

**J** JOSSEY-BASS

— **Inside the Mind  
of BTK**

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

John Douglas

and Johnny Dodd



John Wiley & Sons, Inc.



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Published by Jossey-Bass

A Wiley Imprint

989 Market Street, San Francisco, CA 94103-1741 [www.josseybass.com](http://www.josseybass.com)

Wiley Bicentennial logo: Richard J. Pacifico

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### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Douglas, John, date.

Inside the mind of BTK : the true story behind the thirty-year hunt for the notorious Wichita serial killer / John Douglas and Johnny Dodd. — 1st ed.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 978-0-7879-8484-7 (cloth)

1. Rader, Dennis, 1945- 2. Douglas, John, date. Serial murder investigation—Kansas—Wichita—Case studies. 4. Serial murders—Kansas—Wichita—Case studies. 5. Serial murderers—Kansas—Wichita—Psychology. 6. United States Federal Bureau of Investigation—Officials and employees—Biography. I. Dodd, Johnny, date. II. Title. HV8079.H6D684 2007

364.152'30973—dc22

2007017136

Printed in the United States of America

FIRST EDITION

HB Printing 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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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*



## — 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.

A shout-out of gratitude to Evan and the staff at Peet's at 14th and Montana. To Bill "Deer Hunter" Lischak and Diamond Joe Bruggeman for always being there with an 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 Bremer, 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

— S omewhere 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.

Earlier that afternoon, two detectives from the Wichita Police Department arrived at FBI headquarters, hoping I might have some answers for them. They'd read my 1979 analysis of the BTK case and wanted to discuss the latest developments in my research that would allow them to finally nab this heinous killer. We sat down in a conference room, and they walked me through a case that had stumped their department for the past decade. Almost seven years had passed since his last known murder.

As I listened, I felt my focus and confidence return. For the next eight hours, my brain ran on autopilot, soaking up every fact and bit of data the two detectives tossed at me. The sensation wouldn't last, I knew. But it was nice, all the same—it reminded me of who I used to be.

Despite my having recently returned to work after months of being on sick leave, I already had an enormous caseload. So did the six wannabe profilers assigned to me, whom I'd handpicked because of their impeccable reputations as investigators. But I could sense how much pressure the Wichita police were under from their community to take this killer off the street, so I decided we owed it to them to carve out some time in our overcrowded schedules to see how we could help.

The facts behind BTK's killings went like this:

In January 1974, he strangled Joseph Otero, thirty-eight; his wife, Julie, thirty-four; and son Joey, nine. The partially nude body of Josephine, eleven, was discovered hanging from a water pipe in the basement. A large amount of semen was found on her leg.

In October, the local paper received a detailed letter from someone claiming to have killed the Otero family. In March 1977, Shirley Vian, twenty-four, was found strangled, with her hands and feet bound. The killer had locked her children in the bathroom. In all likelihood he would have killed them, but was scared away by a ringing telephone. In December 1977, BTK telephoned a police dispatcher to inform police about his latest murder—twenty-five-year-old Nancy Fox, whose body was found strangled on her bed. The next month, the killer sent a letter about the killing to the local paper—although it wasn't discovered for almost two weeks. In February 1978, he sent

another letter to a local TV station, gloating over his killing of Vian and Fox, along with another unnamed victim.

In April 1979, he waited inside the home of a sixty-three-year-old woman, but eventually left before she returned home. Not long afterwards, he sent his intended target a letter, informing her that he'd chosen her as his next victim, but had opted not to kill her after growing tired of waiting for her to arrive home.

The local cops had exhausted all their leads. But in the five years since I'd last reviewed the case, investigators had managed to link another homicide to him. In April 1974, three months after the Otero killings, Kathryn Bright, a twenty-one-year-old assembly line worker, was stabbed to death in her home. Despite being shot twice in the head, her nineteen-year-old brother survived the attack. The detectives briefing me believed that having another case to link to BTK, especially one with a survivor, might help shed some new light on the UNSUB responsible for the murders.

From my knowledge of the case and of the Wichita Police Department, widely regarded in law enforcement circles as one of the most progressive in the nation, I was confident that the police hadn't botched this investigation. Yet the killer was still on the loose, and this worried everybody.

Why, everyone wondered, had he stopped killing? What had happened to him? I sensed he was still out there. But he'd become a ghost, which was why the task force created by Wichita police a few months before, in July 1984, had been named the Ghostbusters. I had a hunch that the only way we could catch this ghost would be to find some way to flush him out, to develop some sort of a strategy to force him out into the light where we could finally see him.

I rummaged through a few drawers in my hopelessly messy desk, looking for the criminal profile I'd written for police back in 1979, but I couldn't locate it.

"Probably back at the office," I mumbled to myself.

And then it suddenly came rushing back to me—the memory of that night three years ago in 1981, when I used BTK to help pry information out of the head of one of the nation's most notorious serial killers. It happened in a pale green interrogation room deep inside the Attica Correctional Facility, with fellow FBI profiler Bob Ressler.

It was evening, the loneliest time inside a prison. We'd arrived unannounced, on a fishing expedition of sorts, hoping to convince David Berkowitz, aka the Son of Sam, to help us with our criminal profiling study, which involved a fifty-seven-page interview questionnaire. We wanted answers to such questions as *What was his motive? Was there a trigger that set him off on his murderous spree? What was his early childhood like? How did he select his victims? Did he ever visit the grave sites of his victims? How closely did he follow the press coverage of his crimes?* His answers would help us better understand the killers we were hunting.

Berkowitz was three years into his 365-year prison term after trying unsuccessfully to convince a jury that his neighbor's Labrador retriever had commanded him to gun down his six victims. He looked surprised to see us when the guards led him into the tiny interrogation room.

"Who are you guys?" he asked the moment he spotted us seated at the far end of the only piece of furniture in the room—a linoleum-covered table. As planned, the guards had quickly exited before Berkowitz had a chance to tell us to take a hike.

"We're FBI agents, David," I told him. "We'd like to talk to you. We're hoping you might be able to help us." Berkowitz wheeled around toward where he expected the guards to be, but because they were no longer there, he begrudgingly took a seat.

"It's like I always say," I explained, "if you want to learn how to paint, you don't read about it in a book. You go straight to the artist. And that's what you are, David. You're the artist."

I was laying it on, but, I hoped, not too thick. Berkowitz stared at me with his aquamarine eyes. He didn't smile. He didn't even blink. Inside his head, he was trying to figure out some way to get something in return for talking to us.

"I'll speak to the warden," I said, trying to head off his question. "I can't make any promises. But if you agree to talk to us, I'll tell him how helpful you've been."

He nodded slightly, looking past us at the cinder-block wall behind our backs. I didn't have much time. He seemed about thirty seconds away from shouting out to the guards to get back in here and take him back to his cell.

"Why me?" he asked. "I ain't no artist."

"What in the hell are you talking about?" I laughed. "You're famous. You're huge. You had all of New York City scared shitless. In

a hundred years, no one will remember my name. But everybody will still know who the Son of Sam was.” Berkowitz listened, but he didn’t seem all that impressed with the bullshit I was spoon-feeding him.

Like all the killers I’d interviewed, he longed to have his ego stroked—the problem was, I wasn’t particularly stroking him the way he liked. I was losing him. He turned to see if the guards had returned yet, but of course they hadn’t. So he spun back around and fixed his gaze on me.

We stared at each other in silence for a few moments. The fluorescent lights overhead cast a green tint on Berkowitz’s pale, pudgy skin. A year earlier, another inmate had slit his throat with a razor. The scar, which snaked a jagged path across his neck, had required sixty stitches to close. It glowed an unhealthy shade of pink.

“You know, David, there’s a serial killer out in Kansas, a guy responsible for the deaths of at least six people, who idolizes you,” I told him. “He’s mentioned you in the letters he writes to the police. He fancies himself just like you. He even wants a name like you.”

Berkowitz’s eyes were suddenly ablaze with curiosity. His look of boredom had been replaced with a smirk.

“Is he shitting me?” he asked, glancing over at my partner.

“It’s the truth,” replied Ressler, quietly.

“He calls himself BTK,” I explained.

“BTK?” Berkowitz said. “What’s that for?”

“Bind, torture, and kill. That’s what he does to his victims.”

Berkowitz nodded. “And this BTK, he’s still out there?” he asked. “You guys haven’t caught him yet?”

“No,” I said. “But we will.”

Berkowitz laughed, and I slowly walked him through BTK’s various murders, describing how he’d kill and then disappear for years at a stretch. He listened, spellbound, unable to fathom how someone so bloodthirsty could exhibit such restraint. I could tell by the way his eyes locked onto me that he was soaking up every word I told him. *How can this guy control his appetite like that?* he appeared to be thinking. To a killer like Berkowitz, whose reign of terror lasted a mere thirteen months, this serial killer in Wichita was a criminal with enviable endurance—a virtual marathoner of mayhem.

After a few minutes spent listening to BTK’s exploits, the man we’d come to interrogate turned to putty in our hands. Over the next five hours, he walked us through every dark, twisted corner of his sad life, sharing details he’d never told anyone, confiding that he’d made