rules. It worked, generally."

"I'm not going to defend myself. There can be no defense for my actions, before or after joining the club. I did what I did because I could and I wanted to. The taking of a human life is so empowering. It gives you such a sense of power. I will confess, however, I never did achieve my perfect kill. Just as I had thought I had done it, I discovered some flaw. Each kill was better than the previous. But there was always room for improvement. Upon reflection, the one kill that came closest to perfection for me was the one involving Alice Swanson and the screw helmet. I keep looking back and comparing every other kill with that one. She became my benchmark kill."

"Unless you have some more questions, I think I've pretty much had my say. No. Wait. Roger, could you personally do something for me? Once everything is over and done with, including the arrests of the Club members, would you go see my parents? Tell them what I have done here. Let them know that I am sorry I was not the son I am sure they had hoped for. What I have done here is for them and Gary. What I had done before was for me and I couldn't stop. It was not their fault. It was all me. Tell my mom, 'Billy says he loves you and he's the only one.' Repeat the message."

"I'm to say, 'He loves you and he's the only one.'"

"No. 'Billy says he loves you and he's the only one.'"

"I want to go back to my cell now. If you wait I will prepare the letter under seal and provide you with a note to my attorney, who is holding the safety deposit box key. It will take me about half an hour to prepare both. Please wait."

Those were the last words Billy spoke to any of us. He never gave us a chance to ask any of the questions on our list of prepared questions. In light of what he had said, our questions, now, seemed almost meaningless.

Billy was returned to his cell. About half an hour later, a guard brought me a white #10 envelope. Inside I could feel, at most, two pages. In addition, the guard handed me a note. It was not addressed to Ronny. Instead, it was addressed to Joe Tortino. I was surprised. Billy took no chances. With these in hand, I said good-bye to the wardens and Witherspoon. I met Mark and Barbara in the visitors' parking lot as I was about to leave and said good bye

to them. "And Mark, thanks for everything. I promise to keep in touch. Are you coming up for the execution?"

"No, probably not. No reason to really. Miller might since he was involved in the original investigation. And thanks for everything you've done."

"Barbara, I've made arrangements for you to stay in the room you had last night at the Best Western, if you're still interested in attending the execution."

"Thanks, Roger. Mark, can you tend the home fires for a couple days? I'd really like to see the execution."

"Not a problem, hon. The boys and I will miss having you at home, but we'll survive."

"No sense driving tired right after the execution. So, we'll stay the night after the execution and leave in the morning. Mark, do you have a problem with that arrangement?"

"No. It makes perfect sense. I'll leave your suitcase in our room. See you Thursday. Call me tonight, Okay?"

He kissed her and left.

A little while later we returned to the motel. I made arrangements for our rooms with an expected checkout for Thursday morning.

Chapter 11

The Execution and Its Aftermath

Tuesday, May 15

Barbara and I arrived at FSP at 10:00 Tuesday night. Warden Crosby had instructed me to be at the prison by no later than 10:00 so that he could give us a tour of the facilities and orient us as to the procedure and our responsibilities as witnesses. All in all, it was a routine affair. Our biggest responsibility was to sit quietly in our seats during the entire execution procedure.

In my mind's eye, I had thought Florida's electric chair was located centrally in a large room and the witnesses sat in front of the chair, facing the accused with no real separation. In reality it was a rectangular room divided equally into the glassed-in death chamber and the witness area. The walls inside the death chamber were a light institutional gray. To the left of the chair was a curtained doorway. At this stage, the curtain was pulled aside, showing a doorway. The warden told us this led to the final preparation room for the inmate about to be executed. There was a second curtained doorway. I never saw the curtain in this doorway drawn aside. The only thing that differentiated the two doorways was the color of their curtains – one blue, the other

black. A door labeled 46, with a small window was behind the chair, along with a large gray metal box, possibly an electrical panel. I have no idea what lie behind that door. To the right of the chair, on the outside wall, was a louvered window. I assumed it was for ventilation purposes. Now it was closed. Later, I realized the need for ventilation.

In the middle of the enclosure was the wooden electric chair, The 'Old Sparky'. The chair I saw had only three-legs.



According to one of the guards, this was a “new” chair. The new chair was a carbon copy of the previous chair. It had been built by the prison’s corrections personnel in 1998 and installed in FSP’s death chamber fairly recently. Shortly after its installation, Allen Lee “Tiny” Davis was its first occupant. The original electric chair

had been constructed in 1923 by prison inmates, an ironic bit of prison trivia.

While the chair was new, the electrical apparatus had not been replaced “due to the high cost of the new equipment.” Personally, I found this fact a little comical. They could afford a new chair but not new wiring and electrodes. I wonder if they were concerned with the seating comfort of the condemned or how the chair ‘looked’ but not whether the actual electrocution process was as efficient as possible. Government accounting I supposed. Misplaced priorities.

There were two heavy leather straps attached to the back of the chair, above the armrests, just about chest height. There were two thick leather straps on each arm of the chair. There was a wooden piece that was a part of the front leg, notched to hold the ankles, and there were leather straps for each ankle. On the back of the backrest were two vertical pieces of wood. When I first saw them, I could not think of what their purpose might be. Later, I found out that the leather mouth and chin strap wrapped around the uprights to hold the condemn’s head. At first, there was no evidence of electrodes. The chair was just all wood and leather.

At about 11:30, curtains were pulled shut on all the windows. We could not see into the death chamber

There were no last minute writs of stay before the governor. As far as Warden Crosby knew, everything was ready to proceed.

By 11:45 the drapes were reopened. Billy was now seated in the chair and securely fastened. Instead of his orange prison T-shirt, he wore a white shirt and dark trousers. No shoes but he was wearing socks. His head had been shaved and what looked like a metal beanie was strapped on top of his head. Later, I was told

that a wet sponge had been placed on his head and under the head piece. An electric cable was attached to the metal cap. Another electrode had been attached to his left ankle.

Apparently, Billy had refused to have the black cloth execution mask placed over his face. He looked me straight in the eye and mouthed the words, "Thank you." I nodded in acknowledgement. Then one of the prison personnel placed a wide leather strap over his mouth, gently pulled his head back and attached the strap to the two wooden uprights at the top of the backrest. The strap covered his mouth from his nose to his chin. He closed his eyes.

About five minutes to midnight, the warden read the execution writ, signed by governor, Charlie Crist. During the reading, Billy opened his eyes. Billy had already told him he would have nothing to say. So they dispensed with that part of the protocol. Everyone then vacated the enclosure. Billy was utterly alone. He gazed defiantly straight ahead.

At the stroke of midnight, the first jolt hit Billy.

Barbara, who was seated next to me, reached out and took my hand as the first surge of electricity began passing through Billy's body. We both gave the other an almost instantaneous glance and, then, refocused on Billy.

According the protocol sheet, there would be three separate voltage and amperage cycles during the electrocution process. The first cycle would consist of approximately 2,000 volts at 10 amps for 8 seconds. Then there was a slight pause. When Billy stopped twitching, a second jolt surged through his body. The second cycle consisted of approximately 600 volts at 2.9 amps for 22 seconds. There were some small sparks this time. Once the second cycle had ceased, you could see his body relax. Then came the third and

final surge. This cycle lasted for another 8 seconds of roughly 1,500 volts at 10 amps. It was the longest eight seconds I have ever experienced.

A wisp of smoke emerged from around the bottom of the head piece. From outside the enclosure you could not really hear the electricity as it surged through Billy's body. But you somehow felt it. During the execution, with each successive jolt, Billy's face first turned pink then got redder and redder, and it seemed to swell, first against the leather gag they had used to strap his head back against the chair. Then it looked like the gag was being swallowed by his face. Small droplets of blood ran down the gag from his nose, making small blood spots on his white shirt. A few moments later, after his body had slumped as far as the restraints would permit, a doctor, wearing a hood and goggles to conceal his identity, came in, placed a stethoscope to Billy's chest and listened for a heartbeat. Once he had been pronounced dead, the curtains were closed for good. We never saw Billy again.

After the curtains had been closed, Barbara and I turned and stared at one another. It was then that I realized just how hard I had been squeezing her hand. While the full impact of what had just happened had not hit home, yet, on a raw, emotional, visceral level, it had been shocking. Barbara's hand was reassuring. I released my grip and she gave a sigh of relief. I'm still not sure if it was from the bone-crushing grip I had had on it or that she felt the ordeal was now, finally, over.

As I sat in my chair, just looking toward the curtained off death chamber, something seemed wrong. The actual execution process had lasted, probably, less than two minutes. I thought to myself, it can't be over that quickly. Surely, in light of the crimes Billy had committed, an execution had to be longer. How could society's

need for retribution have been satisfied in so little time? It couldn't be satisfied in just two minutes! Could it?

After all, it had taken nearly ten years from the time Billy was convicted and sentenced to death for him to finally find himself seated in the new electric chair. During that time the Florida funded Capital Collateral Regional Counsel had repeatedly prepared and filed appeals on his behalf, despite the fact that he had asked for all appeals to be stopped. Nevertheless, the wheels of justice could not be stopped. He wanted to "get it over with." While the state sentenced him to death for his crimes, the very same state refused to allow the execution to take place swiftly. Every effort was made to stop the execution. Finally, when all petitionable technicalities had been exhausted, the execution process was set in motion. Billy never understood why his wishes for a speedy execution could not have been granted. Huge sums of money had been wasted on his appeals. All he wanted to do was get it over with but the state refused. Now it was finally over, at least for Billy.

After the execution, Warden Crosby had us escorted to his office, where we were to wait for the final phase of our execution night. The warden had other duties to attend to before he would be free to meet with us and finish our business. He had to supervise the preparation of Billy's body and having it placed in a wooden coffin. He would be interred later in the prison's cemetery without ceremony in an unmarked grave. In Florida, relatives are not permitted to claim the deceased's body or participate in the burial. While we waited for the warden, Barbara and I discussed the execution, what we had seen, what we thought we were going to see versus what we had actually seen and our impressions of the process. Neither of us was shocked by the process. We agreed we needed to discuss the whole affair another time, after we had had

time to digest our immediate impressions. Now, the experience was still a bit too raw.

....

"Roger, now that it's over, I have a question for you."

"Sure, what is it?"

"Perhaps this may not be the right time to ask but, after witnessing the execution, what do you think about the death penalty?"

"You're kidding me, right?"

"No, not at all."

"Do you want a politically correct answer, a philosophical response, or what I honestly believe?"

"What you believe deep down in your heart."

"Whoa! I thought you were just making idle conversation. What do I believe deep down? Hmmm." I had to think about it. Most of the time, I just crank out my PC response but Barbara wanted to know how I really felt. After a few seconds, I looked her squarely in the eye. "I find it ironic that you should ask me this now. My honest to God opinion is yes and no."

"Yes and no don't answer my question. It was not a Yes or No question. What kind of answer is that?! You can't offend me if that's what you're worried about. Remember, I'm married to a homicide detective. Okay?"

"I'm not being a fence straddler. Let me explain. First, I have two different sets of feelings about the death penalty, and I cannot de-

cide one-hundred percent on either. It may be that what I believe is situational. I know one thing for sure, it's not an event I would like to repeat."

"I would agree with that," said Barbara.

"Philosophically, the death penalty may be a just punishment for an offender like Billy, but is it *sufficient*

punishment? It may be that we, as human beings, don't have the capacity to punish a man like Billy for his crimes. Some crimes are beyond our ability to devise an equitable punishment."

"With that said, my opinion is that capital punishment should exist for a select group of offenders. There are simply some offenders who should die for their deeds. One night when Ronny and I were discussing Billy's execution, we talked about whether or not there should be capital punishment. We both played the devil's advocate. In the end, we came to the conclusion that there really is no clear-cut answer. It really depends on how you view the concept of justice. In the end, Ronny made a comment that kind of summed up the pro capital punishment argument. He said, 'Some people just need killin.'" At first, I was shocked. This was a comment made by a well-educated man, an attorney, not just some redneck. But, as I thought about it, it may be a crude expression of a basic underlying truth. Premeditated murder, certainly, is one act against humanity that I feel deserves capital punishment."

"One unfortunate aspect of current execution methods is that they are, generally, too sanitized. They are neat and, if society has its way, painless. Why must we be so humane when the criminals ignore almost every semblance of humanity during the commission of their crimes? Whatever happened to 'an eye for an eye'?

"Recently I had read an article by Sydney Freedberg of the *St. Petersburg Times*. In it he gave some history about Florida's use of the electric chair. He quoted a professor at USF. Freedberg asked him, considering all the legal challenges made against the use of the electric chair, why was it still used? The professor's reply went something along the lines of, 'it's like a kind of frontier, eye-for-an-eye mentality. It's a testament to people who want to protect the old ways. Lethal injection is just viewed as politically more correct in light of society's mock sensibilities.'"

"Did you know that it wasn't until the 1920's that Florida decided that electrocution would be the only state-approved method of execution? Until then, capital punishment was meted out at the county level by hanging."

"Really," said Barbara.

"Capital punishment is the same for everyone, whether they murder one or 100 people. Execution is society's final judgment, but does it necessarily fit the crime? You can't execute one person for more than one crime. Shouldn't the punishment fit the crime, but what if the crime involves more than one victim? Shouldn't the criminal pay for each of his separate crimes? How can we accomplish this with a single act of execution? A ratio between the crime and the punishment simply doesn't exist. Executions don't satisfy the crime to punishment ratio. How do we balance out and differentiate between a crime against one versus a crime against many? Philosophically the punishment should be commensurate with the crime but our technology is incapable of satisfying this need. So, should we eliminate capital punishment? I don't think so. A life spent behind bars is still a life lived. Under certain circumstances, I believe, the criminal's life should be forfeit.

"In addition to premeditated murder, other crimes could or should be added to this list. I would not, however, apply the law under strict sentencing guidelines, where the judge does not have the jurisdiction to modify the sentence laid down by the law. For me, the only conditions under which a person should be sentenced to death are:

1) Those who have confessed and there is supporting evidence to corroborate the confession. Some people confess to crimes they did not commit or have been coerced into making a confession; and

2) There can be absolutely no doubt about the guilt of the offender, in the absence of a confession. Absolute irrefutable DNA-type evidence has to be part of the evidence package."

"No one should ever be executed based on circumstantial evidence no matter how compelling that evidence might seem to be. It is still circumstantial and open to interpretation. Many people have been executed based solely on circumstantial evidence. Too many people have been convicted and sentenced to lengthy prison terms for a variety of crimes, only to be exonerated later by DNA evidence. There is an old adage in the law: It is better to let one guilty man go free than imprison an innocent man. Once you have executed an innocent man, it's too late. People are going to be wrongly accused and convicted for crimes they have not committed. These are the people we need to protect. While I don't think there is any absolute evidence that any innocent man has ever been executed, probability suggests there have been."

"Man, you have given this some thought, haven't you?"

"I don't think, being in the kind of business I've been involved in over the years, you can escape thinking about it. Okay, what is your position?"

....

Just then, Warden Crosby, accompanied by Warden Jackson, returned to his office. "I guess my answer will have to wait," said Barbara. A definite sign of relief came over her face and she smiled. She knew she had dodged the bullet but she also knew she was not off the hook. Her turn would come.

In addition, to the two wardens, there was Irene, Matt Witherspoon, one FBI agent I recognized, and someone I didn't know. I assumed it was Detective Sergeant Miller. I leaned over to Barbara and whispered, "Is that Miller?"

"Yes." She gave him a polite half wave.

"I had a feeling it was. That was a pretty poor excuse for an across the room acknowledgement. Don't you like the guy?"

"He's Okay but a little too stiff for" Before she could finish her sentence, Warden Jackson started to speak.

"I want to thank all of you for coming, and especially Mr. Bainbridge and Mrs. Barnkowsky. I would also like

to thank Roger for all his cooperation and help in collecting an amazing amount of information on our behalf. I am not sure that, without his involvement, we would have ever gotten Mr. Weatherford to cooperate so fully with us and the investigations. Thank you, Roger. We owe you a lot of gratitude."

"That said, we have some last minute business to attend to. Jim, do you want to take over?"

"No. This is your show. You've seen this whole thing unfold, no reason you shouldn't finish it."

"Thanks Jim. I really appreciate it. I have to admit, it has been quite a ride. Roger, did you bring the letter Mr. Weatherford had given you at the last interview?"

"Yes, it's right here." I pulled it from the inside pocket of my jacket.

"Is the envelope in the same condition as you received it?"

"Yes."

"Would you now open the letter and read it to the group?"

"Sure." Using a letter opener from the warden's desk, I slit open the envelope. Inside were three pieces of paper. Two separate notes. I began to read the first handwritten note:

Dear Roger

I want to thank you for all your help. I am very appreciative of your willingness to stick through to the end. I also want to thank the wardens, especially Warden Jackson. He made all this possible in spite of his initial belief that it would be a waste of time. I hope that he now holds a different opinion.

During the last interview, I told you I would provide you with a number of things having to do with the Brooksville Gentlemen's Club and its Recreation Center.

First, the recreation center is located off Neff Lake Road. The GPS coordinates are 28° 27' 59.27" N and 82° 20' 47.89" W.

Second, you will find two touch pads on either side of the steel doorway that opens to the stairway leading to the underground level. All the touch pads are placed far enough apart that one person cannot activate both at the same time. The following codes can be used on either one, but they must be entered simultaneously. The numbers are: 77097 and 39072. At the bottom of the stairs, you will find two more touch pads. Enter the following numbers simultaneously. The numbers are: 83001 and 51738. These numbers are the security system's master pass codes and cannot be reprogrammed. I was

the only one who had access to these numbers. So, they will unlock the doors to the stairway and to the lower level work area. Other members were given pass codes that could be changed, but not these master pass codes.

Finally here are the names of the Club members and their last known positions or title :

- 1) Ira Swank, Bank President*
- 2) Richard Shrout, Real Estate Broker*
- 3) Donald Knight, Sheriff's Deputy*

- 4) *Wayne Haidle, Insurance Broker*
- 5) *Marcus Mosely, Developer*
- 6) *Bobby McNabb, Trucker/Garage Owner*
- 7) *William Stanley, County Commissioner*
- 8) *Tony Gray, Store Manager*
- 9) *Gary Weatherford*
- 10) *Billy Dean Weatherford.*

There were only 10 names on the list. Who was the eleventh member? On the second page there was only one name:

- 11) *Ronny Sykes, Attorney.*

Now you know why I had to leave the safety deposit box key that contains the videotapes with Mr. Tortino. I'm sorry. The videos will confirm every one of these men's involvement.

Billy.

I was in shock. This had to be some kind of sadistic joke. So this is how he repays me, by incriminating my life-long friend. It could not be! Surely Ronny's name was added as some kind of cruel, vicious joke. But, why?

The second note instructed Joe Tortino, a local Brooksville attorney, to give me a safety deposit box key he was holding in trust.

Chapter 12

Video Cassettes

Raiford, May 15

After the execution was over Barbara and I returned to the motel to get some sleep. But I could not close my eyes without seeing Ronny's face. How could he have deceived me for so many years? How could this be happening? Ronny was my friend. I grew up with him. I was the best man at his wedding. It was simply not possible.

After our 3:00 o'clock check out, I took Barbara home and drove myself to Brooksville. My first stop in town was Joe Tortino's office at the corner of Main and Liberty. By the time I arrived at Joe's, he was in court, so I waited. Like so many other professional people in Brooksville, I knew Joe from high school. He was a year ahead of me but we had not seen each other in more than, probably, twenty years.

When Joe finally arrived from court, we went through the informalities of acknowledging each other as former classmates. Then, I presented him with the note from Billy. He went to a wall safe and retrieved a small brown envelope. As he handed it to me, he

asked that I sign a release form. As I was turning to leave, I asked "Joe, can I ask you a question?"

"Sure, as long as it doesn't violate my client's rights to privacy."

"I don't think privilege is an issue any longer. Billy was executed last night. Did he tell you what this key was for and when did he give it to you?"

"All I was told was that I was about the only remaining attorney in town that he trusted. The key is to a safety deposit box at what is now SunTrust, and his mother gave it to me to hold about a week after he was arrested with instructions to give it to whoever Billy instructed me to give it to. That's you. Now, you know as much as I know."

"Do you know who has been paying for the box year after year for the last ten years?"

"I haven't a clue. I would conjecture, however, that his parents have been paying the rent on that box. I don't know what he could have that was worth all that expense but it's not my box, now, is it?"

"Thanks, Joe. Take care of yourself."

I immediately walked to SunTrust, back up Main Street. I presented the key. The key was not registered at the main branch in Brooksville. I was told it was registered to a box in Spring Hill, at the Commercial Way Branch on 19. I drove out, presented the key, and was shown into the safety deposit box section of the vault. The teller and I inserted our keys and I pulled the box from its locker. In the privacy of the customer booth, I opened the box. Inside were more than four dozen individually packaged and dated

mini cassettes and another sealed envelope. I requested a large envelope and put all the cassettes and the sealed envelope into the larger envelope and sealed it. I returned the key to the teller and told her the box was no longer needed. She said she would take care of canceling the agreement.

On the trip home I stopped at Western Auto and picked up the largest portable, fire-proof safe they had in stock and a length of heavy chain and a padlock. Once home, I transferred the cassettes and envelope to the safe, locked it and pushed it to the back of my closet. I wanted to chain it to something to make sure it could not be removed from the house but I couldn't find anything to chain it to.

I called Warden Jackson. "Tim, I have the cassettes. What would you like me to do with them?"

"Either I can call the Tampa Police or you can. You know Barnkowsky, so why not call him? He can arrange to come up to Brooksville and take them off your hands. There is no reason to bring them all the way up here. The local law enforcement people will need them, not us. I will arrange to have your packages sent UPS to you in the next day or so. You can call the FBI in Tampa and arrange for them to duplicate the video tapes for their records. I am sure the Behavioral Sciences folks will be interested in them. The originals of the tapes are yours. Roger, I want to thank you again for your help and professionalism. I will not personally or professionally forget what you have done. Take care of yourself, and if you're ever in our neck of the woods, stop in and see me."

"Thanks, Tim. I'll make a point of coming up, if for no other reason that sitting down with you. You've been great, all the way around. Your willingness to bend rules so we could get through this is un-

characteristic of most people in your position. It's nice to work with people like yourself. Again, thanks. Bye."

I called Mark, "This is Roger. I have the video cassettes that Billy told us about. The ones taken at the rec center. There are four dozen cassettes all toll. Would you or someone from your offices like to come up and pick them up? I'm really wasted. If you haven't talked to Barbara, she can fill you in on what happened after the execution. The bottom line is this, my best friend is involved in the Gentlemen's Club. Shock would be an understatement. I'm absolutely devastated, and I have to deal with him, until he's arrested, like nothing has happened. I don't know how I can do that and keep it together. Can you come to pick up the cassettes? I need someone I can trust to talk to. Thanks. I'll see you then."

Two hours later, Mark was knocking on my door. He had picked up a couple free riders – Barbara and Susan. To be honest, they were all sights for my sore eyes and salve for my broken heart and spirit.

Talking to them lifted my spirits about as high as they could be raised under the circumstances. Barbara and I took turns describing the execution as we had seen it. Our impressions of what happened varied slightly but the details of what we had witnessed were almost identical. For me, while the execution might have been mildly traumatic, it was the allegation that Ronny was involved in the Gentlemen's Club that caused me the most pain. Around 10:00 Mark and Barbara left on their drive back to Tampa, Mark with his cassettes safely tucked away. Susan stayed with me that night and all the next day, after calling the school to make arrangements for a substitute teacher. I think, without Susan, I would have gone crazy.

Chapter 13

Cruel Realities

May 16 - September 1

The next few weeks were extremely difficult. I had to avoid speaking with Ronny or meeting with him. I simply could not face him. Knowing he was involved in something so absolutely repugnant made me sick to my stomach. It shook me to the depths of my soul. How could my lifelong friend be involved in something so barbaric? I still could not believe it.

The only bright spot in my life was Susan. Despite the torment I was experiencing, we went ahead with the move. Being involved in something that made me genuinely happy took some of the sting out of the betrayal I felt. Every time I saw Susan, I knew that I would make it through this travail.

Between the last interview and the execution, I had asked Barbara to help me choose an engagement ring for her sister, since we had some free time. I figured Barbara would know Susan's taste in jewelry better than I would. We drove up to Jacksonville to do our shopping. It was our lucky day. Barbara pointed out the most beautiful ring I had ever seen. It was a done deal.

With a shaky hand, I put the ring in my jacket pocket, and thought, now all I have to do is give it to her, but when?

Susan had arranged for a mover to come in on Sunday, the 12th to move her furniture to a storage unit in Brooksville, not far from the house. By Sunday night, her apartment was empty. She had returned her keys to the landlord, who agreed to lease or sublease it for her. He already had a waiting list of people who wanted an apartment in her complex. At the worst, she would have to pay half a month's rent to cover the period between the 12th and the first of the next month, when the new tenants would move in. About the only thing left for her to do was cancel her telephone service, because utilities were included in the rent. By Sunday evening, she had moved everything.

The master bedroom walk-in closet was full, with the overflow neatly hung in the second bedroom closet. There were shoes everywhere. I have never seen so many clothes. How could she possibly wear all the outfits she had so carefully placed in the closets? Then, there were drawers and drawers, boxes and boxes of miscellaneous apparel. It was unbelievable, but, at the same time, a beautiful sight. She was happy. I was as happy as I could be, under the circumstances, and I knew, in time, the joy she brought into my life would assuage my feelings of betrayal. It was strange in both a horrid and wonderful way; or maybe a better way to describe it would be prophetic. I would lose a friend and gain a genuine soul mate, my *Beschert*. I knew the gain was so much greater than the loss, even though it didn't feel quite that way at the moment.

A crime task force was set up under the auspices of the Tampa Police Department. Sheriff Nugent from Hernando County was included, but it was felt that the task force could not maintain the security it would need if set up in Hernando County. Part of the

difficulty with setting up the task force in Hernando County stemmed from the fact that the deputy named in Billy's letter was now one of the ranking senior officers in the sheriff's department. It would have been impossible to keep him out of the loop.

In addition to the Tampa Police Department and the Hernando Sheriff's Department, the Florida Highway Patrol and the FBI supplied task force members and investigators. Within two weeks of Billy's death, the video tapes had been reviewed, the club members had been identified and verified and a list of charges was compiled against each member. Billy's accusations were accurate, but only represented the tip of the iceberg.

On Thursday night, three weeks after Billy's execution, a raid was organized by the task force. Simultaneous with the main raid on the Recreation Center of the Brookville Gentlemen's Club, each member's home was raided. I have to admit, I felt sorry for the unsuspecting family members. They would be destroyed by the allegations and the subsequent convictions. I was especially sorry for Nan and Ronny's children, particularly Jessica.

The raid was executed flawlessly; perfectly timed. The task force SWAT teams burst into the center, only to find the main clubhouse meeting room empty. A SWAT

team had been placed outside the ground-level entrance – the delivery entrance. No one could or would escape “out the back door.” Since the facility was so well insulated, the members assembled below had not heard the forced entry above. With no members on the first floor, it could only mean one thing. They were in the lower level in their Activity Room – a euphemism for their torture chamber.

The team moved to the steel doors that secured the upper level entry to the private club facilities below. The pass codes worked perfectly. At the bottom of the stairs was the second set of key pads. The second set of pass codes were keyed-in. The door unlocked with a slight click, but to those present outside the door, it sounded like a piece of high-carbon steel being hit with a cold steel hammer. Those inside the door had not heard a sound. They were too preoccupied.

The SWAT team burst in, automatic weapons raised, locked and loaded, with red lasers waving and searching for targets to lock onto. The doorway opened into a hallway. Directly opposite the main entrance was the doorway into the inner sanctum, the Activity Room. To the left was a corridor that swung around the end of the activity room and down the side of the central room. This wall was lined with one-way glass, looking in upon the Activity Room. Chairs were lined up against the glass wall and each had an occupant, intently focused on the action going on in the Activity Room. It was only at the last moment that anyone in the observation area realized something was wrong. As they saw the SWAT team burst into the Activity Room, the remaining force was charging down the hall into the observation area. There was no way out. They were all trapped like the rats they were. Not a shot was fired. There was no resistance. No one was armed. They lined up, not a word spoken between them. The only common trait among this accumulation of human refuse was a stupefied look on each face. Not shock or amazement; it was a look reminiscent of someone who had just awakened from a drunken stupor, or had been awakened from a deep, sound sleep.

The team that entered the Activity Room found two men in the process of preparing a victim for termination. The two men stood motionless as the team swarmed into the room. They wore plasticized suits, to keep their clothes clean. They wore gloves, shoe

covers, hair caps, and plastic masks, so they wouldn't get any flying blood or tissue in their faces. They resembled surgeons in an operating room. They also had the necessary tools for their exercise in brutality – knives, saws, bats, all manner of tools, either laid out neatly on a table beside the table they had already tied their victim to, or neatly arranged on the walls. Over the victim was a surgical quality light that could be moved around, adjusted, just like in an operating room. For all intents and purposes, this was an operating room of sorts. The operating room of the Damned.

The holding cells were empty.

Tonight's victim was already laying on the table in the center of the room. She was barely conscious. She was just coming to as the SWAT team entered the room. As the club members were handcuffed, two team members rushed to her assistance. Quickly, two paramedics arrived. She would be physically all right, but how could she have not suffered emotionally? Who knew how long, or if ever, it would take to recover from injuries that no one could see?

Over the next week or so, the Recreation Center was processed for evidence. In the end, more than fifty separate DNA samples were discovered. It would take months to process and identify to whom each belonged. They would have to be compared with known missing persons. There were other samples that were too degraded to process. One could only imagine the actual number of victims that had been run through this death mill. If Billy had been right, it could be in the hundreds.

Based on the evidence collected at the Recreation Center and from the video recordings that Billy had created, every club member was charged with multiple counts of first degree murder, kidnap-

ping, mutilation of human remains, and every other possible charge that could be thought up. Even in the face of the evidence, some of the members had the gall to plead not guilty. Some, rather than go through the charade of a trial, did plead guilty. Soon they were sitting in the same cells at Raiford that had once been the home to Billy, their friend and fellow club member.

Only three members contested the charges – Ira Swank, Donald Knight, and Ronny Sykes. Ronny pled not guilty, despite the fact that he and McNabb were the two found in the Activity Room preparing to eviscerate the woman on the table.

Eventually, every club member was convicted and sentenced to die. There has to be some kind of poetic justice in that. Some found themselves jailed at Union Correctional. Others were placed in FSP. Eventually, they would all end up at FSP, since that was the only facility that had been set up for the purposes of executions. For now, however, only the first to be executed were housed at FSP. Among those was Ronny Sykes. It would take years before any of them would actually see the inside of the execution chamber. The State of Florida has an automatic appeal process for anyone sentenced to death; and that appeal process could take years to complete. If any of them were executed in under ten years, the wheels of justice would have moved very quickly.

Eight of Brooksville's most influential families were forever disgraced. It is unfortunate that their families had to bear the burden of shame brought upon them by their husbands, fathers and brothers. Who knows if that shame can ever be expunged from the social record of Hernando County but should it be expunged? These men, these monsters, were creatures of their own creation. For them, it had started out as an idea that grew into an inglorious, indescribable reality game.

Among those caught up in the raid were two new members, members that had not been on Billy's list. These members had joined the club after Billy and Gary's arrest, their replacements. One was an award winning cattle rancher, Bill Bradley, and the other was the owner of a well known fast food franchise, Buster Douglas. Unlike the other older members, there were no videos of their exploits. Had it not been for some of the other murdering cowards turning state's evidence, these misanthropes might have avoided the death sentence.

I had thought that because of my involvement in the roundup of the Brooksville Gentlemen's Club members and their subsequent conviction, I would become known as the guy who had ratted out the Brooksville Eleven. Not a single person ever intimated I had done anything wrong. In fact, everyone was mortified by the revelations about the activities of their community leaders. For all intents and purposes, I was a hero. I didn't feel much like a hero, however.

Chapter 14

Ronny

September 11 -- A Year Later

In the end, I could not just walk away from Ronny. He had caused me more pain than even the death of my parents. Their deaths had been accidental. There was no premeditation. There had been no secrets. The situation with Ronny was very different. How could my lifelong friend be involved in something so gruesome, so vile, and downright sickening, no matter how you looked at it or tried to explain it? So many questions gnawed at me. I needed some answers – answers for heart and my soul, not my intellect. There was only one person who could possibly begin to provide those answers – Ronny, himself.

It had been several months since Ronny had been found guilty of several counts of first degree murder and a number of lesser charges. He was finally sentenced to death.

In January 2000, Florida inmates receiving the death sentence were permitted to make the choice of electrocution or death by lethal injection. Terry Melvin Sims was the first to be executed by lethal injection in Florida on February 23, 2000.

Ultimately and unbelievably, Ronny chose electrocution. He would probably be one of the last who would die by that method. Everyone else took the easy, coward's way out.

The Coward's Way

Lethal injection seems to be physically painless, unlike electrocution. Execution by lethal injection involves several steps. First, an anesthetic, usually sodium thiopental, is used to put the condemned into a deep sleep. Based on the dosage administered, it is believed that many inmates do not feel anything. Next, a paralyzing agent, oftentimes, pancuronium bromide, is administered. This is a muscle relaxant. It is given in a sufficiently large dose to stop breathing by paralyzing the diaphragm and lungs. Other drugs used for this purpose include tubocurarine chloride and succinylcholine chloride. Finally, a toxic agent is administered. The most commonly used toxin is potassium chloride. This toxin interrupts the electrical signaling essential to heart function. This causes cardiac arrest. Not all states include the toxic agent step. Death usually occurs within a minute after the final drug has been administered. So the condemned simply slips away. How humane of us to insure that monsters like the Brooksville Eleven, and other sadistic murders suffer as little as possible.

Once the condemned has been pronounced dead, relatives may claim the body or the state will inter it. In Florida, however, relatives are not permitted to claim the body. In Florida, the body is buried in an unmarked grave.

I was always taught that the punishment should fit the crime. That doesn't seem to be politically correct anymore. As the TV character Baretta used to say: 'Don't do the crime if you can't do the time.' In our legal system, there is almost no difference between someone who premeditatedly shoots someone to death, killing them instantly, and someone who tortures a victim to death over

hours or days or weeks. In the eyes of the law, it is simply the death of a human being, homicide, and it is premeditated. No consideration is given to the suffering of the victim. I honestly believe there should be a difference. These two crimes end up with someone dead but we should be concerned with how they died when it comes to the subsequent punishment of the killer.

The method of execution for people, like the Brooksville Eleven, should be as painful and agonizing as that endured by their victims. I am not sure that electrocution is as painful as it looks. I hope it is. Maybe we simply cannot devise methods that permit us to inflict on the condemned even a portion of the pain and terror that they inflicted on their victims. The loss of the convicted's life, compared to the brutality of some murders and our growing reliance on lethal injection, on some cosmic scale of justice, just does not seem to be a fair punishment. We are making capital punishment virtually pain free. In my medieval way of thinking, the victim has not been avenged. Why should society not be permitted to avenge the needless and heartless death of one of its own? Isn't it enough that we simply kill the killer? Why should the murderer suffer? Only the victim(s) should suffer. It would not be humane to take the condemned's life and throw in a dose of discomfort as a bonus. That would not be justice, now would it?

How has society become so protective its criminals' rights over the victims'? The criminals have all the protections of the law, while the victim is forgotten. Somehow, the legal system has been perverted. The law only gets involved *AFTER* a crime has been committed. It cannot prevent crimes; only punish those who commit them. And, then, we have to insure the criminals' rights are not violated and that the punishment is not overly injurious to the body and mental well-being of the convicted. Heaven forbid the convicted should get a dose of his own medicine.

Ronny's Story

Finally, I made a call to Warden Jackson at UCI, where Ronny was being held. "Tim, this is Roger, Roger Bainbridge. It's good to hear your voice too. I'm calling for a favor. Yup. Again." I could hear him giving a quiet chuckle. "No, it's all right. Under the circumstances, I'm sure I've already used up all my Brownie points."

"Roger, you could never use them all up with me. You've performed yeoman's service for the State of Florida. What can I do for you?"

"I would like to talk to Ronny Sykes. Before all this began, he and I had been best friends. Since his arrest and conviction, I have been unable to cope with what he had done. I'm having difficulty getting my head around how my best friend could be involved in such a disgusting situation. To be honest, I need some answers. Ronny is the only one I can get those answers from. I need some answers to help heal the hurt and pain I'm feeling. I feel grossly betrayed. Is there any way I could meet with Ronny and be able to just talk, without all the glass between us. Kind of like how we did it with Billy?"

"I don't see why not, but I will have to clear it with Ronny and his attorney. You know that they are in the middle of the appeal process. Would you want to have the same format as we did with Mr. Weatherford?"

"No. No. This is personal. No notes. No tapes. No recordings. Just Ronny and me chatting. Kind of like, old friends catching up on things. Could you make the arrangements and let me know? To be honest, I'm not even sure if Ronny is willing to speak to me."

"Can do. Give me a few days. I'll get back to you. I promise."

A few days later, Tim called. "I've talked to both Mr. Sykes and his attorney, Mr. Delay. Delay is reluctant to permit the meeting but he will abide by whatever Mr. Sykes decides. Delay did have one condition, however. Nothing learned during the conversation can be used in any form or fashion. No books, no articles, no interviews, no nothing. I'm sure he'll have some kind of gag agreement prepared for you. Are you willing to abide by this condition?"

I had no need to think about it. "Yes." I simply needed

to find a way to gain an understanding. I could never sympathize with him. His crimes had been much too great to forgive. But I needed to attempt understanding.

"When I talked with Mr. Sykes. He was shocked by your request. To be quite honest, he seemed on the verge of tears. He would like to speak with you very much. Today is Friday. Would you like to come up, say, next Monday? That would give me today and the weekend to get set up and get everything arranged. Does that work for you?"

"Absolutely. Unless I hear otherwise, I will be knocking on your door Monday morning. Tim, thanks. This is much appreciated."

"Not a problem. It's my way of saying thanks for all you've done for us. By the way, how is the book coming along, the one you and Mrs. Barnkowsky are working on?"

"Actually, we're still in the process of working our way through the videotapes and all the stuff Billy gave us. The preliminary research is pretty much in hand, it's just a matter of outlining the book and what we can or want to put in it. There are, probably, several books hiding in all the documentation we have. Thanks for

asking. I'll be sure to get a copy of the book to you and Warden Crosby when it comes out. How would you like that?"

"That would be fantastic. Could you autograph it for me?"

"I'll even do you one better. I'd be willing to hand deliver it to you two. And, again, thanks for everything. I'm in your debt."

"Don't give it a second thought. Take care of yourself. See you next week.

....

When Susan got home from work, I told her about the meeting I was going to have with Ronny. Her initial response was, "You're kidding me, right?"

"No. I need some closure. Ronny is the only one who can help me get it."

"That son-of-a-bitch screwed you over royally. How could you even want to talk to him, ever!? What could he say that would make you feel better?"

"There is nothing that he could say that would make me feel good. I know that. There is no way he can repair what he has done to me. But, he can try to explain how it happened. If I can come to grips with some of the hows and whys, maybe it will help me, finally, make some sense out of all this. Right now, nothing makes sense, either emotionally or intellectually. If I'm to ever make sense of all that has gone on, and not become a basket case, I have to have some closure. I'll never be able to put everything behind me, but if I can get a handle on even a bit of it, maybe I can work

through everything and not feel so damn violated. It's just that a part of me needs to 'know.'"

"Do you want me to come along with you?"

"No. This is something I think I need to do alone. Sorry."

"I understand but I don't have to like it," she said.

"Thanks for understanding."

Over the weekend, Susan and I dropped in on Barbara and Mark. I told them about my plans. "Do you want some company?" asked Barbara.

"No. Like I told Susan, this is something I need to do alone. It's just going to be me and Ronny. We'll have an observer that goes without saying, but no cameras, etc. It's a more a matter of me getting a handle on what happened. I have to make sense of all this. Right now, I feel pretty much like a wounded animal. It was such a shock to learn my friend could be involved in something so sordid. As I told Susan, I need something to start the closure process. Right now, I'm an open wound and each day just adds a little more salt. Hopefully, talking with Ronny will take away some of the sting."

"I can only imagine what you must be going through," said Mark. He actually sounded sympathetic.

The rest of the day was limited to just simple chit chat. When the boys returned home, they challenged Mark and me to a two-on-two basketball game. Had it not been for our height advantage, they would have whipped us even more soundly than they did. In the

end, I was exhausted and glad the game was over. "Is it me, or am I just getting old?" I asked rhetorically.

"Yes," Mark responded, then he laughed. I had to smile as well, partly out of embarrassment. Life, inactivity, and time were catching up with me. I'm sure, if I got Susan involved, she would whip be into shape in no time. Oh. The thought of exercising was excruciating. But, maybe, I should give it a shot. Maybe when things settled down. I was safe for a while, at least. It didn't look like that was going to happen any time soon.

Sunday finally arrived. Susan and I just hung out with the papers and fresh bagels at home. She helped me pack and get ready for the trip to Raiford, which, I hoped, would be my last such trip. Around 3:00, I threw my gear in the car, kissed Susan goodbye. As I pulled out, I waved goodbye and shouted to Susan, "Have a good day at school tomorrow and I'll see you after work on Tuesday. I'll call when I get in to let you know I arrived safely. Love you." She waved back and threw me a kiss. It was a comfortable feeling, knowing someone cared about me and my welfare. She turned and headed back into the house.

When I arrived at my old standby, the Best Western, the ever present desk clerk, Steve, greeted me. "It's been a while since your last visit. How are things?"

"To be honest, things have been better. No. Let me rephrase that. Most things in my life are going quite well. It's only a problem with a friend right now."

"Glad to hear most things are good for you. Sorry about the friend problem. It will resolve itself. If you and your friend are honest with each other, things usually work out. At least that's what happens with me when I have a run-in with friends."

"My problem is a little more complex than just having a disagreement. My friend is up at Raiford on death row."

"Yow. That is a problem. Sorry to hear about it," said Steve.

"Would you like your regular room? It's available."

"Sure. Thanks."

When I entered the room, absolutely nothing had changed. In a very frightening way, it was comfortably too familiar. After settling in, I called Susan. We talked for a while, then it was time for sleep.

♦♦♦♦

Bright and early, I drove to the prison Monday morning. No stops at the breakfast bar. No coffee. No cinnamon buns. I was more nervous going to see Ronny than I had ever been going to see Billy. The circumstances were similar, but worlds apart. I checked in with the guard. He was about to direct me to Jackson's office. "Thanks. I know the way."

Tim was waiting. "So how the hell are you? It's been a while. Everything has been arranged. Mr. Sykes will be brought to the interview room. The same one you and Mr. Weatherford used. I hope you don't mind. We really don't have many options."

"It doesn't really matter." He could see that I wasn't my usual self.

We made small talk while things were being prepared for the meeting. As the guard announced that Ronny was about to be escorted to the interview room, Tim put his hand on my arm as his way of consoling me. It was such a gentle gesture, especially com-

ing from a warden of a prison. I guess the tough as nails image of a prison warden was not applicable to Tim Jackson. He did his job, but he was still able to maintain a gentle, caring heart. That was appreciated, as well as surprising.

I was escorted to the interview room. I had hardly gotten seated when Ronny was escorted in, in shackles and secured to the desk and floor, just as Billy had been so many times. The guard, then, turned and left the room. For a moment, we just stared at one another.

I was the first to speak. "How are you doing?"

Ronny immediately began to sob. Through his sobs, "I can't believe I'm really here."

I could hardly believe my ears. He couldn't believe he was here?! I felt like saying, 'You son-of-a-bitch, you killed people in cold blood. You deserve to be here! You deserve to be burnt to a fucking crisp for what you have done, just like Billy!' But I just couldn't say it out loud. I think he saw it in my face, however.

Slowly, he composed himself, at least to the point where he could talk without choking up on every other word. "I'm glad you came. I've wanted to talk to you for the longest time but I wasn't sure you would ever speak to me again. When I got the message that you wanted to come up here and meet with me, I was elated. No one from my family will come. It's like I don't exist anymore. They can't forgive me for what happened and, as sad as it may sound, I understand. I've had time to think about what happened, and I find it almost impossible to believe it was me. Don't get me wrong, I'm not trying to conger up some new insanity defense for my actions, I knew what I was doing and I knew it was loathsome and wrong. I just couldn't stop. That's the God's awful truth."

"How in hell did you get yourself mixed up with the Club?"

"It all started out so innocently. A bunch of us were getting together on a regular basis, just to shoot the shit over some beers. Gradually, the group grew larger and larger. One day, one of the guys, I think it was Marcus, just asked the question: 'Have you ever thought about killing someone?' Almost everyone in the room had to admit that they had had thoughts about killing someone for one reason or another. Then we started talking about how we would do it. Who we wanted dead, etc. Pretty soon, every 'meeting,' instead of talking about other stuff, killing people became the only topic. People would ask such questions as: 'I wonder what it feels like to hold someone's life in your hands and extinguish it.' This went on like that for a couple years, then Bobby brought Billy and Gary to a meeting after he had seen some videotape they had made. We watched the video. Some of the guys said, out loud, we can do that. Soon the wheels were set in motion and there was no turning back. An idea, a discussion topic was being transformed into a reality."

"As long as we were just talking about what it would feel like to kill someone, or how would you kill this person or that, it was all, more or less, an academic exercise. When Billy and Gary showed up, things started to change. The discussions began to move toward planning, rather than just speculation. This is when I got alarmed. I still didn't believe anyone in the room would actually go ahead with an abduction, and definitely not an actual execution. The longer I stayed the deeper and more elaborate the discussions became. I was getting caught up in the idea of killing someone. I could have never have conceived just how seductive an idea it actually was."

"Can I stop you for just a minute?"

"Sure. Why?"

"You know, your statement about Bobby McNabb, just now, and comments made by Billy leave me with the impression that Bobby, in some ways, is the lynch pin that held everything together – the club, the rec center, and Billy."

"Yeah."

"Somehow, McNabb, as a truck driver and garage owner, seems kind of out of place in the club. All the rest of the club's membership consisted of educated and successful businessmen. McNabb doesn't seem to fit in. How did he happen to be part of the club?"

"Oh. Don't let Bobby fool you. He comes off as a redneck's redneck but there's a lot more to him than meets the eye. He's not simply an uneducated trucker and grease monkey. Both of his parents were well educated. In fact, his dad was an advertising exec before he retired. And I think his mom graduated from Florida, *cum laude*. He graduated from college as an engineer but he just got caught up in the bravado of the trucker's life. He took on this trucker persona and it just became him. At times he gets a little carried away with himself, and starts believing his own shit. From time to time he loses it. That's when he's really dangerous. He loses all sense of control. He's been known to beat on his kids from time to time, as he would say, for the sake of discipline. But, as far as I know, he's never laid a hand on Francine, his wife. She's about the only person that frightens him. If we'd had female members, she would have been our first inductee. Now, that one is a *bona fide* downright mean and nasty redneck bitch. Bobby is, admittedly, a loud, racist, son-of-a-bitch but he's also damn loyal and dependable and a whole lot smarter than most people think. I'm proud to call him my friend. He saw the Weatherfords as an asset and brought them to our attention. He was just helping the club."

“Okay. Okay. That said, let’s get back to what we were talking about before.”

“Sure. Then, someone came up with the idea of the ‘recreation center,’ where we could experiment. Even then, it was more a mental exercise than anything else.

Pretty soon, I was actually contributing time and money to the recreation center project. It was becoming a reality. I can’t explain it, but the whole killing thing seemed to take on a life of its own, separate from whatever was going on in our individual and collective lives. It’s hard to explain, unless you were actually there.”

“Are you trying to tell me that all the years of critical thinking and legal training just got washed out of your brain by the idea of killing some nameless victim?! I just don’t buy it! There has to be more that went on. You’re far from being a stupid, gullible, or spineless person. There has to have been something else at work here to engage a number of professional people in such a venture. Didn’t you ever look at yourself in the mirror and simply ask yourself ‘what the hell am I doing?’” I asked. I was amazed at how earnest he seemed to be or, maybe, just how blasé he was about describing the evolution of the club. I couldn’t accept the idea that ‘it took on a life of its own.’ That was just a pile of crap. There had to be more to it.

“Somehow, I never really asked myself that question. What we were doing just seemed to unfold out of a collective consciousness.”

“That sounds like a lot of psychobabble. Are you trying to find some acceptable explanation for your personal or collective behavior?” I asked.

"Are you mocking me?" His entire demeanor seemed to change. Before he had been, more or less, the Ronny Sykes I had always known. Now, he was becoming visibly defensive. Somehow I had struck a nerve.

Through, almost clenched teeth, he said, "I'm trying to tell you what transpired. Is your mind so shallow that you cannot understand what I'm telling you? I thought you were much more intelligent than that."

Then it occurred to me. These guys had taken social and economic success and turned it into a collective identity that fed on itself. They felt they were just better than everyone around them. They were superior. Financial success meant they did not have to abide by the same standards that mere mortals were forced to live by. They could do whatever they wanted. And the club was their real-world expression of that superiority.

"I have never thought of myself as being stupid. If you explain a little more, maybe I will come to understand and embrace what you have to say. There has to be some philosophical basis for your actions and the rest of the club members. Can you help me understand?" I asked.

"For me, after a while, I thought to myself, if these two morons, Billy and Gary, could kill a number of people and not get caught, I could do it. It became a kind of challenge. And I had a number of other guys who just wanted some simple thrills in their lives. Most of us lived pretty ordinary and boring lives. Once you get to a certain point in your life, every day seems the same. You get up. You kiss your wife goodbye and go to work or go golfing. You come home, do some more work or just plop yourself in front of the TV. Then you go to bed and the cycle starts all over again the next morning. Life just becomes boring. Some guys take up a hobby or

sport that puts zip in their lives, like sports car racing, extreme downhill skiing, skydiving or mountain climbing. Not many of those opportunities available locally here in Florida. So, you have to find something you can do that gives you the same rush. For us, it started out just talking about the idea of killing. Then, all of a sudden, we found out that it could actually be done. Pretty soon, we were doing it, and it was an exhilarating experience. I liked it. I liked the rush it gave me. When I finished with one, I wanted another. It was a never-ending story. As long as there were gullible people out there, there would be easy prey, and young women are among the most vulnerable of all. The Weatherfords used the lure of drugs. It works almost every time with these young women," said Ronny.

"Are you trying to tell me that you couldn't stop once you had started killing young women?"

"No. Not at all. Once I started, I didn't *want* to stop. It never occurred to me to stop. The idea of stopping never really crossed my mind. Why would you stop doing what you enjoyed?"

"Didn't it occur to you that what you were doing was, besides being against the law, morally indefensible?"

"Before we actually took steps to translate all our talk into action, I suppose I did think about what would happen if I got caught but that was pretty fleeting. I never really gave much thought to the moral implications of what we were doing. Once you start the planning process, you are pretty well beyond thinking about morality. Questioning the morality of an act is best left to philosophers, people with too little else to think about. Morality is for little minds. Action supersedes morality. Once you have made a decision to DO something, morality no longer plays a part in the

process. And once we had our center, it was simply a matter of execution. No pun intended."

"Did you ever discuss issues of morality with the other members of the club?"

"I honestly don't think anyone ever really brought the subject up. It may have occurred to some of them during the two or so years we just sat around talking about killing someone but somewhere during that period it became an irrelevant issue -- a *non sequitur*."

"You know, it just occurred to me that, if you were to take every one of the members of the club and were compare them with everybody else, you'd probably find that the club members, in general, even before the creation of the club, would rate rather low on a scale of morality. Success usually means that you get used to 'bending the rules' to your own advantage. It's a natural thing. Morality is for those who play by the rules. Money and power mean you don't have to play by the rules. So, doesn't it follow that people with power and money are less concerned with moral issues?"

"That's rather profound. You're starting to sound like a philosopher." Ronny must have missed that barb, because he neither took offense or he had already forgotten his comment about philosophy and morality being for little minds. I was beginning to see just how deluded Ronny really was. He might not be certifiably crazy, but he sure as hell was border line."

"But shouldn't people with money and power also be concerned with being moral?" I asked.

"Why should they? They don't have to be, now, do they? In the law, every day I saw how people with money, power or fame were

not subjected to the same standards as everyone else. The rich have the best lawyers. There is a homily among lawyers that goes like this: 'He who has the best lawyer wins.' What Everyman experiences with the law is different than what the rich and famous experience. Take for example, the O. J. Simpson trial. If he had been defended by a lawyer from the 'hood,' would he be walking the streets a free man today? I don't think so. He got off because he could afford to hire some of the best legal minds in the business. They knew what to do to get him off. And they did. If he had had an average attorney, he would have been sitting on death row in a California prison after his trial."

I wanted to point out that Ronny's defenders had failed to save him. What did that say about his importance, power, and money? But, I let it slide. It would have probably been a definite interviewer.

I could not believe how imperious Ronny had become. In school he had been shy and reserved. Now, he was almost off the chart. No wonder he seemed to show so little remorse. Then, the full weight of a career filled with stories about serial killers struck me. Ronny was the 'average' guy next door that turns out to be a serial killer. I had gone to school with this guy. He had been my best friend, and I never suspected that he could have been, or was a serial killer. It's pretty humiliating to know so much and, at the same time, know so damn little. I was learning about as much about me as I was Ronny. The entire experience of dealing with Billy and, now, Ronny was becoming a real eye-opener. I took pride in knowing my subject, not just the man, but what made him tick. I was finding I really knew very little.

Human nature, as we normally apply or rely on it, is not applicable to the serial killer. I knew Ronny had had a good childhood. He had not lost his parents. If anyone should have become a serial

killer, based on trauma, it should have been me. Why would Ronny, a guy who had, for all intents and purposes, a normal upbringing, most of the benefits of a loving home and supportive environment, turn into a cold-blooded killer? In the case of Billy, I could, somehow, identify some of the key ingredients that might have contributed to his transformation – physical and mental abuse, fear, and an unsupportive family unit. But they were not part of Ronny's personal history or personality. What had put him at risk? What had tipped the scales for Ronny?

"I can understand the evolution of Billy but, honestly, Ronny; I just cannot understand what happened in your case. Billy exhibited a lot of the attributes commonly associated with serial killers. If you don't mind me being blunt, you don't! Can you try to explain to me what happened that was so traumatic that your only outlet or last resort was premeditated murder?

Please, help me understand. I am at a complete loss here. We grew up together. Even in college you were the same guy I played catch with in grade school. What happened in the last twenty years to change you so much? You seem to be where most people want to be. I don't mean in prison, but you had it all – a family, a big house, friends, a successful law practice, prestige and money. What the hell happened?"

"This is really bothering you isn't it? If I were that calculating little son-of-a-bitch, Billy, I'd just let you dangle. You never did figure him out, did you? That's because that little shit was simply a freak of nature. I'm not made of the same stuff. Let me try to explain. First, you're right, I grew up in what was a fairly normal home and family. No skeletons there to blame me on. I've never had any head injuries. A few conks as a kid, but nothing other than just ringing my chimes. I was never abused, physically or emotionally. Not at home or school, or anywhere. So, you're right. I don't fit the

stereotypical TV serial killer profile. Second, if it had not been for Billy, I might not be here in prison today. I might never have killed a single person. I'd still be a respected attorney with a successful law practice in a small town. I'd have a wife and the requisite two children. On the surface, there is no explaining my behavior, is there?" asked Ronny.

"No. I haven't figured Billy out. He doesn't exactly fit the stereotype of the serial killer, either. He did, however, have a lot of the traits that profilers use to identify them, however. And you're right, again, I can't explain your behavior at all. You don't exhibit a history or a personality type that is consistent with serial killers.

So, you're right. I can't explain your behavior. Can you? Can you stand back from yourself and be objective?"

"The simplest answers to your questions are yes and yes. I saw that roll of your eyes. You don't believe I can be that objective do you?"

"To be really honest, no. I don't think you can be objective. Prove me wrong, Okay?"

"Buckle up, little buddy. It's going to be a bumpy ride. Law school was a real bitch. Overworked and under-appreciated. Nope, that wasn't it. Sure, I think the law pros took pride in driving, especially first year law students, crazy. The dropout rate was high that first year. A lot of the lawyers-to-be just could not cope with the workload or the harassment. That is the purpose of the first year, weed out the weak. After that, the workload doesn't diminish, but it, somehow, seems to get a bit easier, once you learn how to study the law. It's so different from undergraduate studying. It teaches you how to think like a lawyer, not like everyone else. This is not

to say that it is right or wrong thinking, it is just different. Are you with me so far?"

"Yup."

"The bar is no piece of cake either. So much rides on just passing it. You don't have to get anything but a passing score, and you become a full-fledged member of the legal fraternity, whether you pass with 100% or with a minimum passing score. Either way, you're a lawyer. High scores are only for bragging rights. They don't make you a good attorney, and they mean squat when it comes to making money. It's how you practice law that counts. It's not entirely about your win-loss record, either. It's more about which ones you win. One win can make you a millionaire. You make money even if you lose. It's really a win-win type of game. The lawyers never lose, win or lose. Still with me?"

"I'm right there."

"When Nancy and I got married. You were there. I was still a struggling attorney. My life and career were still ahead of me. Nancy was all that I thought I wanted. Then came the kids. Don't get me wrong, I love them to death. I thought my personal life was complete and on track. I couldn't have been more wrong. Life, in a nutshell, is boring, especially if you are successful and plowing ahead. Marriages go stale. Don't let your relationship with Susan go stale. Keep it stimulating. Don't settle back and go with the flow. I have to admit, she impressed me. Make sure you keep being impressed by her. You both will change, but keep your relationship alive. It will take work, but you will find it well worth the effort. I didn't put in enough effort, and Nancy and I were little more than housemates but, it was comfortable. Neither of us was unfaithful. We just grew more comfortable. She had her things to do

to keep her busy. I found things to keep me busy. That was not a marriage. It was existence. Does that make sense to you?"

"Yes, unfortunately, but I didn't come here for marriage counseling from a convicted serial killer. Even so, I appreciate the advice. It really does make sense."

"My practice grew, and as it grew, I met more and more influential people. I liked what they could do with their influence and, then, it occurred to me that their influence and power stemmed from one basic thing, money. So, my next goal was not to just make a living, but to make a lot of money, which I could translate into power and power into influence. I just wanted to be important. To be recognized. So, for about ten years, I was the lawyer's lawyer and the attorney's attorney. I did everything. And I made sure I did it well. Soon, I had fat retainers coming in. I had influential clients. I got some plum cases. I made sure I won the big ones – the ones that paid exceedingly well. I won using every trick in the book, but I won. Finally, the money started rolling in. I had done it. I wasn't rich, but I was wealthier than I thought I could ever be. That money brought me more free time and less work. Very quickly, I realized it was the work that had defined me, not the money. No matter how much money I seemed to have, there were places where I just did not fit in. Money gives you power and influence, but it does not mean you are assured of acceptance. That comes as a bitter pill, if you think about it!"

"So, you have all the accoutrements of success – home, family, successful law practice, money, power and influence – so what's missing? For most people that is the American dream. What didn't you have?"

"Surprisingly, I still didn't have two things that I didn't even realize I needed out of life – excitement and just plain fun. As a child,

you know how excited we were with our lives. We had almost nothing to worry about. Then we became adults and gradually, all the fun and excitement was just sucked out of us. We were, somehow, duped into believing that our lives were going to be exciting and fun, once we had made our place in the world. Nothing could have been further from the truth. Every 'success' cut more and more fun and excitement from our lives. We didn't seem to see this at the time. We just keep striving for more, when, in reality, we are getting less. Have your successes as a journalist kept you excited? Are you having fun? Do you feel like you did when we were playing ball, chasing your mangy dog around the house for hours, or when we snuck into your neighbor's grove and snatched her Satsuma oranges?" asked Ronny.

"To be honest, no. Life has been almost all work for me since school. Come to think about it, I have almost no excitement in my life but my work, and my fun does not come from my work. Right now, my excitement and fun come through Susan. But, if I understand you correctly, that relationship should not be my source of excitement and fun, either. Right?"

"No. Not at all. I think you have misunderstood me, or I haven't made myself clear. You should not get your excitement and fun from ANY ONE thing. It should come from EVERYTHING you do. I made the mistake of letting one thing become the sole source of my excitement and fun. Learn to get excitement and fun from everything you do or are involved in – your work, your writing, your reading, your relationship with Susan, your relationships with friends, your car, painting your house, etc. Everything you do. Don't let anyone phase or aspect of your life dominate. One day I saw a Canadian license plate while driving out to my branch office in Spring Hill. It read NJOYLF. That's what I'm talking about."

"So, how does all this excitement and fun relate to the club, you, and killing innocent people?"

"When the club was first forming, like I said before, it was kind of a support group for a bunch of successful, dissatisfied businessmen. We would talk about our families, our wives, our children, our jobs or careers. We'd talk about just how boring it was to be doing the same things every day. We all agreed that, when we were just starting out, the challenges of life kept us stimulated, and that stimulation became our excitement. Work, family and children were our source of fun. Success gave us money. Money gave us free time. Free time was supposed to give us fun time, excitement. At first it did. We thought we were having fun but, after a while, the excitement and fun seemed to wither away. And boredom set in, in almost every part of our lives. We even tried putting together little trips that would give us some excitement. I remember going sky diving at Zephyrhills. Golfing at some of the biggest and most famous golf courses. We even went to Augusta on one of our trips. Lobster diving in the Keys. Hunting hogs up near Stienhatchee. We tried Skidoos and four-wheelers. We tried motorcycles. We tried power boats and big game fishing. We went deer hunting. Then we went elk and moose hunting. Bear hunting. Everything we tried worked for a while. Once the newness wore off, boredom set in again. Nothing lasted long."

"One night we were just sitting around talking about hunting. I can't remember who said it first but someone said he really enjoyed the rush he got looking down the barrel of his rifle and taking aim at a deer, moose, or bear. He said he could hardly breathe once this quarry came into view. And once he squeezed off a round and the prey lay dead, he said he experienced a rush like nothing else he'd ever done. He had to admit, however, that sitting up in a tree shooting an animal that had no idea of what was coming took away from the experience. He said that when he went

bear hunting, it was different. Sure he had the upper hand, but a lot of bear hunters get killed by their prey. The threat of being killed heightened the rush. The bear and hunter were not on an even plain, but it was a pretty damn exhilarating experience. The tables could be turned when bear hunting, and the hunter could become the prey."

"Where are you going with this?"

"Relax. Enjoy life. One night, Marcus asked: Have any of you ever thought about killing someone for real? That simple question grew into the one single topic of conversation week after week, month after month. As we discussed who we wanted to kill and why, we also talked about how we wanted to do it. It is amazing how 'creative' people can come when it comes to how to kill someone. There were all kinds of suggestions. We'd criticize each other's methodology. We always found one problem or another. We liked some of the ideas and trash-canned others. Our discussions were just about running out of steam when Bobby brought the boys to the meeting. I suppose, the constant talk about killing someone had served to desensitize us. We had gotten ourselves to the point that we were ready to take some kind of action, but no one had the nerve to actually do something. All that changed with Billy and Gary's little tape was shown. For the first time, we all realized that it COULD be done. In fact, it HAD been done! That's when the club began talking about the rec center. Soon talk turned into action. Once we were actually building the center, the first murder was, for all intents and purposes a *fait accompli*. In our minds, it was already a foregone conclusion. We were going to kill someone, and Billy and Gary were going to show us how to get started."

"Are you trying to tell me that, if Bobby McNabb had not stumbled onto Billy and Gary's secret, the club would have remained a

bunch of wealthy businessmen just sitting around talking about killing people!?”

“No. Ultimately the club would have broken up, having done nothing. We had pretty much exhausted our ability to come up with new ideas. We were just rehashing week after week. Some of the guys even said they were getting bored by all the jaw flapping. Ira even went so far as to say we sounded like a bunch of old women yakking about how things used to be. The club was pretty much on its last legs just before Bobby brought the boys in. Had they screwed up that kill in McNabb’s garage, say, two months later, there probably wouldn’t have been a club to bring them to. All there would have been was a bunch of mind numb businessmen who had nothing to do on Thursdays. They would have been sitting at home and, probably, simply gotten themselves drunk out of boredom. Now, wouldn’t that have been something? No club, no Brooksville Eleven, no rec center, no convictions and no death sentences. I think I know eleven men who wish they had never laid eyes on Billy and Gary. But, that’s not quite how things worked out, is it?”

“Now that would have been a much better ending by my way of thinking. That brings me to another question. Why didn’t the club disband when Billy and Gary were arrested, or after they were convicted? Billy mentioned to me that he thought you would all lose your resolve once he had been arrested. Weren’t you concerned that Billy would turn you guys in?”

“I guess, the simplest answer is that Billy had done his job too well. Billy was a catalyst. He was an outsider that got involved, maybe by accident, or maybe as an act of fate. He got all of us off the dime. The group was primed and ready but we were at a psychological impasse. We needed a nudge to get us over a comparatively small psychological hurdle, the one the lies between thought

and action. We just could not, individually or collectively, get over it. He got us over it. He was the proof that what we wanted to do could be done. It was all easy from there on."

"We liked what we were doing. We enjoyed the empowerment that came from having absolute control over someone or something. None of us seemed to have that in our real lives. The club became kind of a fantasy life, where we could do anything we wanted. Even the most heinous things. No one objected to whatever we did. Killing gave us control over our lives and the lives of others. Then, there was a component of voyeurism. We found we got nearly the same rush from watching one of the others eviscerate their victims. Ira took it a little too far, but that was his thing. Who were we to tell him he was taking it too far? We did what we wanted with our victims. Why should anyone tell anyone else what to do? Even if we thought it was a bit over the top, we all still got something out of it. We felt free to be whoever we wanted to be, but couldn't in the 'real' world. In the real world, we had responsibilities and images to uphold. In the club and the rec center, we had no responsibilities and we had to impress no one but ourselves. I'd call that a perfect world and we got to enjoy it, at least, once a week. That's a whole lot more than most people every get in their humdrum lives. It was a fantasy life, but it was also part of our real life."

"And we all knew that Billy would not betray the group. How we knew that, I couldn't tell you, but we knew he wouldn't say a word, and he kept that word until he wanted to talk to you. Had I known what he really had planned, I sure as hell wouldn't have put you together with him. I have to admit, you are a persuasive SOB. I don't know if he would have trusted anyone as much as he trusted you. You just have that quality about you. So, I will admit, I had a part in my own downfall. I pulled you into this morass. I also knew that you would confide in me. I would know what was going

on from the git-go. As soon as Billy realized I was your confidant and friend, he was able to change the rules, but you still kept me in the loop. I relied too much on our friendship to keep things under control. I didn't realize just how sharp Billy really was. I really underestimated just how cunning he was. And, now, you probably know more about him than I ever did. Now I'm paying for that mistake with my life. Surprisingly, however, I don't hold you responsible. You were just doing what you do. I just didn't realize how damn good you were at it. Kudos to you. Now that's being objective!"

"Thanks for the complement." I said. "Regarding Billy's apparent change of heart, regarding turning all you guys in, I am assuming that it blindsided all of you, right?"

"Do you honestly think any of us would have been sitting around waiting for ten-plus years if had any inkling that he was going to turn us in?! We'd all have been living life in some place like Brazil where there is no extradition."

"Okay. Okay. I see your point. You didn't seem concerned when I had agreed to talk to Billy about additional murders he wanted to confess to. Weren't you worried the journals you were holding for him might incriminate you?" I asked.

"Hell no. As soon as Millie dropped them off, I opened the package and pulled out the journal. I read through every page. I had to admit, he was a lot more organized than I had thought. There wasn't a single reference to the Club or any of the members. These were all his previous kills. So, I had nothing to worry about, or so I thought. I guess he proved me wrong. I rewrapped the journal and put it in the safe. When you came to claim the journal, I was perfectly at peace with what you were doing. I had no way of knowing about other journals or videotapes. Had I known about them, I

would have been concerned. I thought the journal I was holding was the only one I had to be concerned with.

"Again, I was wrong."

"When you retrieved the package from the safe, I noticed that the tape was already coming off one side. I even thought to myself that someone could have slid the journal out, had they wanted to. So, the loose tape had nothing to do with your reading it?"

"Again, no. I completely rewrapped the package in new paper and tape. It had been laying in the safe so long that the tape I used just got old and dried out." Ronny continued. "I'd like to change the subject."

"You mentioned our friendship. I'll always be your friend. They cannot take our history away from us. Only we can do that. After I'm gone, a part of you will remember all the good times we had. A small part will think about the murders, but my part in them will fade and you'll be left with only the good times. Kind of a scary thought isn't it?"

My only response was, "You could be right but I hope not. I don't think my mind will let me forget what I saw on those tapes of Billy's. Yes, I will remember our friendship before all this happened, but it will be difficult to look through or beyond all the innocent people you and the other club members tortured and killed just to put a little excitement and fun in your miserable lives. I find it unfathomable that because you and your buddies were bored that so many people had to sacrifice their lives. Dr. Phil has a pet comment: 'You drove that one into the ditch didn't you?'"

"You watch Dr. Phil, too?! He's pretty good isn't he?"

Everybody up here watches him," said Ronny.

"Yes, but let's not get off track, okay? Can you tell me how many victims the Club actually processed through your little Activity Room, your little chamber of horrors?"

"No. Not really. Unlike Billy, no one ever kept a journal and we never kept souvenirs or trophies. So, I have no idea about how many people we killed. Sorry. However, you can probably estimate how many were killed. We usually killed at least one a week, although, one week we had three, and occasionally, two. You do the math."

As strange as it may seem, Ronny's answer did not sound as cold as the words he used. He was just so matter-of-fact about it. His answer was, it's a simple math problem.

"Okay, then. Here's another question for you. Let's say you killed a hundred women. How did you dispose of them and their personal effects? The police forensics experts found almost no evidence that linked you to the victims, except the video tapes and the confessions of your cohorts." I said.

"Yeah, if those weak bastards had kept their mouths shut, about the only evidence the cops would have had on us would have been those damn videotapes, and without corroborating testimony, they would have been inadmissible."

My only response was, "You're sounding like a lawyer now." Ronny gave me a wry smile, and then continued:

"Billy was a genius. For a kid who never graduated from high school, he really knew how things worked. He had a mind like I've never seen before. He would take a problem, study it and come up

with the damnedest workable solution. He was phenomenal that way. That's what he did with the body disposal problem. He knew that if we could dispose of the bodies efficiently and completely, leaving no traceable evidence, you had committed the perfect crime. So, the problem was leaving no trace of the victim."

"As he explained it to me, people try to dispose of bodies as bodies. Whole bodies or big pieces, because people are in a hurry to get rid of the evidence. This makes disposal more difficult. The smaller the pieces, the easier the disposal. But getting the pieces smaller and easier to dispose of takes time, and most killers don't have time or don't think they do. Most try to rush things and they create more of a mess and more evidence than they are trying to dispose of. Blood, bone, hair, you name it, all over the place. So, he said, 'We have a choice.' Take the time to make smaller pieces, or make smaller pieces in less time.' It almost sounded like a commercial's tagline. Kind of cute wouldn't you say?"

"Not really. Continue." I said.

"In the end, he came up with a whole system for disposal. Beside the stainless steel work table in the Activity Room he had a large, industrial-grade grinder installed. It was separate from, but a part of the work table. It would grind almost any sized bone into pea-sized pieces in very little time. So, when we were finished, we stuffed the body parts into the grinder and *viola*. Part of the grinder had a discharge chute that allowed us to put the grindings right into one of those big plastic olive barrels. You cap the barrel and take it wherever you're going to dispose of it. You know, one human body fits quite nicely in just one 30-gallon barrel."

"That's a piece of information I honestly didn't know, and probably didn't need to know. Do you realize just how disgusting and grizzly all that sounds?" I asked.

"I suppose it does. Oh well. Now, we had the body all ground up. What should we do with it now? You just can't go out anywhere and dump the barrel, human remains start smelling really bad, really quickly. That draws attention. You can dig a hole and throw everything in, but someone could find it, unless you are really careful where you dig and make sure you don't leave any unexplained, telltale dirt lying around. And that takes time."

"You can dump the ground up body in a pig trough. They'll eat anything. And they digest some of the bone and shit it out in the pig sty. Who's going to search through that pig piss and shit muck?"

"Billy's final solution was brilliant. Load the barrel in the back of a truck or car, take it to the marina, put it on your boat, go out into the Gulf and just dump the barrel's contents overboard. Rinse out the barrel, swoosh some bleach around inside and you have disposed of almost every trace of your victim. The fish, crabs, shrimp, and almost every other living creature out there eats up the fleshy parts and the organ tissues and the bone chips simply sink to the bottom, get ground up by the sand and tidal action, and get mixed in with the sand. The body is gone forever. No traces left behind. Brilliant isn't it?"

"Diabolical but, yes, at the same time, brilliant."

"What if, while you're unloading the barrel at the marina or while you're on your way out, fish and game stops you and they want to take a look in the barrel?"

"Again, no problem. In fact, that actually happened to a couple of the guys on several occasions. All he said is that it contained chum for the sharks he was going after. They looked in the barrel at the mess, and said good luck. Do you see just how fantastic the system is?"

"I guess you could say that. It worked for you guys. Is that how you disposed of most of your kills?"

"It was so foolproof that it would have been stupid not to use it. Billy chose to dispose of some of his kills in other ways, and look what happened to him. It was as if he wanted to get caught, or he was just too cock sure of himself. Either way, he got caught. We didn't want that to happen. So we kept using Billy's grinder system. The cops never have found any of the bodies we dumped in the Gulf, now have they?"

"I don't know why this never came out at any of your trials but, Billy did want to be caught. That's why he was purposively sloppy. He even left the victims' belongings at the bars where he abducted them and made sure he left fingerprints behind. He couldn't just rat you guys out, so he had to get caught so you'd get caught."

"Why did he wait so long to do it? He could have done it as part of a plea bargain and avoided the chair. Why didn't he do that?" asked Ronny.

"I can't really answer that. I suppose, if he had known you guys were still out there killing people after he was imprisoned, he might have spoken up sooner. He thought that as soon as he got caught, you would quit the killing. Obviously, he underestimated either you guys or just how obsessed you all had become. Either way, he waited and here we are now."

"He also said that part of the reason he allowed himself to be caught was that he felt that Bobby McNabb had coerced him into becoming part of your little group. Just think what would have happened if Billy had felt like he had had a real choice to join or not join. He wouldn't have joined, the rec center would probably never have been built, and your group would have fallen apart.

Everyone would have been better off if only he had felt he had a real choice in the matter. Amazing how things work out, isn't it?" I asked.

"We thought we were giving Billy a great opportunity to do what he wanted to do and have our financial support to boot. It would seem we were wrong. Do you realize just how often all this could have fallen apart. One little decision here. One little decision there, and absolutely nothing would have happened. But, that's not what happened, now is it? As it is, things played out as they were probably supposed to. You know, fate, *kismet*."

Ronny continued, "You asked if I could be genuinely objective. I told you I could be. Obviously I lied. I can't be objective. Had I been objective then, none of this would have ever happened, at least for me. I can't speak for the others. If we had been a little more objective and less wrapped up in our own self-importance, again, none of us would be here now. Had we been able to realize what was truly important in our lives, we would all be home preparing for dinner with our families tonight."

"Was it worth it? That's hard to say. From a purely moralistic point of view, no. Too many people suffered horribly for a bunch of over-indulged men's quest for excitement and fun. None of those people deserved to die like they did. But, you know, one of the worst aspects of this whole mess is that most of the victims' bodies will never be recovered and identified. They will simply be lost, like they never really existed, once their relatives slowly forget about them. That is sad. And, you know, they will gradually fade in the memories of everyone who knew them. Sad but true. My grandmother told me once that a person never truly dies, until no one remembers them. They live on in peoples' hearts and memories until that time. Each day that goes by, our victims' memories fade as we get busy with the trials and tribulations of

each day, week, month and year. In time, even Billy and all the club members will simply vanish into thin air. Forgotten for all eternity.

Ronny sounded remorseful, and I responded almost philosophically, "It's getting late. We've been here a long time. It's time for me to go. I won't be back again. I wanted to clear the air. And you are probably right. While I'm having a difficult time forgiving you for what you've done, I will look back on the good times we shared. And they were good times. I'm sorry things had to end the way they have. Good bye."

"Wait a minute. I'm not quite done. There is a second part to my answer about whether or not it was worth it. The answer is YES it was worth it! I have never felt so alive or excited as I felt when I could see the life, the blood, seeping out of my victims' trembling bodies, down the table and into the blood drain. It was fun. I'd do it again, if for no other reason than I enjoyed the feeling I got watching them die. They died for me, and I love that thought. If they hadn't been such tramps, they'd be living their shallow lives somewhere today. They were stupid and deserved to die. . . ."

I got to my feet, I could not believe what was hearing. Blaming the victims for their own deaths. He ranted on as I walked toward the door. The last thing I heard him say was, "You'll never know the pleasure that comes from taking someone's life. It's almost a religious experience. You'll never be happy. . . ." The door closed behind me. He had finally lost it. Or was all the composure just an act, and the ranting and raving was who he really was now? I was sickened and saddened at the same time. My friend was finally lost to me. His last outburst would be what I remembered most about him, not the friendship of our youth. I am not man enough to be able to see beyond the atrocities. Maybe

some day, but I don't see that day coming any time soon.

As I walked back toward Tim's office, I began reflecting on some of the things Ronny had said. If he was right, anyone could be a potential serial killer. All that had to happen was that a series of events, or circumstances, had to befall someone who was psychologically vulnerable. In Ronny's case, it was a simple case of boredom. I couldn't believe it. Innumerable people had died at the hands of bored businessmen! There had to be some psychological defect involved but it is unlikely that everyone in the club could have been equally disassociated from reality based on a common mental defect. Was it possible that they just got caught up in a common psychosis?

And what about Ronny's belief that if Billy hadn't arrived on the scene when he did, that there never would have been a single murder committed by any of the members of the club? It's a rather frightening thought that one person, and an unwilling participant at that, should be capable of causing so much carnage. Was it coincidence or some kind of awful act of fate? It's hard to conceive that so many people died due to coincidence. Had the sequence of events been altered, even ever so slightly, nothing would have happened. The reality is, however, the circumstances were what they were. There was no way of altering what was to come. That is almost a paralyzing, dreadful thought. It would mean nothing could have stopped the wholesale slaughter. That is the awful truth. Nothing could have been done. We can conjecture if this had happened, or that had happened, none of this would have happened.

All the ifs in the world will never bring all those souls back. That thought chilled me to the bone.

"Tim, I wanted to say goodbye to an old friend. I left behind a monster instead. It was a crushing, excruciating experience. I will call you and give you more details once I have come to grips with what went on. Right now I feel sick in heart and soul. I'm drained. Again thanks."

"You take care of yourself. Sorry you didn't get what you came for. Most people don't leave here uplifted. Most don't leave at peace. Again, take care," said Tim.

After checking out of my motel, the drive home was numbing. All I could think about was that anyone could be a potential serial killer. No wonder they are so difficult to catch. Even the most "normal" appearing people could be secretly killing one person after another. All that has to happen is that they fall victim to an impulse or set of circumstances and they make that leap in logic that permits them to take that first life. Every life taken thereafter becomes easier and easier and, maybe, even enjoyable. That is truly a frightening thought.

The only truly bright spot through all these otherwise frightening thoughts was that I would see Susan when I got home. For now, she was my psychological anchor and primary tie to reality. She kept me balanced. Too bad Nancy could not have been Ronny's source of balance. But, for whatever reason, she was not. Another 'what if.'

Chapter 15

The Dust Settles Yeah Right!

It took me a month or so to digest my conversation with Ronny. When the emotional dust had settled, I asked myself, how could I get past something like this? I found I couldn't. It's not that I was so morally offended by all that had gone on, even though I was. It's not that I felt myself responsible for the unfolding of events. It's not that I caused the entire scenario. If it had not been me, some other journalist would have been tapped to interview Billy. One of the most likely candidates would probably have been Patty Shipp Lieb, who had been a crime writer for the *Sun Journal*. She would have been a natural. She knew the area, she knew the stories behind the killings.

Instead, because of sheer luck, timing and "knowing people," I was the one tapped to interview Billy. Part of me wishes I had never been involved. I lost a lot in the process of listening to Billy's stories. The other part of me, the ever-present journalist, reveled in the opportunity to interview a convicted serial killer. No matter who had interviewed Billy, many of the consequences of the interview would have been the same. I would still have lost my childhood friend. It was quite a price to pay, but it would have been paid no matter what, unless Billy had elected not to give the club up. Based on his disgust for the club and his coerced involvement

in it, there was probably very little chance that he would not have turned in Ronny and the others. As he had told me, he was fairly sure the club did not have sufficient drive in it to keep going once he was arrested. Unfortunately he was mistaken. It had continued to churn out death after death without his involvement. Had he known they had continued, he might have spoken up earlier. It would have been to the benefit of many men and women if he had.

Hernando had changed for me. No one could say that it was a backwater any longer. I even was reluctant to remind people that it had been my boyhood home. I think, on the inside, I cringed at the very thought of being associated with the county or Brooksville.

I honestly believe the whole affair has taken something out of me. I'm not just talking about the senseless loss of life, or the anguish these men had wreaked on the lives of countless families. What had happened to me was very deeply and much more personal. I had been betrayed by my best childhood friend. I had thought that lifelong friends developed a dependency based on truth, honesty, and reliability. That was gone. How can you allow yourself to invest that much time and effort in a relationship and have it betrayed so completely?

As we sat, not doing much one night, Susan turned to me and said, "Roger, I've tried to keep my mouth shut but, you know, you have to stop beating yourself up over all this. It's not your fault. You're not responsible for any of this. I know you feel badly about Ronny, but he brought it all upon himself. Just like the others in the club. Had they quit killing after Billy was arrested, would that have made everything all right? Would it have exonerated Ronny? Of course not. Billy, in the end, did the right thing. The honorable thing. No one likes what happened but, at least, the Club has been

destroyed and the guilty are behind bars, where they belong. Maybe this place has too many ghosts for you. Would you consider living somewhere else? I want you to be happy. We'll stay right here if you tell me you can be happy. If you can't do that, then we need to decide what to do and where to do it."

After many hours and days of trying make sense of the world, I knew Brooksville held too many ghosts for me. Susan had been right. I was just feeling creepy. Finally, Susan and I decided to move to Tampa. We had thought about moving to Key West, but that would take Susan too far from her sister, my friend and collaborator. Besides, Mark had kind of grown on me.

After we had finally decided to leave Hernando County, I decided it was the perfect time to ask Susan to marry me. It was not the most romantic moment, but it was as romantic as our situation would allow. I said to her, "Would you like to move to Tampa as Mrs. Bainbridge?" Once what I had really said had sunk in, she gave out an enthusiastic, yes. "Then I have something for you." I skipped to the bedroom and found the ring box I had secreted away so long ago. I brought it down, opened it and showed it to Susan. She reached for the box, just gazed at it and, finally, pulled the ring from its resting place. She handed it to me, and I slipped it on her finger. Tears started coursing down her cheeks.

"When in the world did you get this?" she asked.

"When Barbara and I were just wasting time between the last interview and the execution, we went up to Jacksonville. And we started looking around in jewelry stores. I asked Barbara what she thought you might like. She pointed out this ring. I thought it was absolutely beautiful and would look fabulous on your finger. And it does."

"You both have fantastic taste." She threw her arms around me and kissed me like never before.

I could hardly believe it. I had actually asked her to marry me. And she had said yes. Life was much better than good.

"Why in the world did you wait to so long to ask me?"

"I don't really know. Maybe it was all the confusion over everything that was going on. Maybe I had to deal with the pain of losing Ronny. Yes, I know how stupid that sounds but I was devastated by everything that has transpired since the night of the execution. After talking to Ronny for the last time, I knew everything would be okay as long as you were part of my life. Now seemed the appropriate moment."

After the thrill of the moment had finally subsided, I told Susan I wanted to share some of the things that

Ronny had said to me. We had not talked about that trip, except obliquely. She never pressed the issue. She knew that when I was ready to talk about it, we would. She is so good that way.

I tried to remember as much of that conversation as I could, trying to not leave anything out. As I spoke, her face was awash with a range of emotions – shock, empathy, and anger. But joy was not among the emotions that my story produced.

"One of the things that Ronny tried to emphasize to me was that I had to get to the point where everything in my life excited me and was fun. He said that everyone in the Club was bored with their lifestyles, their wives, their jobs, their careers and every other aspect of their lives. It was out of this boredom that they ended up killing innocent people. That is a very scary thought, that the *rai-*

son d'être for the club was their attempt at not being bored. He also made a very specific point about marriage and you."

"What?! What the hell did he have to say?!" asked Susan. She was actually upset by the thought that he would have anything worth saying about either subject.

"He said, 'Marriages go stale. Don't let your relationship with Susan go stale. Keep it stimulating. Don't settle back and go with the flow. Make sure you keep being impressed by her. You both will change, but keep your relationship alive. It will take work, but you will find it well worth the effort. I didn't put in enough effort, and Nancy and I were little more than housemates but, it was comfortable.'

At hearing those words, Susan's expression changed from anger to a look of awe. "He really said that? That is really quite insightful and endearing. You wouldn't expect that kind of sensitivity from a *bona fide* serial killer, would you?"

"I was surprised too. But when you think about it, he's absolutely right. I always want to be impressed by you. I'm not going to let us fall into the trap of complacency. I don't ever want our relationship to go stale. Right now, you excite me every time I look at you, or I talk to you, whether it's face-to-face or on the phone. Bottom line, I love you. You know that, don't you?"

In that playful way she had of expressing certain things, she said, "Listen, Bud. I know you love me. How could I not? You tell me often enough. Well, maybe not often enough. But, you let me know just by the way you look at me. You're a caring man. You care about a lot of things and people, but when you look at me, I just know you love me. I can even see it when you're not even looking at me. Even when you are absorbed in your work, I sense when

you're thinking about me. A certain little look comes over you. That is so cute and endearing. I absolutely love it!"

"Just like with babies, have you ever thought it might just be gas?"

"That's a horrible thing to say." We both laughed. She put arms around my neck and kissed me tenderly.

We made arrangements for Bob to sell the Darby Lane townhouse. We took our time and finally found an adorable 1920's bungalow in Tampa. We decided we didn't want a place like Mark and Barbara – a gated community. Instead, we opted for a much older but refurbished old style Tampa bungalow. It was located off Dale Mabry south of Kennedy Boulevard, not far from Palma Ceia Spring. Although the place we fell in love with was opposite a park, the Crosstown Expressway was just on the other side of the park. In fact, from the house, you could actually see the expressway. At first we were afraid that the Crosstown would mean way too much noise. The Realtor® assured us that there was virtually no traffic noise to be heard. So, on a couple of occasions, we sat in our car, windows open, outside the house. We parked on Marti Avenue, which would be our side street, just to test her assertion. Sure enough, even at the height of rush hour, there was almost no traffic noise. I have to admit, we were shocked. As soon as we had assured ourselves that it would be a quiet place to live, we put in our offer, which was accepted. Now we had someplace to call home.

We could leave Brooksville at any time. We didn't have to wait for my house to sell before we could move. As soon as the West San Nicholas house closed, we moved in. This time, however, we made use of Susan's furniture that she had put in storage in Brooksville, and had it all trucked back to Tampa. When we were done, the little bungalow fit us and our needs to a tee. It was not that far

from the school where Susan taught, but it would be a good half an hour's drive to Mark and Barbara's.

It took longer than I had thought to sell the Darby Lane place. After about six weeks, Bob found a buyer. I was eager to sell but I stayed firm with my asking price. It was a fair price for both the buyer and me. I sweetened the deal by throwing in all the furniture, just as the previous owners had done. Also it was just simpler to have it convey with the townhouse. Even though I had lived there only a short while, I had grown attached to the place. It was Susan's and my first place together. If for no other reason that made it special. The other memories attached to it and Brooksville were best forgotten, if possible.

With all the activity that surrounded the investigation of the Brooksville Eleven, selling and buying houses and moving I had forgotten to follow up with Mr. and Mrs. Weatherford as I told Billy I would. Finally, several months after Billy's execution and settling into our little Tampa bungalow, I finally phoned the Weatherfords and asked if I could stop by. I told them I had a message from Billy. After making arrangements to meet with them, I drove up to their place in Weeki Wachee Acres. Despite everything that had gone on, they had not budged from their home. They both greeted me from the front porch. So this is the famous railing that may have gotten it all started, and these were the parents of Billy and Gary Weatherford. Much to my surprise, I found them to be warm and charming people. I have to admit, I had expected the worst. We chatted for a couple of hours. I asked some of the questions I never got to ask Billy, or could not, because only a parent could answer some of them.

Before I left, I took Millie aside and said. "I have a personal message from Billy for you. He wants you to know that he was sorry he could not be the son you might have wanted him to be but he

tried to make amends for everything in the end. That is why he turned in the Club. He also said to say, 'Billy says he loves you and he's the only one.'

"Then, these are for you," said Millie.

She reached inside her blouse and pulled out a long chain that hung around her neck. Hanging from the chain were two safety deposit box keys. She removed the chain from her neck and handed it to me.

"Do you know what these belong to?" I asked.

"No, but Billy Dean asked me to give them to whoever said what you just told me. I've been holding on to them for years, waiting for someone to come along and say those very words. I always knew he loved me and I loved both of them boys. I would have died for them, and, for a while there, I thought I would. But that's history now. Thank you for caring for my boy. He phoned me a couple days before he was executed. He told me how much he appreciated what you had done for him, and that you were a good man. He felt you were one of the few people he felt he could trust. He wanted to reward you for all that you had been able to do for him. He also said he was terribly sorry that your friend was mixed up in that killing club. He wanted you to have the stuff in the boxes. He said that you would know what to do with it all. I'm sure he appreciated what you did for him. It showed in the fact that you were the one to come and deliver his message to me.

Thank you, again."

"Mrs. Weatherford, . . ."

"Please call me Millie."

“Okay. I have what will probably sound like a silly question.

“What do you want to know?” asked Millie.

“Whenever you refer to Billy, you call him Billy Dean. No one else seems to add the name Dean. Why is that?”

“Oh, that’s simple enough. When the boy was born, we named him Billy Dean, after his grandfather. Out of respect. Around home and amongst the family, we called him Billy Dean. To everyone else, he was just Billy.

“Oh . . .”

Soon thereafter, I excused myself. I thought to myself, ‘Who knows what I might find inside these boxes this time.’ The last key had opened a Pandora’s Box for me. Who knew what these might contain. I drove to the bank for what I hoped would be the last time. I presented the keys and was escorted into the box vault. I retrieved two thin document-sized safety deposit boxes and returned to the private viewing room. I opened the first box. Inside I found a bound journal approximately one inch thick. On the cover was indelibly printed ‘The Journal of Billy Dean Weatherford, Vol. 2.’ I opened the second box. In it lay another bound journal. The last volume only had Billy’s name printed on it. As I shook my head, the only phrase that escaped my lips was nearly inaudible “Good God! More journals?!”

I was almost fearful of opening the journals. I almost knew what I would find inside. I opened the numbered volume first. As I opened the cover, on the first page, written in Billy’s characteristic handwriting, was the following note:

As I write this, I probably do not know who you are; and I know we are not friends. Friends would not give a friend what I am about to bequeath to you. In all likelihood, I am already dead. Death has been long in coming. It will be a welcome relief. Carrying around the knowledge locked up in my mind and in my journals has been unbelievable. My death will, hopefully, relieve me of that burden.

This volume contains information on the victims killed at the rec center. Like my other journals, I have tried to memorialize the victims, or at least provide acknowledgement of their existence and some details of their deaths. Since I was not a direct participant in each of these murders, and, yes, I have no illusion that they were anything but murders, I do not have the details concerning where they are now. Some were surely buried, some were dropped off at sea, the rest, I have no idea what became of them.

In my heart, I knew that this day would come but I did not know when the reality of my life would force me to take actions that would mean I would be caught. I have had enough. Enough in the sense that I cannot allow the killing to go on any longer. Had it only been me and Gary, I probably wouldn't be writing this but, now, there are too many people doing unspeakable things. Things I could not and would not do. I can't condone what they are doing. It's almost a sport or diversion for them.

So, I've set in motion a strategy what will bring all this to an end. Beginning with tonight's abduction for the club, I am going to return the victim's jacket and purse to the bars we take them from. I will continue removing the licenses, but the rest I will return to the bar, in the hopes it will be found. These should, eventually, lead the police to me. It is unfortunate that it will also lead them to Gary but I am sure he has had enough too. I should, probably, talk it over with him, but I won't. He has always gone along with my decisions

In this volume is the record of the deaths of the victims since I joined the club. Abductions that I participate in, from here on out, will include only the license. Since I will participate in the disposal, I will make sure that the bodies are found. The police will be able to tell how they were murdered, so there is no need for me to detail it here.

I will also make sure that I leave at least one good, legible fingerprint for the police. I hope they do their jobs well and soon. This has to be stopped. If Gary and I get caught, I am fairly sure the rest of the group will lose their resolve and the killing will finally end.

Billy.

Although the note and entries were undated, a timeline can be created with the information contained in the journal. Once the victims are confirmed, we will know when Billy started the journal. The last entry was made only a few weeks before his arrest. So, a fairly accurate chronology can be put together. Based on the

entries, I have to assume that Billy had planned out every step of his "confession" to me well in advance. More than ten years ago. All this time he had been sitting on the knowledge that he was going to turn in his associates in the Club. Unbelievable. He was just waiting to spring his trap and I was part of that trap. When he had written his introductory note, there was virtually no way he could have known about me. But, here I was, just as he had planned.

The volume contained more than 50 licenses; all but seven were accompanied by detailed information about the victims' deaths, including which Club members had been responsible for each victim's death. Only about a dozen included information on the whereabouts of the victims' bodies. In the end, this volume became the guide the prosecution used to get cooperation from the Club members.

Apparently, every victim that Billy had been involved with, over the course of the last year or so of his career, involved the return of the purse and coat of the victim to the bar as a lead for the police. Also, each of these victims was disposed of in such a manner than they were 'discovered.' The last of these, Martina Sanchez, of Ybor City, had been impaled and left naked on a pole in the middle of the woods. Needless to say, this was the most horrific of the known disposals. It was, thankfully, the last. Billy and Gary were arrested shortly thereafter.

Unfortunately, Billy's feeling that the killings would end with his capture was not realized, and from all indications, it did not even slow after his arrest. Apparently, he could not turn state's evidence on his fellow Club members, at least as long as he was alive. He could, however, manipulate their discovery following his execution, spurred on by Gary's death and misplaced allegiance to his oath to the Club.

The second volume was a shocker. Billy had confessed to the seven killings he was involved in, while a club member. He had confessed to ten additional murders during the course of our interviews. Apparently, that had all been nothing more than a red herring of sorts. Billy and Gary had been very busy boys.

The unnumbered volume included information on more than 43 additional murders; however, these differed significantly from what Billy had described to us as his preferred victim type. Almost none of the 43 were blonde women between 20 and 30. There were women, ranging from 18 to 55. There were men, ranging from 20 to 45. These victims reflected almost every ethnic, religious, and social group.

As with his other two volumes, this volume included licenses, a description and details of the method used to kill them, and detailed information on where their remains could be found. From the list of victims, it became apparent that Billy's victimology had almost no pattern to it. Additionally, where they had come from varied markedly. No matter where Billy and Gary were, they would take victims from shopping malls, grocery stores, airport terminals, parking lots, churches, hospitals, nursing homes, hotels and motels. They would abduct people from almost anywhere at any time. Since there were no details regarding the actual abduction of the victims, we will never know how the two brothers had become so bold and so successful. The descriptions indicated that they had taken people at all times of the day.

The unbelievable thing about all these new cases was that not a single body from this list, apparently, had ever been unearthed. Flipping through the pages of the journal, every victim seemed to have been buried somewhere and each victim had its corresponding *GPS*

coordinates. The forensics people, over a four-state area – Georgia, North Carolina, Alabama, and Texas - were going to be very busy people. And there was one victim, a woman from California. She was the only victim outside the South.

It almost appeared as if Billy had been experimenting with victim types and methodologies, but there seemed to be no change in how bodies were disposed of. Wooded median areas seemed to be frequently used but more often, wooded, out-of-the-way areas were selected. There was, however, no indication that these burial areas had been pre-selected. Possibly, over time, they had become so habituated to using these areas that it had become second nature to just carry their victims into the median wood stand or forests, and it did not seem to matter if it was public or private property. No suitable burial spot was avoided. One burial site was adjacent to a North Carolina State Highway Patrol Headquarters. I can only imagine the delight that that burial had for the boys. They were bold and daring, and, yet, they remained undetected and at large.

When I took the time to add up all the victims, Billy had killed more than 70 people of all ages over 18, both sexes and of every persuasion. Billy was unlike any serial killer or serial killers I have ever encountered or read about. There may have been more prolific killers but none that had plied their trade as systematically, or who had gone virtually undetected. Had Billy not consciously decided to leave clues for the police, there is a good chance he might have gone undetected until he could no longer successfully haul down his prey.

And, what does a retired serial killer do during retirement? Fortunately, we have no idea, or at least not yet.

Almost every aspect of Billy's murderous career raises questions. The unnumbered journal only raised more questions. Based on the entries in the unnumbered volume, and putting them together with known facts, Billy continued to kill outside the sanction of the Club. Some of the murders were chronologically intermixed with those he had confessed to during our interview. Others were after he had become involved with the Club but all were murders committed outside the State of Florida, during their periodic "road trips."

One question that was of particular interest to me, and one that would never be answered now, was why was Billy so compulsive about who and how he killed in Florida but when he was on his road trips, virtually anyone was a potential target and he used bloody, violent methods along with "clean" methods. Why the difference in methodology or targeted prey?

After making photocopies of the journals, I turned them over to Mark. I told him, "Here are more cases for you. Tell the guys you discovered them during a routine part of the investigation into the Weatherfords. That should put more feathers in your cap. Who knows, you might end up a captain for all your sleuthing activities."

"No kudos for the wicked, my friend."

By this time I was psychologically and emotionally weary. "Mark, I have to tell you, I came to Brooksville to find tranquility, and all I ended up with is turmoil. I'm glad you have been here to lean on. It's meant a lot to me that I have been able to rely on you."

"I've always felt it was the other way around. You cannot imagine the positive implications your involvement in all this mess has had for a lot of people. A lot of us are deeply indebted to you. Who in the world would have ever thought that some guy waiting to die in

prison would expose the largest killing machine, probably anyone has ever seen? I sure as hell didn't. I thought Billy was just a crackpot, until the day after that first interview, when he gave you the GPS coordinates. I was really skeptical, and proven wrong. The amount of information he had stored away in his head was phenomenal. Now, these revelations. I hope this is the end of it," said Mark.

"Me too. I feel like I'm going into information overload. But, you know, I just have this nagging feeling that it's not over yet. I hope I'm wrong but I just have the feeling that someone out there is holding yet another key. . ."

About the Author



The author, Roger Bainbridge, is a *nom de plume* for J. Albert Rorabacher.

John was educated at the University of Michigan, Michigan State University, University of Texas, and the University of Minnesota, where he received his B.Sc., M.A., and Ph.D.

For several years, he taught at the University of Texas, University of Wisconsin – Green Bay, The University of Minnesota, and South Dakota State University.

After leaving academia in 1980, the author became involved in consulting, import-export, construction, and real estate in Florida, until he immigrated to Canada in 2002.

He now spends his time in Barrie, writing, hunting, and enjoying his family and his four-legged companion, Crosby – a Husky-Labrador mix.

The author can be contacted at:

Wolverine31@rogers.com.

Feel free to write anytime.

OTHER WORKS BY THE AUTHOR:

The American Buffalo in Transition: An Historical and Economic Survey of the Bison in America, Saint Cloud: North Star Press, 1970 and 1971, ISBN: 0-87839-007-3, 141 pp.

Bettkasten: The Führer's Final Order, Barrie: Dark Horse Press, 2009, ISBN: 978-0-9864774-0-9, 404 pp.

Can Democracy Survive Islam: A Polemic, San Francisco: Scribd, 2009, ISBN: 978-0-9864774-2-3, 38 pp.

Hunger and Poverty in South Asia, New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2010, ISBN: 978-81-212-1027-0, 555 pp.

Coping with Climate Change: A Problem of Survival, San Francisco: Scribd, 2010, ISBN: 978-0-9864774-5-4, 64 pp.

FORTHCOMING:

Return of the Mayan, 2010, ISBN: 978-0-9864774-4-7, 618 pp. Science fiction. What if the end of the Mayan calendar, supposedly on December 21, 2012, is not, as the New Agers suggest, the beginning of the End but the End of the Beginning?

A Long Way Home, 2011, ISBN: 978-0-9864774-3-0, ~ 450 pp. Fictional history. This story follows two Jewish families from Eastern Europe to China, and covers their trials and tribulations from ca. 1750 to 1949, from expulsions and pogroms under the Russian Empire to their lives in China until the rise of Communism.

