

— *mv* — **Inside the Mind  
of BTK**

The True Story Behind the  
Thirty-Year Hunt for the  
Notorious Wichita Serial Killer

John Douglas

and Johnny Dodd



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*In memory of my mother, Dolores A. Douglas,  
February 9, 1919-March 4, 2006.  
Mother and my biggest fan—with love.*

*—John Douglas*

*To my father, a man of few words, but many books.  
Long may you read.*

*—Johnny Dodd*

## **Preface to the Paperback Edition**

Criminal profiling has become a very popular and widely portrayed aspect of modern criminology in American society, particularly since it has been dramatized in movies like *Silence of the Lambs* and *Mind-hunters*; on such TV shows as *X-Files*, *Profiler*, *Waking the Dead*, and *Criminal Minds*; and books like Patricia Cornwell's Kay Scarpetta series, featuring FBI agent Benson Wesley. I was an FBI agent back when profiling was still in its infancy, and I've seen it grow to become a very effective investigative tool. But at the same time, I'm well aware that for some critics, criminal profiling has become controversial; it has been widely misunderstood and even attacked in the media.

Recently, for example, Malcom Gladwell wrote an article in the *New Yorker* (Nov. 11, 2007) that questioned the legitimacy and success of criminal profiling, comparing it to astrology. Aside from including many mistakes, misrepresentations, and inaccuracies about the history of criminal profiling and its utility to the FBI, Gladwell and his fellow critics basically misunderstand the theory and practice of what I and other professionals having been doing for many years.

Most of what you read in crime novels or see in movies and on TV is pretty entertaining, exciting, and dramatic, but it has little to do with professional criminal profiling. What I've been doing for more than thirty years is not so quick and easy to learn. Nor is it a magic bullet for achieving immediate solutions to all sorts of murders and other heinous deeds. It also has little to do with instant psychological analyses or mystic visions, trances, and talking corpses.

I'm extremely proud of my work. As an FBI agent, I hunted for some of the most vicious predators in American history,

including the Green River Killer, San Francisco's Trailside Killer, and the Atlanta child murderer. When I started, profiling was an exciting, emerging science—with a lot of skeptics and much work yet to be done. I learned as I went, conducting face-to-face interviews with Charles Manson, David Berkowitz, Richard Speck, and many other violent serial criminals whose single positive contribution to society was the window they gave me and my colleagues into the criminal mind. By talking with them and observing them, we learned how they thought, how they selected their victims, and how their violent acts escalated over time. We learned how to predict their behavior. And most important, we learned how these killers revealed themselves through their crimes.

That's the basis of profiling. You study the evidence—gathered from crime scenes and witness interviews, forensics and victimology. Then, from literally thousands of pieces of information, you find the behavioral indicators from which you put together a picture of the perpetrator.

Profiling went from theory to science during my years at the FBI training and investigative center at Quantico, Virginia, and my unit turned it into a tried-and-true tool, an essential part of complex investigations. That's something I'll always take pride in. And although I retired from the Bureau more than ten years ago, my work as a profiler hasn't ended. Much of my time these days is spent doing pro bono work for victims of violent crime and their families, advising parole boards, and speaking to law enforcement groups about the value of criminal profiling in their work.

I'm hoping that writers like Malcolm Gladwell can forget about the mythology they see in the movies and on TV and take a hard look at the facts. I'm no Dick Tracy. Nor am I an entertainer shooting in the dark without expertise or evidence.



Like medical doctors, profilers require an inordinate amount of experience laced with instinct and intuition. Mr. Gladwell has written that “instinct is the gift of experience. The first question you have to ask yourself is, ‘on what basis am I making a judgment?’” So we agree on something. The more experience you have under your belt, the better your instincts and track record as a profiler will be.

So-called criminal profilers do much more than draw up vague pictures of an unidentified perpetrator. In fact, the FBI has no official position designated as “profiler.” More times than not, the profiler will offer a range of suggested investigative methods, including proactive techniques, information for probable cause in search warrants, interview and interrogation strategies to be used when the suspect is apprehended, and prosecutorial strategies. These profilers are also relied on often to provide expert testimony when a case goes to trial.

In the book you are about to read, for example, I detail how the Wichita police came to my unit at the FBI in 1979, seeking assistance in their investigation of a serial killer who had terrorized their city. What we did do was make a variety of suggestions, one of which—the “super-cop” technique—turned out to be a significant tool in getting BTK to drop his guard for the first time in three decades. This misstep on BTK’s part eventually led to his arrest. The FBI felt so strongly against my divulging this successful super-cop technique in this book that it first sought to prevent its publication.

If the critics of profiling had themselves ever been involved in an actual criminal investigation, they would know that it’s a useful tool among many other scientific, investigative, and forensic tools used in modern detective work. Nevertheless, there’s no absolute formula where A plus B automatically winds up with the C of certain identification, proof, and conviction.

As you read this book, you'll come to understand that criminal profiling is a subtle yet powerful investigative art. I can't think of a better way to tell the story of criminal profiling than through the thirty-year investigation and hunt for BTK. It's an odyssey that reveals a great deal about the criminal mind and the latest investigative techniques used in finding out who he really was, how his mind worked, and how ultimately to lock him up forever.

**JOHN DOUGLAS AUGUST 2008**

## **Acknowledgments**

I am indebted to the heroic people who shared their insights, professional experiences, and, in many cases, their lives with me—particularly the men and women of the Wichita Police Department and the Kansas Bureau of Investigation, who worked so long and so hard and so well to see this case through and see justice done. They have the undying gratitude of us all. Thank you.

This book was a team effort, and it would not have been possible without the support of our literary agent, Liza Dawson; our intrepid editor, Alan Rinzler; my entertainment attorney and good friend, Steve Mark; and of course Johnny Dodd, who became an extension of my life and personality in writing this book. Thank you all.

Finally, I would like to pay tribute to my mother, Dolores Douglas, who died in an accident while I was writing this book. She was my biggest fan and supporter, and I miss her dearly.

**—JOHN DOUGLAS**

An extra special thanks to Liza Dawson, the best agent an ink-stained wretch could ask for. To John Douglas for his patience and trust in allowing me to tell his story. To Alan Rinzler and his editorial cat o' nine tails (the scars have almost healed). To Kris "It's So Over" Casarona for literally everything. To Ken Landwehr, Larry Welch, and Bernie Drowatzky for all their help. And to all those who knew Dennis Rader (or thought they did) for agreeing to share their stories with me.

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open ear and a shoulder. To Ron Arias for his words, wisdom, and advice. To Lizz Leonard for once again being so absolutely Lizz Leonardesque. To Diana for picking up the domestic slack and then some. To Mother Antonia for her prayers of protection, her insight, and her lorca. To my various friends who spent fourteen months listening to my rants and nightmares. To Jamie Lee for her wordsmithing. To Champ Clarke, Oliver Jones, and Lorenzo Benet for allowing me to constantly pick their gray matter. To T-lu for her motherly advice and proofreading prowess. To Julie for helping me shape every single word. And to Christian and Ella, my two little rays of sunshine: remember always to do your best.

**—JOHNNY DODD**

## Introduction

It began in the autumn of 1974 while I was working as a “street agent” in the FBI’s Milwaukee field office. I was twenty-eight years old and had spent the past three years working with the bureau. One afternoon while I was chewing the fat with a couple of homicide detectives from the Milwaukee Police Department, somebody mentioned a serial killer in Wichita, Kansas, who called himself “the BTK Strangler.”

BTK. Just those initials. What did they stand for? I didn’t know then, but the moment I heard them I felt a little jolt of electricity shoot through me. I yearned to know everything I could about this murderer. Little did I realize how far my search for answers would take me and how entwined my life would become with this violent, elusive killer.

It was during this period of my life that I started on my quest to understand what motivated someone who seemed to enjoy perpetrating acts of violence upon complete strangers. This was what made serial killers so difficult to identify—they rarely killed anyone whom they knew intimately, and their crimes often appeared to have no motive.

As a young FBI agent, I made it my personal mission to find out what drove these vicious, heartless killers. I wanted to know how they viewed the world, how they perpetrated their crimes, how they selected their victims. If I could get the answers to those questions, I told myself, I’d one day be able to help police around the nation identify serial killers long before they got the chance to leave a long, bloody trail in their wake.

So after work that evening back in 1974, I went digging through the Milwaukee Public Library and located some old newspapers from Wichita. I read every word that had been

written about the quadruple homicide this killer had committed in January 1974 and learned that BTK stood for “bind, torture, and kill.” His self-chosen nickname perfectly summed up his modus operandi. He somehow managed to waltz his way into his victims’ homes, tie them up, and torture them in the same way a schoolboy might torment an insect. Then, when it suited him, he snuffed out their lives. He was an equal opportunity killer who had claimed the lives of a man, a woman, and children.

That was a hectic, busy time in my career. When I wasn’t working bank robberies and fugitive and kidnapping cases, I could be found at the University of Wisconsin, where I’d enrolled in graduate school, studying educational psychology, pushing myself to understand what made someone like BTK perpetrate such heinous, brutal acts.

Some nights I’d lie awake asking myself, “Who the hell is this BTK? What makes a guy like this do what he does? What makes him tick?”

At the time, the FBI’s Behavioral Science Unit (BSU) was operated out of the FBI Academy in Quantico, Virginia. It served primarily as an academic unit. The word *profiling* had yet to find its way into the bureau’s investigative vocabulary. But it would one day soon—I just knew it. And I promised myself that after I earned my graduate degrees, I would transfer into the BSU and spend my days profiling the minds of violent serial offenders full-time.

By June 1977, I did just that. I was selected and transferred to the FBI Academy as an instructor for the BSU and quickly began teaching courses in hostage negotiation and criminal psychology. Most of my hours were spent working as an instructor, but I occasionally thought about BTK, wondering if he’d ever been identified and arrested.

One afternoon in March 1978, while researching another case, I again dug up what I could on BTK and was surprised

to learn that since 1974, he had somehow still eluded police and now claimed responsibility for seven murders. By this time in 1978, he'd already sent two taunting letters to local newspapers—the first in October 1974, the second in February 1978—daring the police to try to catch him.

By 1979, I was in the midst of my serial murder research program, conducting what would eventually become in-depth interviews with three dozen serial killers, including Charles Manson, Arthur Bremmer, Richard Speck, John Wayne Gacy, David Berkowitz (aka Son of Sam), and others, each of whom had murdered three or more victims with some sort of cooling-off period between their crimes.

In the autumn of 1979, the phone rang in my office, which at that point was located in the basement of the FBI Academy library. On the other end of the line was a homicide detective with the Wichita Police Department. “I heard about the work you’ve been doing out there,” he said. “Was wondering if you could help us on a case we’ve been working on.”

“Tell me about it,” I said.

“We got a serial killer out here,” he said. “Goes by the name of BTK. You heard of him?”

“Only what I’ve read in the papers.”

Over the next few minutes, he walked me through the BTK murders, detailing the twists and turns of the investigation and reiterating his claim that police would welcome any assistance the FBI’s BSU could lend.

“If you can get out here,” I told him, “I can give you a day. Bring everything you’ve got. We can go through it, and I’ll put together an analysis for you.”

One week later, Wichita police lieutenant Bernie Drowatzky arrived at Quantico. I walked him upstairs to a quiet corner of the library, and Drowatzky spread his crime scene photos across the table. “Let’s go through this murder

by murder,” I said. “The only caveat is that you can’t tell me about any potential suspects you might be looking at.”

The veteran cop frowned and, in a subdued voice, said, “We don’t have any suspects.”

Drowatzky remained silent as I thumbed through the grisly photos. The fact that he’d traveled all this way to seek my help told me one thing: the Wichita Police Department was grasping for anyone or anything that could help steer them in a direction they hadn’t thought of.

“We’ve never run across anything like this before,” Drowatzky said. “We normally solve our murders in Wichita.”

At the time, my colleagues and I were trying to acquire answers to the formula of Why + How = Who that I believed could help investigators crack these often frustrating, hard-to-solve cases.

Why, we wondered, would someone want to kill multiple victims over a period of days, months, and, in the case of BTK, many years? Why do they target certain types of victims? How do they prepare for their crimes? What sort of impact do their actions have on them?

Are they born to kill? Did some childhood trauma warp them, causing them to turn violent? Or is their homicidal appetite a combination of these two factors? What factors led to their identification and arrest? Did they get sloppy, or was their capture a result of stellar detective work? Our interview protocol involved thousands of questions and stretched fifty-seven pages in length. The insight we gleaned from these killers provided us with a priceless understanding of how the mind of a serial killer worked.

From what police had been able to piece together from BTK’s crime scenes, it was clear that this killer maintained a high level of control over his victims. This form of



dominance over another person appeared to be a big turn-on for BTK. He tied his victims up, using rope or whatever else was handy at the scene. When it came time to kill, his preferred method involved either a garrote or a plastic bag tied over the head. He often arranged the bodies of his victims in poses reminiscent of a detective magazine cover. Before fleeing, he would sometimes masturbate on or near his victims.

Among other things, in the pages of the analysis I wrote in 1979, I emphasized to police that BTK's ego would eventually lead to his downfall. Their job, I wrote, was to stroke his ego in public whenever possible, to show him the respect he craved, in the hopes that he would continue to communicate with them. The way I saw it, the best chance that law enforcement had to get a handle on this killer was to keep him talking. Exactly what police did with my analysis, I have no idea. I had to jump to the next case on the front burner. If they needed me, all they had to do was pick up a phone and call me.

In October 1984, the Wichita Police paid a second visit to my office. Seven years had passed since BTK's last known murder, and police still weren't any closer to taking this sick killer off the street.

The Wichita Police Department had recently formed an eight-person BTK task force, known as the Ghostbusters. The longtime chief was retiring, but before leaving his post, he wanted the case solved and closed. So he assembled a team of six crack investigators, a captain, and a lieutenant and instructed them to reopen the files and sift through the mounds of crime scene photos, witness statements, police and autopsy reports, and even the analysis I'd written on the case five years earlier. After three months, they were desperate to ensure that the investigation didn't hit another

brick wall, so they reached out again to our BSU. A week after telephoning to ask if my unit could offer any assistance, two task force detectives—Paul Dotson and Mark Richardson—arrived at the FBI Academy toting several pounds of new crime scene photos and various reports. I met them in the lobby of the forensic science building, where my office was located. At the time, I oversaw a staff of six criminal profilers.

“Let’s go to the conference room,” I told them. “Several of my colleagues are waiting there for you. I want you to walk us through the case.”

As Dotson and Richardson passed out the grim, gritty eight-by-ten photos and readied the slide projector, I explained just how far we’d come with our criminal profiling program since the last visit by a Wichita homicide detective. Then, for the next eight hours, they outlined the basic facts of the case, describing the victims, communiqués the killer had sent, medical examiner’s reports, and the various neighborhoods where the murders had occurred.

I listened to their presentation, yet when they’d finished I had many more questions than answers. Despite being considered one of the nation’s foremost experts on serial murderers, I’d never encountered a case quite like BTK’s.

Six years had passed since he had written to police, gloating over one of his murders. How, I wondered, was this publicity-starved psychopath able to go underground for so many years? Was he still killing? What specifically did he do sexually, physically, and psychologically to his victims? Why hadn’t he been apprehended?

Together with four of my colleagues, I ingested the information from our briefing. A few days later, we sat down with the detectives again, and, during a marathon skull session, we provided them with a detailed verbal profile of

what we had concluded about BTK, given the limited information we had at that point, along with some proactive ideas that we believed might work to flush him out.

The Ghostbusters task force was disbanded in 1987. Because BTK was only one of thousands of cases I worked on during those years, I never learned exactly how many of the ideas generated from our analysis were actually ever used in the investigation. But one fact was frustratingly clear: by the time I retired from the FBI in June 1995, the unknown subject (UNSUB) in Wichita had yet to be identified. Was he dead? Was he incarcerated for another crime? Had he moved away from Wichita? Or was there another reason to explain why he'd gone underground?

I'd begun to believe that I'd never get the answers to my questions until one evening in March 2004, when a former colleague telephoned. At the time, my wife, Pam, and I were living together with our oldest daughter, Erika, twenty-nine, who was living at home, studying to become a nurse. Her sister, Lauren, twenty-four, was finishing up her third year of law school. My son, Jed, eighteen, was getting ready to graduate from high school. My family had just finished dinner, but I was seated at my desk in the study, talking to a rape victim who had contacted me through my Web site. No sooner had I ended my conversation with that sobbing, shell-shocked woman than my phone rang.

"He's back," said the voice on the other end of the line. It belonged to a FBI profiler I'd hired and trained shortly before leaving the bureau.

News that BTK had resurfaced and had just sent the local newspaper a packet containing a photo snapped of a murder he'd committed in 1991 both excited and disappointed me. My gut told me that it would be just a matter of time before he tripped himself up and police nabbed him. But I also knew that because I was no longer

employed by the FBI, I'd have to wait years before I'd ever get a crack at interviewing him.

Over the next eleven months, Wichita police used a technique I'd first tried out in the 1980s to solve a murder in San Diego. It involved creating what I called a "super-cop," the kind of law enforcement officer who could stand up at press conferences and talk directly to the UNSUB, eventually building up such a rapport with the suspect that he allows himself to take chances and risks he wouldn't take otherwise.

Which was exactly what happened with BTK. He let his guard down. He began to believe that he and the police were, in a sense, comrades and colleagues. He made the mistake of believing that he could trust them to tell him the truth, and that led to his downfall. In February 2005, police arrested Dennis Rader, a seemingly mild-mannered, married, churchgoing father of two grown children. He was a municipal employee; he worked for the city of Wichita as a compliance officer, handing out tickets to people when their lawns grew too high or they held a garage sale without obtaining the necessary permits. And, just as we feared, he had continued to kill. His body count had climbed to ten victims.

Six months after his arrest, I watched intently as Rader spoke at his televised sentencing hearing, calmly detailing whom he had killed and how. But what I really wanted to know was *why*.

Several years had passed since I'd written a book. I'd been waiting for the right kind of story to come along, something that I could use to tell readers about how the inside of a serial killer's head works and how other serial killers might be stopped. As I watched Dennis Rader's performance in court on that day in August, I knew I'd finally

found my inspiration. It was the kind of story that comes along once in a career. BTK was one of the very first serial killers I encountered whose appetite for death set me on a journey into the heart of darkness. His career spanned mine. He was always there, always lurking on the periphery. So when the opportunity came to finally put the pieces together, I jumped at the chance.

Yet for all the years of study and analysis I'd done on serial killers, nothing about Rader made sense to me: Who was this guy? Why did killing mean so much to him? How could he be married, raise two kids, and also be such a heartless monster, such a sick sexual pervert? Why did he go underground for so many years? How was it that this killer could be elected president of his church? Why was no one able to glimpse his real identity? Is there anything that could have been done during all those years that would have led sooner to his arrest? Why did he finally come out of hiding and get caught?

So I picked up the phone, called my literary agent, Liza Dawson, and told her all about BTK, detailing my involvement with the case and how, with my police contacts on both the local and state level, I'd try to secure a prison interview with Rader. Within weeks, she made an arrangement with Jossey-Bass, an imprint of John Wiley & Sons, to publish the book, and I soon embarked on my odyssey into the dark, twisted mind of Dennis Rader.

At the time, I had no idea just how rough that journey would be. It quickly became plagued by so many problems—both personal and political—that I began to lose hope of ever getting my questions answered. My supposedly perfect story soon emerged as the most arduous, frustrating one I'd ever experienced, researched, and written.

Yet by the time it was all over, I'd become the only author to talk to Rader. Part of the reason was that Rader wanted to talk to me. He knew me and my work very well and was anxious to communicate about it.

I found out that during the years Dennis Rader had been leading his Jekyll-and-Hyde existence, he'd read many of my books. In one of them, *Obsession*, published in 1998, he had read my profile of BTK.

He apparently found what I'd written intriguing, and nine months after his arrest, he wrote a critique of my analysis. I eventually read it while I was researching this book; it proved both fascinating and disturbing.

What you're about to read is a story of a haunting journey through the mind of one of America's most elusive serial killers. In researching this book on BTK, I was handed the keys and invited into the kingdom of his convoluted, empty, and horrific inner world. I entered his life, his point of view, his relationships, and the world he lived in. Besides speaking with his friends, confidants, and others whose lives intersected with Rader's, I spent a year getting to know a number of law enforcement officials who had tracked this killer for decades. They led me through the actual places—Rader's home and office, the rooms and streets, the basements and automobiles and phone booths—and every aspect of their investigation into the killings that terrorized the Wichita community.

But most revealing of all, they granted me a rare glimpse into the reams of evidence seized from Rader's house and office after his arrest. Never in my career had I been given access to such an enormous stash. It was mind blowing. The material, which included Rader's personal journals, drawings, Polaroid snapshots, and written accounts of his

crimes, provided me with a startling, often sickening look at this cold, calculating killer.

Climbing inside the heads of monsters is my specialty. It was something I did on a daily basis during my twenty-five-year tenure with the FBI. My work there—along with the research I continue to do—allowed me to understand killers like Rader far better than they themselves could ever hope to. With this book, I've pushed my criminology skills in entirely new directions in order to do the following:

1. Tell the story of why Rader started killing
2. Describe how he was able to so effectively compartmentalize his life
3. Explain why—at the peak of his ability to terrorize—he seemingly disappeared into the shadows
4. Detail how the police caught him and what we've learned from him that can help us catch serial killers sooner, before they can become the next BTK

If you've read my books before, you know that education and prevention are the cornerstones of my writings. I want people to understand that Rader—and those like him—don't happen overnight. As he told me in our exclusive prison interview, he not only had become obsessed by violent thoughts at a very young age but had already begun acting them out while still a young boy.

I truly believe that parents and teachers should be able to recognize certain behavioral "red flags," alerting us that a potentially dangerous problem is festering.

In the end, Rader proved a horrifying but fascinating study, allowing me to glimpse an altogether new variation of the homicidal mind. Having said that, it makes me sick that he was able to escape the ultimate punishment he deserved and not be executed for his heinous crimes.

Shortly before noted serial killer Ted Bundy was electrocuted in 1989, a group of behavioral scientists wanted me to make a public announcement that Bundy should be studied and not put to death. They were less than thrilled when I told them, "It would only take a few days to study Ted Bundy. After that, he should receive his just rewards."

I'm glad Dennis Rader lived long enough to speak with me and provide me with the answers I first started asking back in 1974. But about what happens to him now, I truly could not care less. Perhaps he'll commit suicide? Or maybe a fellow inmate, hoping to acquire a bit of notoriety in prison circles, will snuff out his sad, empty life?

Whatever fate awaits Rader, the chronicle of his days, the exclusive account of his crimes, and the exploration into his mind are waiting for you in the pages of this book. I trust you'll find the odyssey of this enigmatic killer both terrifying and enlightening.

It's a story I've been waiting to tell for more than three decades.



# **ACT ONE**

## **My Lifelong Hunt for BTK**

# 1

Somewhere inside my head, the murder played itself out the way it always did in my dreams. His hands were wrapped around her throat—patiently, relentlessly squeezing the life away from her. Blood vessels in the whites of her eyes ruptured from the pressure building up inside her head, creating hemorrhages that resembled faint red and yellow flowers.

She never thought it would end like this. But then who really does? And still he continued to squeeze. His hands and fingers were powerful enough to prevent the blood from flowing through the carotid arteries that snaked up either side of her neck. But to compress the vertebral arteries that allowed the blood to drain from her brain, he needed to twist her head at just the correct angle. So he lifted her torso a few inches off the mattress and went about his business. It was almost over—even amid the chaos, she could sense this. So she used what remained of her strength to try to claw his face. But he'd already considered that option and had tied her arms and legs to the wooden bedposts. She never laid a finger on him.

After a few more moments, her hyoid bone cracked. The sound was similar to that of a twig snapping. It was only a matter of time now. A spasm-like shudder rippled through her nude body, followed by a trickle of blood dripping from her nostrils . . .

“Jesus,” I muttered, sitting up in bed, wiping the sweat from my eyes. “I gotta get a grip.”

My heart was pounding, thumping madly. For a moment, I wondered if I was having a heart attack, but the vision of the strangled woman's face quickly returned. Just another god-awful nightmare.

That face—I'd been seeing that face and hundreds like it for the past couple years now. Almost every night they came to visit me when I fell asleep. Each was in the midst of being brutally murdered—strangled, stabbed, shot, beaten, poisoned. All of them were people I'd come to know only after they'd been killed.

Welcome to my life, circa October 1984. For the past five years I'd worked myself to the point of physical and mental exhaustion while helping create the FBI's elite criminal profiling unit. Back when I started with the bureau in 1970, criminal profiling was seen as a bunch of snake oil, something spoken about only in whispers. But over the course of the next decade and a half, I and a few other visionary, bullheaded souls like Bob Ressler and Roy Hazelwood had worked tirelessly to prove that criminal personality profiling could provide a legitimate, effective crime-fighting tool. Investigators from police departments around the globe turned to me and my unit after they'd hit a brick wall. We examined crime scenes and created profiles of the perpetrators, describing their habits and predicting their next moves.

I was addicted to my job as the leader of the FBI's Investigative Support Unit (ISU) and over the years had immersed myself in thousands of the nation's most grisly homicides and other violent interpersonal crime cases. I'd poured over mountains of crime scene reports and scrutinized stacks of photos that sometimes made me physically ill. I hunted some of the most sadistic and notorious criminals in the nation—the Trailside Killer in San Francisco, the Atlanta child murderer, the Tylenol poisoner, and the man who hunted prostitutes for sport in the Alaskan wilderness.

In an effort to understand the motives and motivation of the killers we were trying to catch, I—along with my colleagues—met face-to-face with dozens of serial

murderers and assassins, including Charles Manson, Sirhan Sirhan, Arthur Bremmer, Richard Speck, John Wayne Gacy, David Berkowitz (Son of Sam), and James Earl Ray. The findings of these interviews became part of a landmark study into what makes serial killers tick and, in 1988, it was published as a book: *Sexual Homicide: Patterns and Motives*.

Up until then, no one had ever thought to undertake this type of research from an investigative perspective. It had always been done by psychologists, psychiatrists, or parole officers. But I was convinced that those of us with a police background had the ability to understand the mind of an incarcerated felon far better than any psychologist or psychiatrist. We possess a type of street smarts that can't be learned out of a book or a classroom. We can listen to a suspect's words, but we also know how the mind of the criminal works.

I worked much like a physician—only all my patients had usually either been murdered or raped by the time I got to them. And instead of studying their medical history in an effort to cure their disease, I reviewed crime scenes, forensic evidence, and the victim's background (this work is known as victimology), trying to better understand what kind of person could have committed a particular crime. It was only after we answered those questions that we could prescribe a course of action that investigators should take.

Over the years, our work helped police crack plenty of cases and put countless sick, dangerous people behind bars. But it wasn't without a heavy price. I could never turn down any request for help on an investigation. My caseload quickly became so overwhelming that I worked myself past the point of exhaustion.

In early December 1983, while in the Seattle area trying to come up with a profile of the so-called Green River serial murderer, I collapsed in my hotel room from viral encephalitis. For three days, unbeknownst to anyone, I lay

on the floor in a coma, my body racked by a 105-degree fever with a Do Not Disturb sign hanging on my door.

After they found me, I hovered in that strange purgatory between life and death. The right side of my brain had ruptured and hemorrhaged. I wouldn't survive the high fever raging within my body, the specialists explained to my wife.

A grave was reserved for me at Quantico National Cemetery. A priest administered my last rites. But I somehow managed to hold on to life. My family, along with friends and fellow agents, kept a week-long vigil in my hospital room, occasionally encircling my bed and holding hands while praying for me.

After I emerged from my coma, the left side of my face drooped, my speech was horribly slurred, and blood clots formed in my lungs and legs. In an effort to control my seizures, I was given phobarital, then Dilantin. After I left the hospital and returned home to Virginia, my body slowly went to work mending itself.

Yet before long I began to sense that something was different about me; something seemed amiss. I'd awoken from my coma a different man. I found myself looking at the world in a new way. It wasn't obvious to anyone but me. It was so subtle at first that I barely realized what was happening.

I'd begun to identify with the victim. I still wanted to catch the monsters and slap them behind bars. But it was my newfound propensity to identify with the victim of violent crimes that began changing the way I looked at the world. I started seeing things through the eyes of those who, for whatever reason, had their lives stolen away from them by another. It wasn't long before I began to understand—viscerally, from the inside—the horror that comes with being murdered, beaten, or raped.

This newfound shift in perspective hardly came as a surprise. In my own way, I'd become a victim of my own obsessive-compulsive way of doing my job. Weeks after arriving home from the hospital, I still felt vulnerable, weak, and overwrought with emotion that something like this could happen to *John Douglas*. A few months before, I was at the top of my game—thirty-eight years old, strong as an ox, focused, motivated, and driven. I had a beautiful wife and two adorable little girls, and I felt blessed to be forging a name for myself in a career I loved. Nothing could stop me. Or so I thought. On that cool autumn night in October 1984 when I woke from my nightmare, I was on the mend. After a few unstable months, I could now walk, run, and lift weights.

My mind, however, was another story. As much as I hated to admit it, I was a psychological wreck. A few weeks before, I'd begun driving out to Quantico National Cemetery to sit by the grave where I was supposed to have been buried, wondering who had taken my spot in the ground. Try as I might, I couldn't shake my anger at the FBI for not giving me the support I'd needed to perform my job, for fostering a work environment where you had to literally drop from exhaustion before anyone would ever step forward to help you.

I pushed myself up from the bed, shoved my feet into a pair of slippers, plodded downstairs into my study, and closed the doors behind me. It had been a long day, and it was turning out to be another long, sleepless night. I collapsed into my leather chair and polished off what remained in the wine glass on my desk. I'd returned to my job at Quantico the previous April, but I was still a raw nerve, still trying to come to grips with the inescapable fact that my brain couldn't work the way it used to.