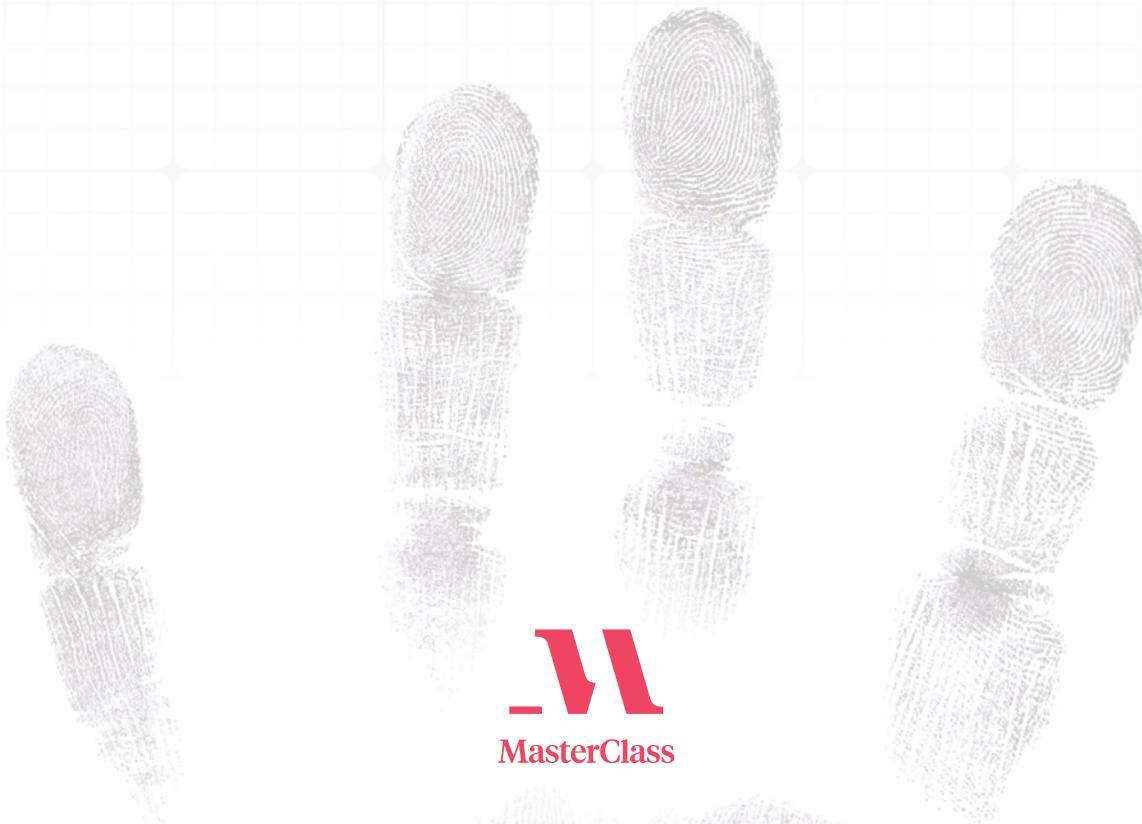


JOHN DOUGLAS

**Teaches How to Think Like
an FBI Profiler**



M
MasterClass

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WARNING:

This Class Guide contains material that may be triggering or disturbing to some readers, including mentions of violence, sexual assault, and death.



Meet John Douglas



Get to know the man who interviewed hundreds of incarcerated murderers to understand the ones still at large



To really understand what makes a serial killer tick, you need to get as close as possible. Uncomfortably close. Starting in the 1970s, John Douglas, a profiler for the American domestic intelligence and security service known as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), sat across from hundreds of incarcerated murderers with the goal of understanding the ones still at large.

Born in Brooklyn, New York, and raised in Long Island, John grew up playing baseball and envisioned a veterinary career. After high school, he did a stint in the U.S. Air Force, eventually studying psychology at Eastern New Mexico University and the University of Wisconsin, and earned a doctorate in education from Florida's Nova University. In 1970—just after leaving the air force—John struck up a conversation one day with a stranger at the gym. The man identified himself as a government agent; he knew of John's educational history and accolades and asked if John was interested in the FBI. Their chat moved to the agent's home, where John was able to compare the

spacious house with his own dingy basement apartment. John decided to sign up.

John's first job posting was in Detroit, Michigan, in early 1971. There, John saw action as a hostage negotiator, and when transferred later to the FBI's Milwaukee field office, he served as member of the bureau's local special weapons and tactics (or SWAT) team. After John cut his teeth, the FBI called him back to the training facility at its headquarters in Quantico, Virginia, in 1977.

In 1972, the bureau established its Behavioral Science Unit (BSU), which focused on criminal psychology and the mental condition of law enforcement officers. John joined in 1977; because of his degrees in psychology and his experience as a hostage negotiator, he began instructing agents and other law enforcement personnel on criminology. "I just turned 32. I was not only the youngest instructor in the entire FBI National Academy," he says, "but even in [FBI] headquarters, which had 1,000 agents."

His new role often took him on the road to municipal police depart-



ments, where he taught seminars to local officers. While traveling across the country, John also traced the network of America's decentralized federal prison system—home to the violent offenders FBI agents track and arrest. An idea struck him: Alongside teaching and traveling, why not collect information from convicted criminals, too? There was an opportunity to better understand their nature, valuable intel that could help agents in future cases. On one trip, John remembers, he turned to a colleague and said, "You know, there's only so many margaritas we can drink here. Let's go into the prisons." Starting with the serial killer Ed Kemper, John began interviewing convicted murderers—without authorization from the bureau.

Word spread. But instead of a punishment, the FBI gave John a promotion: He became the bureau's first criminal profiler. John's inter-

views allowed him to understand the psychological profiles criminals shared, and he was able to identify common experiences many of them had as children. Using his findings and impressions, he continued traveling to far-flung law enforcement agencies—but instead of teaching, he examined whodunit cases and interpreted the evidence to draft personality sketches of the culprits. At the FBI, John's job was completely novel. Historically, the bureau hadn't invested in such a qualitative approach to chasing criminals. Yet now one of its agents was out in the field doing just that, and building the framework that the agency still uses today.

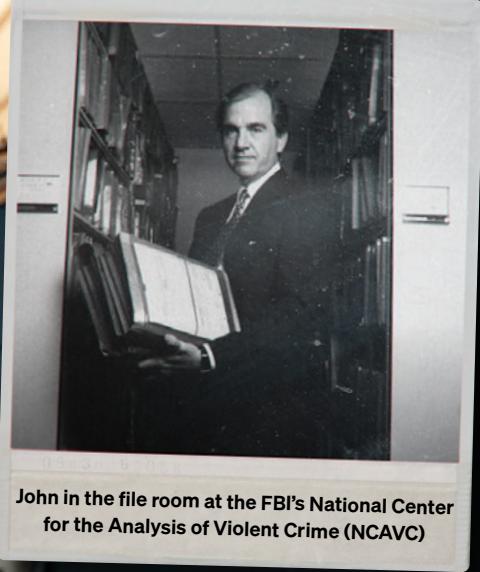
By 1985, the BSU had added four more criminal profilers. By 1999, there were 50.

When he retired in 1995, John had interviewed thousands of violent criminals and hundreds of serial kill-

ers. He and his craft would also serve as inspiration for several movies and TV series—*Silence of the Lambs*, *Millennium*, *Criminal Minds*, and *The Profiler*, to name a few—but John wanted to tell his story on his own terms. That year, he teamed up with author Mark Olshaker to write *Mindhunter: Inside the FBI's Elite Serial Crime Unit*. Since the book's release, John has written more than a dozen others, and *Mindhunter* was turned into a television series on the American streaming platform Netflix.

In his class, John tells the story of his career, offering up the biggest lessons he learned from interviewing some of the most infamous killers in American history—lessons that go far beyond the table of an interrogation room. John's insights will arm you with tools for analyzing the human psyche—tools with endless applications. Prepare to better understand those around you (and yourself).





John in the file room at the FBI's National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime (NCAVC)

"You have to take calculated risks. If you're afraid of failure and do nothing, then groundbreaking work will never happen."

-John



Crack the Code: Terms to Know

Criminal profiling borrows certain concepts from criminology and psychology, though it does have some ideas and methods all its own. Here are a few of its most common words and phrases



Analysis Paralysis

A fear of failure that can make decisive action during high-stakes situations seem impossible. But “in critical decision-making, you have to take calculated risks,” John says. “If I’m wrong, I’m going to learn from that experience—and I’m not going to make the same mistake twice.”



The Behavioral Science Unit (BSU)

An FBI unit established in 1972 (and now known as the Behavioral Analysis Unit) that combines humanities research and crime fighting. At first, the focus was solely on teaching agents about subjects like sociology, psychology, and criminology to help them understand the criminals they pursued. Eventually, however, the unit’s responsibilities expanded to include consulting local police departments on specific cases.



Criminal Profiling

The strategy of identifying a criminal by examining the circumstances sur-

rounding their crimes—the act itself, the crime scene, the victims, and police reports. With such information, profilers can predict characteristics of the culprit, which in turn can help law enforcement find that person.



Deductive Reasoning

The opposite of inductive reasoning (refer to the *inductive reasoning* entry). Deductive reasoning involves creating a broader assertion, then looking for corroboration within the many particulars.



The Homicidal Triad

Childhood behaviors that John contends “can be predictive of future predatory behavior” or violent tendencies. “The three factors which make up the triad are fire setting, animal cruelty, and persistent bed wetting past the age of five,” he says. John believes that “the presence of any two” is considered to be predictive.



Inductive Reasoning

The opposite of deductive reasoning (refer to the *deductive reasoning* entry). Inductive reasoning starts with specific, small details and works outward to make broad conclusions. In a crime-investigation context, this might mean spotting certain pieces of evidence (a knife is missing from the butcher block, say) then expanding and extrapolating to draw conclusions about the culprit (they used a knife).



Manipulating, Dominating, and Controlling

Three overlapping character traits that John says are consistent across serial murderers and violent offenders. **Manipulation** is influencing others in a deceitful way, while **domination** is overpowering them with sheer force. Both are in service of **control**, wherein the aggressor takes away their victims' agency.



Modus Operandi (M.O.)

The way someone approaches their task. One method criminal investigators use to tie cases together is to identify a modus operandi between crimes. However, the modus operandi of serial killers can evolve as they gain experience, according to John. “It’s learned behavior,” he says. “And so therefore, as learned behavior, don’t expect to be able to link cases together by modus operandi alone, because the subject is learning from previous mistakes.”



Motive

The reason a killer acts. Knowing what causes a murderer to kill can reveal a lot about who they are. John says motive is essential—it’s one of the core variables (the “why”) in an equation that attempts to solve the killer’s identity: “Why plus how equals who,” he says. “Understanding the motives of others helps us understand their behavior, their choices, and what they may do next.”



Polygraph Test

A method used to determine whether a subject is telling the truth by monitoring body functions (such as heart rate) while asking them questions. John—like much of the scientific community—doubts the accuracy of such tests, since increased heart rate or sweating are

not automatic symptoms of dishonesty. Many serial killers can also lie without exhibiting those physiological responses.



Signature

A ritual that a serial killer performs when they commit a murder—consider it the most malicious version of a calling card. “It’s almost like a habit that he’s formed,” says John. “And he can’t—or she can’t—really break it.” Examples of a signature could be posing a body in a specific way or leaving behind the same object at each crime scene. Unlike modus operandi, the signature typically remains the same throughout a killer’s period of activity.



Victimology

The academic field focused on crime victims (and survivors) and the psychological effects of experiencing a crime.

NO. 01

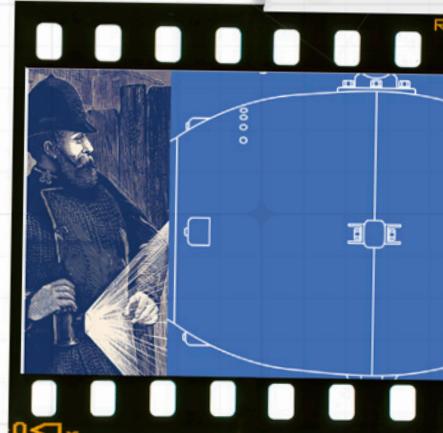
TASK: **John’s Survival Tip**

NAME: **Think Ahead**

John recommends scrutinizing places that may be dangerous before entering them whenever possible. “You have to think ahead,” he says. “The what ifs. And what is my escape route? How am I going to get out of this? If it becomes paramount for you to exit the area on the double, you’ll have an easier time with a plan than without one.”

Mindhunters: The Evolution of Criminal Profiling in Law Enforcement

The FBI's criminal psychology unit has only been around since the 1970s, but the motivations of criminals had captivated investigators long before that



The FBI teaches hundreds of its agents the craft of criminal profiling every year. Yet up until the BSU formed, and even for some time after, law enforcement agencies viewed that craft with skepticism. Here are some of the cases—and personalities—that gave criminal profiling credibility.

TERROR IN VICTORIAN LONDON

For a season in 1880s England, it's believed that one person terrorized the entire city of London. Within a period of just four months, five women were found dead in the city's East End—an area known at the time for high rates of poverty and crime. Victorian London was no stranger to violence, but the unique cruelty of these deaths gripped the public's attention and held it hos-

tage: Whoever had killed the women had also eviscerated them. As part of its coverage, a local newspaper published a letter—allegedly written by the murderer—signed "Jack the Ripper." A murderous persona was born, and the mystery of its true identity only exacerbated the spectacle.

The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) needed to act. They brought in two physicians to find new clues at crime scenes and autopsy results. Ultimately, the physicians produced what is widely cited as the first recognizable criminal profile. One of the physicians, Dr. Thomas Bond, proposed that the killer was a bit of a loner who was most likely subject to periodic episodes of mania. Additionally, Bond theorized that the manner of the killings indicated hypersexuality. Lastly, Bond pushed back against police speculation that the perpetra-





tor worked in medicine: The wounds were sloppy, created by someone who lacked “even the technical knowledge of a butcher,” he contended. The police’s collaborative analysis forged a new field in criminal investigation, but it wouldn’t be enough: Technically, Jack the Ripper remains at large.

THE DICTATOR’S DOSSIER

It wasn’t until the mid-20th century that criminal profiling got its start in the United States. In the decades following Jack the Ripper’s killing spree, psychoanalysis gained scientific legitimacy through the seminal work of wave-making neurologists like Sigmund Freud, the Austrian founder of psychoanalysis. By World War II, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), America’s primary intelligence agency at the time, was making use of psychology to understand its enemies: It

petitioned a psychoanalyst named Dr. Walter Langer to draft a profile of Adolf Hitler. Not unlike a criminal investigator in the field, Langer only had access to circumstantial information—individuals who had met Hitler, for example, but not the Nazi leader himself. Langer completed a comprehensive dossier of the dictator, predicting that Hitler would end his own life. After Hitler died by suicide in April 1945, Langer’s dossier suddenly acquired widespread credibility. But it’s another psychology expert—coincidentally also a World War II intelligence asset—who gets the credit for kick-starting criminal profiling.

THE ORDERLY BOMBER

In 1956, the New York City Police Department was stumped: Since 1940, bombs had periodically detonated across the city, and mocking

letters sent to precincts confirmed the same person was setting up the explosives. The NYPD enlisted a psychiatrist named James Brussel to suss out the bomber’s characteristics. According to some accounts, Brussel used the case file to make a prediction that would become a paragon of criminal profiling. Noting the neat handwriting and prose of the suspect, along with explosives as their weapon of choice, Brussel guessed the perp would be an orderly, unmarried Slavic man with an outdated style of dress living with an older woman relative. Brussel guessed that the bomber would be wearing a buttoned double-breasted suit when arrested. Several weeks later, evidence led the police to Waterbury, Connecticut, where they found a man named George Metesky who matched Brussel’s precise description.

THE FBI'S BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE UNIT

Brussel's work—specifically his 1968 book *Casebook of a Crime Psychologist*—caught the attention of FBI agent Howard Teten, whose interest in the psychological implications of crime went back to the days before he joined the bureau: In 1960, he earned a degree in criminology from the University of California, Berkeley. Teten's devotion to the academics of criminal psychology led him to a position as a FBI instructor, where he created a course on applied criminology (applying the discipline of criminology in the field). His pupils, who were themselves law enforcement personnel, brought up their own open cases in relation to Teten's seminars. As the course grew popular, Patrick Mullany, another FBI agent with an advanced degree in psychology, joined as co-instructor.

By the early 1970s, the bureau recognized Teten and Mullany's work would be most useful in the form of

an official unit rather than as a seminar. The Behavioral Science Unit went live in 1972, offering expertise in criminal profiling. Soon, additional agents were brought on to handle the BSU's growing list of responsibilities. One of them was a young agent named John Douglas.

DEATH ROW INTERVIEWS AND THE CLASSIFICATION GUIDE

The BSU pushed the boundaries of crime fighting and elevated the use of criminology, sociology, and psychology in law enforcement, but it also had its shortcomings. Academic silos can become compartmentalized from the real world. When John, then a new instructor, got the chance to leave the basement classroom and head into the field, he seized it. "We were doing road schools," he says. "As an FBI instructor, we would take our class on the road and present it to different law enforcement agencies throughout the country." When vis-

iting them, John inadvertently passed various nodes of the nation's network of federal prisons—the homes of convicted serial killers. A thought crossed his mind: "To understand the artist, you have to look at the artwork."

To decode the minds of violent criminals, John used his free time on the road to interview imprisoned murderers. The interview results proved seminal, and in 1985, the FBI legitimized John's approach by using takeaways from interviews with 36 of the convicted killers, establishing the organized/disorganized criminal trichotomy (more on page 17), a system for profiling murderers that was later published as the *Crime Classification Manual*.

Since the 1980s, the BSU has become a cornerstone of the bureau, expanding beyond pure criminal motivation courses to include seminars on cybercrime, gangs, and terrorism. In a given year, around 1,000 agents have access to its courses.

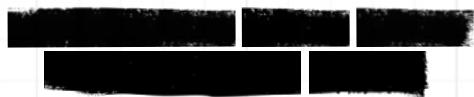
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TASK: **John's Survival Tip**

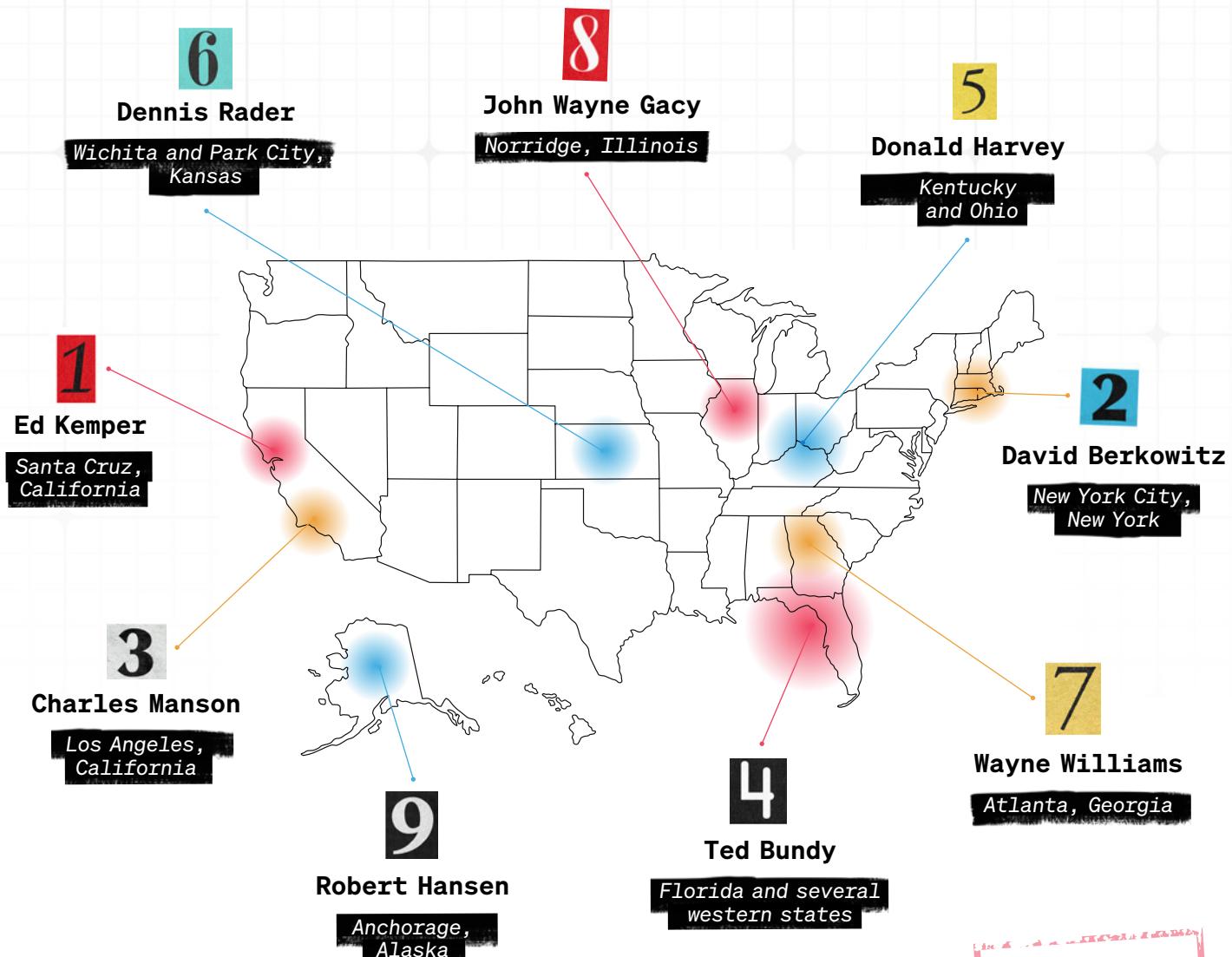
NAME: **Calculate Risks**

Life involves weighing situations and choosing the paths most likely to bring you what you seek, and being intentional about those choices can also help you avoid danger. "Taking a calculated risk means looking at a situation and finding all of the relevant information you need in order to make the best possible decision," John writes in *Profiling: Everyday Life Situations for the Young Woman*. "You may ask others for their advice or opinions, but you make the final choice based on your information and personal experience." For example, you're on the side of the road and a stranger is offering you a ride. Whatever your choice is, its chances of being the right one increase if you consider the risk you're taking and the stakes of your reward. Is getting to your destination in a timely fashion worth trusting someone unfamiliar?

Precarious New Frontiers



John has interviewed several hundred violent offenders, but these killers went on sprees that haunt the public's memory to this day



**CONTINUED
ON NEXT PAGE**

7'6"
7'0"
6'6"
6'0"
5'6"
5'0"
4'6"
4'0"
3'6"
3'0"



THE COED KILLER

1948-Present

CONVICTED: 1973



SON OF SAM

1953-Present

CONVICTED: 1978



HELTHER SKELTER

1934-2017

CONVICTED: 1971

1

Ed Kemper Santa Cruz, California

The first of John's now famous serial-killer interviews was a daunting pick: six feet, nine inches tall, 300 pounds, and responsible for the deaths of 10 people, six of whom were college-aged women in a Northern California college town. Despite his imposing physique, Kemper drew little suspicion—neither from victims, whom he'd lure into his car, nor from the police. In fact, he was so far off the police's radar that when he tried to turn himself in, officers thought he was joking. "He's very, very clever. And he's very, very manipulative," John says of Kemper.

2

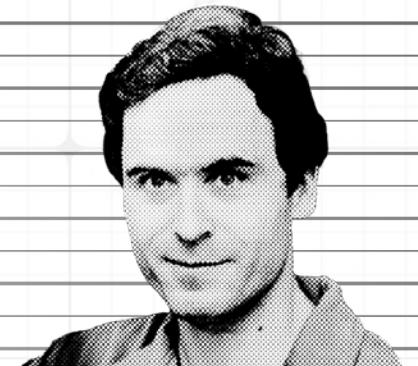
David Berkowitz New York City, New York

In the summer of 1976, New York City's felony crime rate was the worst on city record. If one individual personified that time, it was 24-year-old David Berkowitz—also known as the Son of Sam—a serial killer who crept up and shot people in their cars. In the end, six people were killed and seven were wounded. The NYPD found Berkowitz through sheer luck: At one point, he parked illegally, then stepped out of his car with a gun, drawing the attention of a witness. The same witness had seen police distributing traffic tickets on the street earlier that day. Police then used the traffic ticket to find the car, and then confronted its owner. Berkowitz immediately confessed, later divulging to John the history of childhood trauma and sexual impotence that predicated his deadly spree.

3

Charles Manson Los Angeles, California

A decade after Charles Manson orchestrated a series of murders in Los Angeles's Hollywood Hills, (carried out by fanatical followers he dubbed his "family") John sat down with the infamous cult leader for a conversation. "What we learned from our interview was that Manson was not a master criminal," John says. "He was a master manipulator." The combination of Manson's body language and manner of speech could be intoxicating, even to someone as skilled at identifying manipulation tactics as John. How was he able to avoid falling prey? John says acknowledging your vulnerabilities is essential, as is constantly questioning that person's many motivations.



THE CAMPUS KILLER

1946-1989

CONVICTED: 1979 and 1980



THE ANGEL OF DEATH

1952-2017

CONVICTED: 1987



BTK STRANGLER

1945-Present

CONVICTED: 2005

4

Ted Bundy
*Florida and
several western
states*

Ted Bundy kidnapped, sexually assaulted, and murdered dozens of women—almost all college-aged—in the 1970s, but even today his infamous crimes are remembered alongside his congenial personality and good looks. Bundy used his charm and appearance as tools to help commit his crimes; after his arrest, he continued to rely on those tools, employing his charisma to manipulate the public into liking him, just as he had with his victims. This meant public interest in Bundy's victims was overshadowed by interest in Bundy himself during his trials, a source of frustration for John that he later raised in media interviews.

5

Donald Harvey
Kentucky and Ohio

Donald Harvey killed up to 87 people (he was only convicted of 37 murders) over 17 years while working as an orderly and nurse's assistant at hospitals in both Kentucky and Ohio. Though he expanded to murder outside of healthcare facilities, he typically killed in the hospitals that employed him, since he could exercise maximum control without drawing attention. That said, his nickname came from coworkers who noted, without suspicion, the number of deaths under his care. Harvey suffocated some patients, poisoned others, and even altered the settings on life-preserving devices. In 1987, police finally discovered Harvey after an autopsy of one patient revealed the presence of cyanide. He maintained that his many murders were acts of mercy for the dying.

6

Dennis Rader
*Wichita and Park
City, Kansas*

To most, Dennis Rader was an unassuming member of the Wichita, Kansas, community: a married father of two, prominent in both his church and the local Boy Scouts troop. But Rader was also something terrifying. After killing a family in 1974, he murdered six others over the next two decades. His signature was to bind (B), torture (T), and kill (K) his victims, leading to the nickname "BTK Strangler." Rader's identity remained a mystery until 2004: He'd long expressed frustration to police and media outlets (in the form of letters) that his actions hadn't received more publicity. After local media speculated the BTK Strangler was dead, he reached out to the police, offering to prove with evidence on a floppy disk that he was still alive. Police then easily traced the disk's embedded metadata back to Rader.



ATLANTA MONSTER

1958-Present

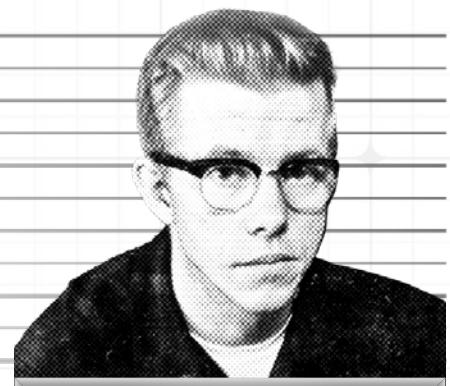
CONVICTED: 1982



THE KILLER CLOWN

1942-1994

CONVICTED: 1980



THE BUTCHER BAKER

1939-2014

CONVICTED: 1984

7'6"
7'0"
6'6"
6'0"
5'6"
5'0"
4'6"
4'0"
3'6"
3'0"

7

Wayne Williams Atlanta, Georgia

From 1979 to 1981, Atlanta was the scene of more than 20 killings dubbed the Atlanta Child Murders, where victims were mostly children, and all were Black. Local law enforcement suspected that the murders were racist hate crimes, but John came to a different conclusion: The killer was Black. The murders occurred in Black neighborhoods; a white culprit would have been noticed. A break in the case came when police saw someone drop a large object over a bridge into the Chattahoochee River. Moments later, they encountered Wayne Williams, a 23-year-old Black man who worked in radio. Williams received two murder convictions, but the case remains controversial. Williams maintains his innocence, and in 2019 the city's mayor announced a retest of old evidence to put to rest any lingering questions.

8

John Wayne Gacy Norridge, Illinois

John Wayne Gacy is famous for his skills in artifice, perhaps fitting for someone whose day job was spent dressed as a clown, performing for families. After he was arrested, Gacy confessed to his murders. During interviews with investigators, he drew schematics of his property, where police found 29 bodies. Despite a conviction for 33 murders, Gacy continually changed his story, depending on who was speaking with him. As an interviewer, John realized Gacy's inconsistency was a serious challenge; he addressed it by studying the case file and remembering telltale signs of dishonesty, like repeating questions. John left the interview with the impression that Gacy's subterfuge skills were virtuosic: "Gacy is a tremendous liar—has no empathy at all—even with truckloads of evidence presented to him."

9

Robert Hansen Anchorage, Alaska

In the early 1980s, Alaska police began unearthing skeletal remains of women in northern Anchorage. Also found with the bodies were spent shell casings. Separately, Robert Hansen blipped on the radar of Anchorage law enforcement when a sex worker he allegedly kidnapped escaped and notified them. When police requested a criminal profile from John to track down the killer behind the remains, the result reminded them of Hansen. John surmised that the murderer would be a locally based and prolific hunter with low self-esteem; Hansen had a speech impediment and severe acne scars. "So I go through this whole list," John recalls. "And the cops say to me, 'You're describing this guy by the name of Robert Hansen.'" John's work proved essential: "For the first time, an FBI profile was instrumental in obtaining a search warrant."

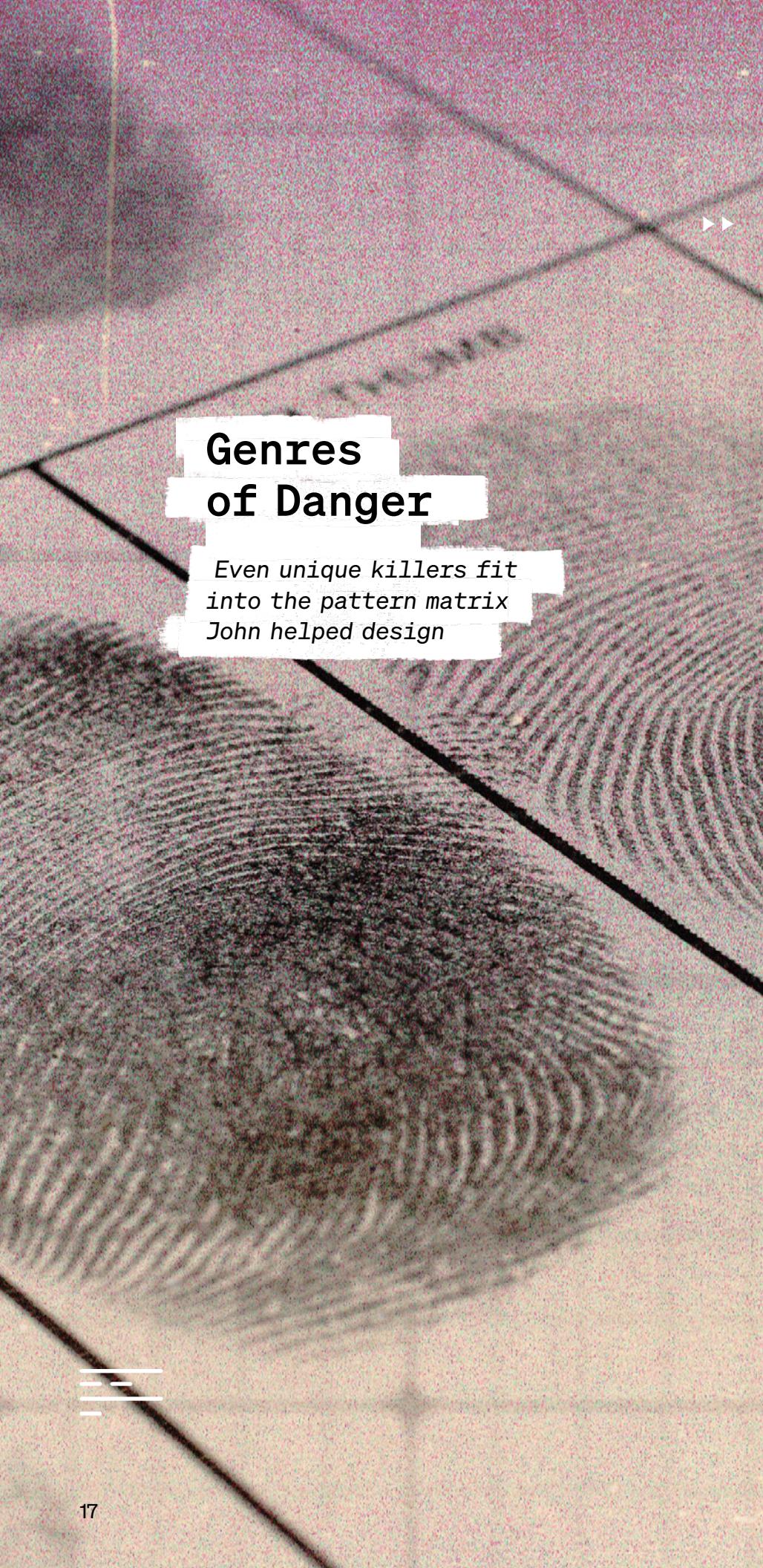


NO. **03**

TASK: **John's Survival Tip**

NAME: **Know Your Vulnerabilities**

Prioritizing safety means being honest with yourself about your own weaknesses. After all, as John says in *Profiling: Everyday Life Situations for the Young Woman*, an unpublished profiling manuscript, "People with impure motives may exploit or play to your vulnerabilities to get what they want." The best way to protect yourself is not to pretend your weak spots don't exist, but to pay particular attention to them. "If you have been wronged by people who exploited your vulnerabilities, learn from those experiences," he writes in *Profiling*.



Genres of Danger

*Even unique killers fit
into the pattern matrix
John helped design*

The FBI published its first edition of the *Crime Classification Manual*—a 600-page tome on American crime—in 1985. Nationwide, law enforcement departments have used this guide to map and detect criminal patterns. Now more than 35 years old, the *Crime Classification Manual* remains a core foundation of crime-fighting strategy in the United States, and the section John helped draft, the organized/disorganized criminal dichotomy (now a trichotomy), continues to be relevant today.

After interviewing numerous violent offenders for more than a decade, John and his colleagues created the organized/disorganized criminal trichotomy system to catalog different types of killers. The system was designed for investigators to use in their own active cases and asks them to contemplate the conditions of the crime scene, the victim, and the suspect's behavior. In the end, investigator's answers form a profile of the killer, bringing them closer to an arrest. Despite the sophisticated crime fighting it was designed for, the system is quite simple and only contains three categories: organized, disorganized, and mixed. Learn more about these buckets to understand what sort of criminal falls into each one.

ORGANIZED

Control and intentionality are two characteristics that underpin the organized category. The crimes an organized killer commits are often premeditated, and the crime scenes are usually wiped of all evidence. "They cover their tracks," says John. "So there's a lot of thought that goes into it." A sense of order often

[REDACTED]

extends beyond the organized killer's crimes, too. Their lives tend to look stable and often include a socially valued job, a live-in romantic partner, and garden-variety sources of stress, like unpaid bills.

An organized killer's target tends to be a chosen stranger the killer entraps through ostensibly unsuspecting behavior. "Fantasy and ritual dominate with the organized offender," reads a 1985 FBI bulletin that outlines the categorization. "[O]bsessive, compulsive traits surface in the behavior and/or crime scene patterns." Ed Kemper, the first murderer John interviewed (more on page 13), represents a textbook organized case. "Kemper meticulously planned what he would say to his intended victims to get them to willingly take a ride with him," John recalls. Whenever Kemper used a firearm to kill his victim, he always shot them in the same place—and always removed the bullet afterward.

DISORGANIZED

The trail left by the disorganized killer hints at a lack of planning. "It's sloppy. It's careless," says John. A variety of reasons could be to blame: The killer might be young, under the influence of drugs or alcohol, or have a mental-health condition or psychiatric disability. The FBI bulletin notes that disorganized killers are often "in a confused and distressed frame of mind at the time of the crime." This is true for their frame of mind generally. Disorganized killers often lack social skills and possess an inconsistent work history.

Culprits whose crimes exist in this framework typically know their targets and decide to kill almost sponta-

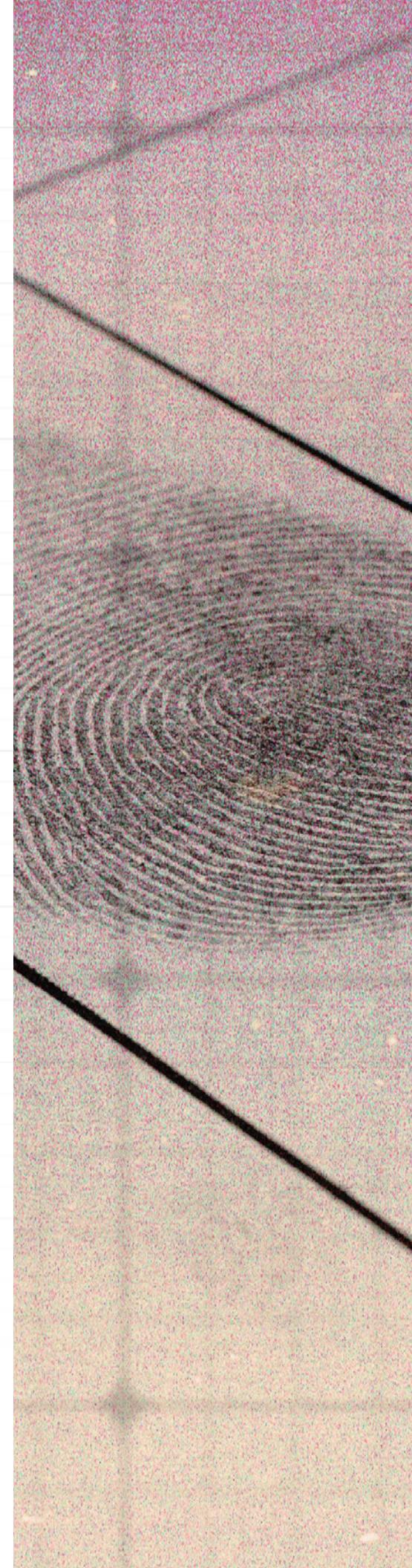
neously. Unlike organized killers, the ad hoc nature of these murderers means their crimes tend to occur near home. One example is Darrell Gene Devier. In 1979, he was working as a tree trimmer along a stretch of rural Georgia road near the home of a 12-year-old girl named Mary Frances Stoner. One day, Devier abducted Stoner from her school bus stop, then sexually assaulted and murdered her. Law enforcement found Stoner's body within a day and were able to arrest Devier within a week due to the evidence he left.

MIXED

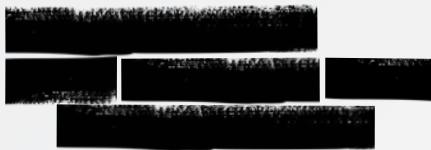
Initially, the FBI manual only included organized and disorganized categories. The second edition, released in 1992, added a third type: mixed. As suggested by the name, the mixed serial killer exhibits a blend of both organized and disorganized characteristics. According to the manual, crimes in this category may have been planned in a way that reads as organized but were carried out poorly, often leaving a crime scene that appears disorganized.

Richard Ramirez, dubbed the Night Stalker, is representative of the mixed serial-killer category. Between 1984 and 1985, Ramirez went on a spree of home invasions across Southern California, killing more than a dozen people before law enforcement caught him. The scenes he left behind were gruesome, and, occasionally, victims survived his seemingly impulsive attacks. Yet, like an organized killer, he frequently showed up with weapons at the ready and followed media coverage of his rampage. This behavior defies both of the original categories in the dichotomy, necessitating a hybrid.

[REDACTED]



The Wrong Place at the Wrong Time



How time, place, and context all build upon a few unmoving constants



TIME: Late 1960-1970s

EVENT: The “Golden Age” of Serial Killing

In the 1960s, America began to undergo societal shifts with the civil rights movement, feminism, and the rise of a counterculture that viewed historically trusted institutions with suspicion. Pop culture also promoted an end to many social and sexual inhibitions. The social code was being rewritten.

Around the same time, the United States was entering a grim

period known now as the “golden age” of serial killing. Some experts have proposed that nationwide upheaval coalesced with other era-specific trends that led to serial killing. Many of the killers of the “golden age” grew up when the U.S. was at war—father figures were either absent or experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder. Simultaneously, societal growing

pains contributed to increased household distress. Conditions were ripe for troubled, abused children to grow into troubled, abused adults.

Homicidal sprees dominated headlines and held the public imagination hostage. Attention focused on serial killers from the media and the public allowed these criminals to attain an almost mythic status. For example, Ted Bundy acquired the sort of following typically reserved for Hollywood A-listers, with crowds of female fans even showing up to the courthouse during his trial.

TIME: Early 1980s

EVENT: A Deadly Trend’s Peak

The bizarrely prominent position of serial killers in 1970s pop culture reflects the large number of them thought to be active at the time. That number continued its rise into the next decade. According to a study from Radford University in Radford, Virginia, there were almost 800 active serial killers during the 1980s, when the number aped. The rise and peak of serial killers throughout the 1970s and early 1980s was similar to the trend lines for other forms of violent crime during this era.

TIME: Late 1990s–2000s

EVENT: The Calm Before the Storm

Serial murders began trending downward, dropping about 85 percent from the 1980s to 2010. One thought is that the prominence of serial killers may have helped pave the way for their downfall: Killing sprees, which often drew public focus, received increased attention from law enforcement, including the FBI. Criminal psychology and forensic sciences—an especially potent pair of fields for investigating serial murder—grew in sophistication. “Serial murder has become a more dangerous pursuit,” Thomas Hargrove, founder of the Murder Accountability Project, told *Discover* magazine in 2020. Overall crime also began to decline, which may have affected the rate of serial killings.



TIME: 2010s–Present

EVENT: The Age of Mass Shootings

Today, criminologists estimate that, conservatively, there are between 25 and 50 operating serial killers in the U.S.—a fraction of the number in 1975. Increased attention from the forensic, science-versus law enforcement of modern culture doesn’t enable serial murder like the analog culture of the 1970s did. Instead, another form of mass murder, one that may be more reflective of socio-cultural realities in the 21st century, has taken serial killing’s place in the American psyche: mass shootings.

Legal access to high-powered weapons and the prominence of anti-social online communities are phenomena that gun-violence experts associate with a rise in mass shooters. For instance, Nikolas Cruz, procured an AR-15 legally and later bragged about it in a private group chat on the global social media platform Instagram before committing the 2019 Parkland shooting at Florida’s Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School.

But when a pair of criminologists at Hamline University and Metro



NIKOLAS CRUZ

1998–Present

CONVICTED: 2021

7'6"
7'0"
6'6"
6'0"
5'6"
5'0"
4'6"
4'0"
3'6"
3'0"

State University, both in Saint Paul, Minnesota, set out to identify the root cause connecting modern mass shootings, they found an answer that was surprisingly familiar: a traumatic childhood, the same common experience among serial killers. John doesn’t believe the correlation between mass shooters and serial killers is a coincidence. “It all stems from the broken family,” he says. “Not really belonging to anything, or belonging to anyone.”

Ultimately, the broken conditions that give rise to deeply violent people appear to be consistent through time, but the era may influence the form that crime will take. Serial killers may have not disappeared. Instead, they might just be called something else.

NO. 01

TASK: Assignment

NAME: Researching Patterns

John notices patterns in crime scenes and victim backgrounds, and by analyzing these trends, he's often able to accurately surmise certain information about them. But patterns aren't limited to the world of crime. Recognizing patterns and contemplating their effects can enable you to make meaningful observations both micro and macro in your own life. Here's how to put it into practice:

1. Context

Pick a trend that you've noticed taking place around you. Define the trend by considering its characteristics. Where and when is it happening? (Or not happening?) Who or what is it happening to? List out all the details you can think of that are consistently part of the pattern.

For example: One of your good friends is always late.

2. Influence

Next, consider the specific causes of the pattern. Under what circumstances is it taking place? Are there any correlations with other things that are happening? Consider whether there's something that specifically sparks the pattern to appear or brings it to a halt. Brainstorm and list these possible catalysts.

For example: The friend is only punctual on days when they don't work.

3. Impact

When the pattern is happening, what effect does it have on the world around it? What is it disrupting—and what other patterns is it giving rise to?

For example: It bothers me when my friend is late!

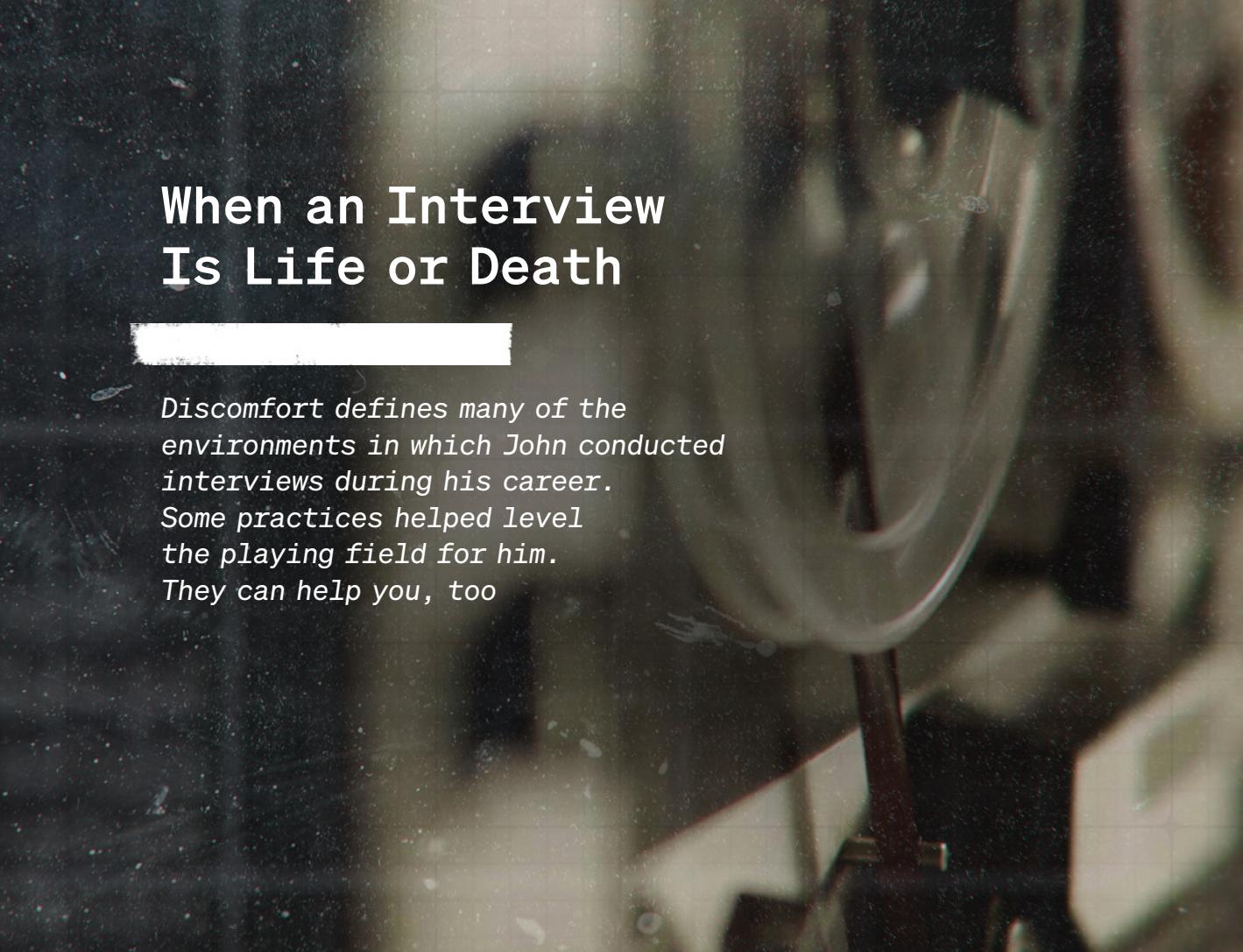
4. Predict the Pattern

Once you've examined the pattern in its entirety—its essence, causes, and effects—think about how a command over the pattern can be of use to you. Would being able to predict the pattern help you? How can you act in anticipation of the pattern to make use of it?

For example: When making plans with a friend who's often late, pick activities that aren't time sensitive—or pick days when the friend is more likely to be on time.

CONFIDENTIAL

When an Interview Is Life or Death



Discomfort defines many of the environments in which John conducted interviews during his career. Some practices helped level the playing field for him. They can help you, too

CLASS GUIDE
EXCLUSIVE



Someone describing the most tranquil interview setting imaginable probably wouldn't place it in a prison, with the interview subject in handcuffs. The list of interferences goes on and on, ranging from dangerous inmates to the oppressive visual design. "You're not Cool Hand Luke going into this," says John. "You're walking into the bowels of these penitentiaries. In some, the inmates are just walking around." Early on in his trips to interview inmates, John learned to wear casual clothes. It's better to be mistaken for a defense attorney than clocked as an FBI agent in prison.

But jeans and a T-shirt offer little protection against physical violence, which was a reality in the

spaces where John operated—one that could not be ignored. He remembers a prison where he had to officially acknowledge that he was taking his life into his own hands. "If you are involved as a victim in a hostage situation, guess what, Mr. Douglas? You are not negotiable," he remembers hearing from prison personnel. "We are not going to negotiate for your release."

John created an entire career by mastering his interview skills, not *in spite of* turbulent conditions, but with the *help* of them. And while the idiosyncrasies of John's experiences fit strictly into his niche career, his advice on staying safe and empowered through high-stakes conversations has many applications.



RESEARCH THOROUGHLY BEFOREHAND

When interviewing serial killers in a prison, many things were beyond John's control—and his subjects were often ambivalent about him. To maintain agency, he made the most of what he could control. "The key thing is never going into the interview cold," John says. He would prepare tirelessly, becoming familiar with the case in as much detail as possible. Relevant documents like crime scene photos and medical examiners' reports became homework. "I try to memorize everything, all of that information," he says.

The benefits of John's preparation were twofold. Serial killers are often manipulative and prone to lying (even after they've been convicted). "They can look you straight in the eye and lie to you," says John. "And test me to see if I really know some of the specific stuff of the crime. If they do start to go off, feeding me erroneous information, I just bring it to their attention. They become impressed." By displaying his own familiarity with their cases, John disarmed his subjects and showcased his professionalism and skill. Memory also allowed John to avoid relying on tape recorders or written notes, which can cause his interviewees to close up. "You can't do that when dealing with incarcerated offenders," John says. "They're paranoid to begin with."

TAKE A CUE FROM JOHN: Deep research can be helpful when faced with a high-stakes situation; memorized knowledge can give you both the confidence and the ability to navigate through granular, relevant details in order to feel confident and better prepared.



CONTROL THE ENVIRONMENT

John rarely had control over the prison environment, but when the warden was accommodating, he made requests. Ideally, he interviewed in a private room with a window, after dark. "I want to create a comfortable environment," he says. That meant lower lighting, relaxing chairs, and the subject deciding where they sit. "I have to try to provide comfort. It's a psychological, mental escape," he says. "If I have a window, I want that person facing the window. I don't block the door." Whether consciously or not, subjects noticed the overtures and entered a more casual state.

TAKE A CUE FROM JOHN: Having difficult conversations could likely benefit from a relaxing environment. If you're about to have a tough exchange, try to make the environment as calming as possible.

OFFER EMPATHY

People under duress rarely gave accurate—or truthful—information. The tension that enveloped a cross-examination in crime procedurals might make for good television, but in reality, John took the opposite tack. He wanted his subjects relaxed and candid. "Don't make it an interrogation," he says. "You have to create a conversation if you want to have a conversation."

By engaging killers in a way where they didn't feel judged or condemned before the conversation began, John allowed them to let down their guard. It may sound strange to offer empathy to a convicted murderer, but John's job was to understand, not revile. When interviewing David Berkowitz, the young serial killer better known as the Son of Sam, John went a step further: He flattered. Berkowitz was in a particularly brutal prison, Attica

Correctional Facility in upstate New York, and he'd recently been attacked by another incarcerated person. John thought Berkowitz might be in need of validation. During Berkowitz's spree, New York City's tabloids closely covered the case, and for a time, Son of Sam headlines were a common occurrence. At the opening of the interview, John dropped a copy of one local paper, the *New York Post*, before Berkowitz. "A hundred years from now, no one's going to know John Douglas," John recalls saying. "But a hundred years from now, David, everybody's going to know the Son of Sam." John made Berkowitz feel as if he had been placed on a pedestal, and from his perch, the Son of Sam granted a comprehensive interview.

TAKE A CUE FROM JOHN: Situations where two individuals aren't in full agreement can almost always benefit from empathy, which acts as a show of goodwill and can allow easier access to common ground.

SPOT DISHONESTY

Often, murderers don't present conventional physical cues of dishonesty. They're seasoned liars. An average person might have trouble untangling the plots of a convicted killer, but John has developed a sense for reading them through years of experience. Your average liar, however, is much easier to read. Avoiding eye contact and fidgeting are markers, says John. So is repeating an interviewer's questions, possibly "because they're stalling for time."

Combativeness from the subject may also indicate that questions are getting close to something they're hoping to avoid discussing. On the other hand, copious compliments may also serve as distractions. To determine whether open hostility or persistent praise are part of a dishonest scheme, John suggests comparing the behavior in question with how the person typically acts. If it's inconsistent with how they typically act, it's possible that they're concealing something.

TAKE A CUE FROM JOHN: Dishonesty can be an effective strategy during negotiations—but only if the other party can't recognize liars. When bargaining, keep an eye out for the

telltale signs of a bluffer. If the exchange doesn't feel quite right, trust your intuition.

MIRROR

Another way to placate a difficult interview subject is to mirror their words and body language back to them. Perhaps without the subject even realizing, you're communicating to them that you seek to please them. That messaging can create connections, research shows. John uses mirroring during his own interviews. When he sat down with Charles Manson, who started rambling in what John describes as his signature "singsongy" manner, John paraphrased Manson's words back to him. "And when I did that, he really was interested," John says. (For more tips on mirroring, check out former FBI negotiator Chris Voss's MasterClass.)

TAKE A CUE FROM JOHN: When interacting with someone for the first time, it might be helpful to mirror their behavior to cultivate a sense of connection and trust.

NO. 04

TASK: **John's Survival Tip**

NAME: **Be Decisive**

When you're presented with a choice, it's important to make one, or you may lose any say in the situation. For example, one friend asks you to go to dinner, another to a concert. "If you wait long enough, it'll be too late" for either, John writes in *Profiling: Everyday Life Situations for the Young Woman*. When the stakes are higher and you're in a dangerous scenario, it's important to act when the window to do so remains open. You can't be sure when it'll slam shut.



Tools of the Trade: A History of Techniques to Extract Information



Detecting deception is an ancient art



Ling is ancient—so ancient that some experts argue it's helped give rise to complex spoken language. In any case, many researchers agree that once the art of intrigue spread amongst humans, so did the art of lie detection. For centuries, people have designed methods to gauge truthfulness. Some of those methods rely on charming a subject, while others rely on brutalizing one. Here are just a few of history's most iconic techniques to extract information.

ANCIENT CHINESE RICE

Government authorities in ancient China may be responsible for history's first lie detector. When they arrested someone suspected of committing a crime, officials would stuff rice into the mouth of the accused. Then, the suspect would answer questions pertaining to the crime. Afterward, they would spit out the rice for authorities to examine. If the rice was dry, the suspect was consid-

ered a liar, because a dry mouth was recognized as a sign of nervousness.

A NOBLEMAN'S AIDE

In the European Middle Ages, royal bloodlines often defined who held power—leading, in part, to nobles being particularly possessive of their relationships. If a nobleman suspected that his spouse was committing infidelity, he would task an aide to sit next to her during a meal and hold her hand. With hands clasped, the aide would mention the names of both the nobleman and the man behind the suspected affair, feeling for the wife's pulse in response to each. A static heart rate for her husband and a quickened one for the other man was thought to be tantamount to confession.

POLYGRAPHS

Various versions of the polygraph test, also known as the lie-detector test, have existed since the early 21st century. Through the years, the



basic approach has remained the same: The machine measures core vital signs, like breathing and heart rate, which interrogators monitor for changes in response to questions. A shift in vitals is thought to indicate stress. Polygraphs constantly appear in pop-culture depictions of crime fighting, but in reality, they're quite controversial (and often receive criticism for being unreliable). John, for example, is "really against them," he says. He points to killers like Ted Bundy, a sociopath who could lie without showing "signs of anxiety and nervousness in a polygraph test," which allowed him to deceive without being detected, John says.

FABRICATING A SENSE OF SAFETY

The head interrogator for Nazi Germany's World War II air force was the cunning Hanns Scharff, who became famous for his virtuosic interview skills. Instead of using violence, Scharff would offer captured American fighter pilots pastries made by his wife; he'd also take the

prisoners on countryside strolls during his questioning. Disarmed soldiers would then divulge confidential information without realizing it. Scharff's approach proved far more effective than his colleagues' more aggressive methods, and after the war, the U.S. Air Force had him give a series of lectures to American personnel on his techniques.

PSYCHEDELIC DRUGS

In the 1950s, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), America's civilian foreign intelligence service, embarked on a pursuit for the perfect mind-control drug. Such a substance could be used to scour the brains of captured spies from the Soviet Union and China, America's Cold War adversaries. Over the next two decades, the agency conducted a series of experiments in which soldiers, prisoners, and members of the public were given a vast array of candidate drugs and observed. The secret effort was called MK-ULTRA. In one case, test subjects received a dose of LSD (known informally as acid) every day for more than two

months. By the early 1970s, the project ended. Officially, the CIA never found a tool to fully hack the human brain, and the documents detailing MK-ULTRA's particulars were destroyed—or remain classified.

THE REID TECHNIQUE

This controversial method of interrogation was developed during the mid-20th century and is now a mainstay of U.S. law enforcement. The technique involves creating a stressful environment for the subject, interrupted by moments of benevolence that are designed to guide them into a confession, as well as giving the subject fabricated information that could prove the subject's guilt. A common configuration of the Reid Technique is the Good Cop/Bad Cop strategy, where one officer plays the disciplinarian while the other gently comforts. The technique is effective at producing confessions, but experts often point out that the practice has yielded false confessions in the past—even people will say what they must to end an unpleasant situation.

NO. 05

TASK: John's Survival Tip

NAME: Gauge Deception

Serial killers are often excellent liars because they're also psychopaths. But most people haven't killed—and most people aren't psychopaths. That means many are likely to exhibit telltale signs of lying. "As an observer and listener, you can determine whether someone is being deceptive by paying special attention to body language," John writes in *Profiling: Everyday Life Situations for the Young Woman*. "Avoiding eye contact, maintaining poor posture, seemingly automatic or robotic arm and hand movements, rapid breathing, and increased perspiration are reactions that should be noted."

NO. 02

TASK: Assignment

NAME: **Developing Your Intuition**

When you comprehend something immediately without an obvious point of reference, you're experiencing intuition at work. John considers intuition to be experience coupled with a gut reaction. He's witnessed intuition's power at work, both when speaking with serial killers and with potential victims who listened to their instincts and avoided a dire fate. "The time when intuition is really very effective is primarily in stressful types of situations," John says.

Honing intuition has uses beyond escaping danger. In lower-stakes moments, intuition can benefit you more than you may know.

First, consider times when you listened to your intuition and had favorable results. Was there a point when you were offered a spontaneous social opportunity that you felt compelled to join—and had it yield close friendships? Brainstorm what you think brought about your intuitive sense. What made you ultimately decide to act upon it?

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Next, consider times when you felt your intuition activating but didn't act upon it. Perhaps a job opportunity you turned down. What were the results? Brainstorm how the outcome would've been different if you had listened to your intuition instead.

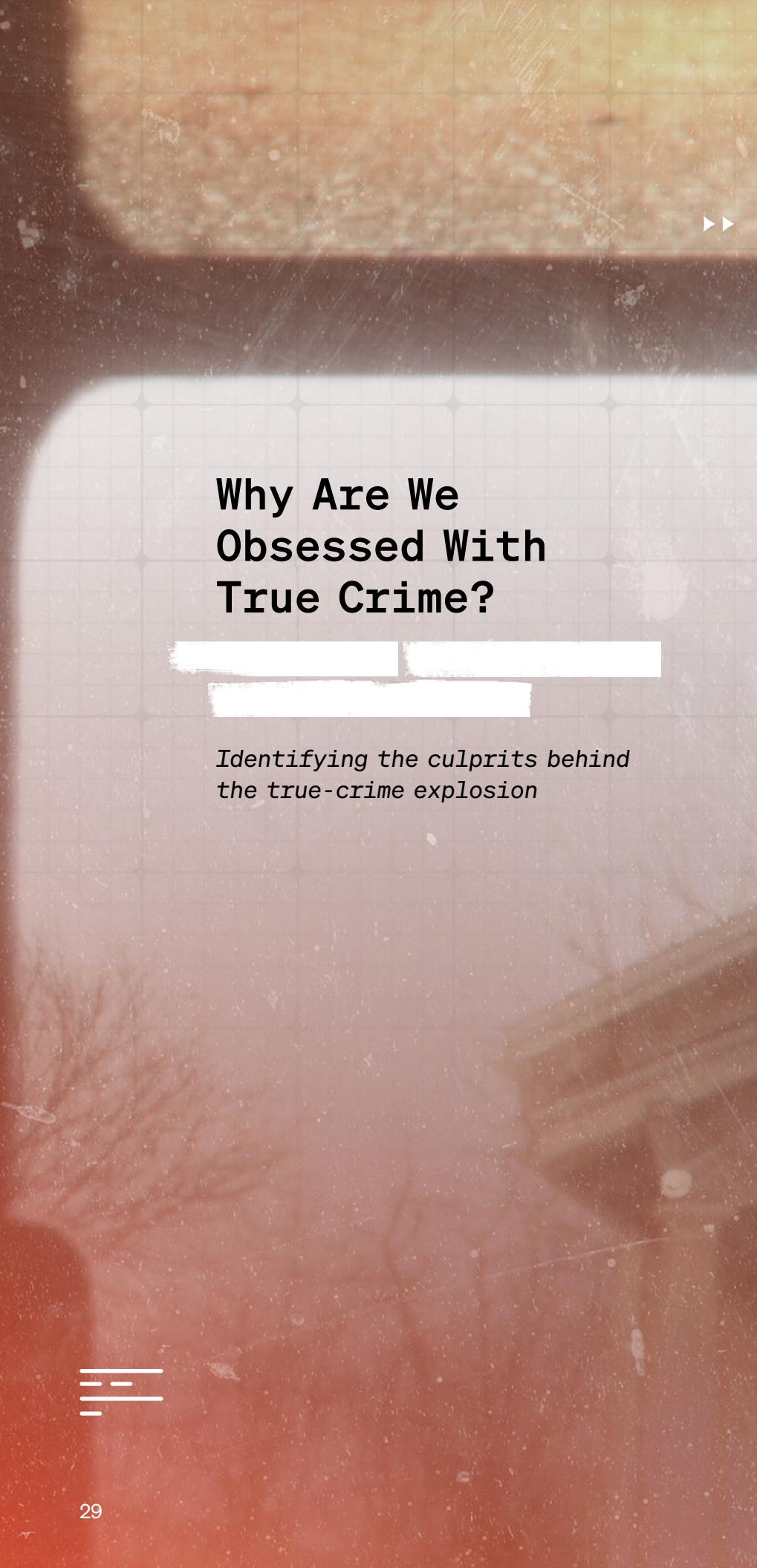
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And what about your present surroundings? Put yourself into a familiar space and find out how many things you can observe about your environment that you hadn't before. Write them down and relate the findings to your typical feelings toward the space.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

CONFIDENTIAL



Why Are We Obsessed With True Crime?

*Identifying the culprits behind
the true-crime explosion*

»

Since 2020, at least eight true-crime documentaries have reached the summit of American streaming service Netflix's "Most Popular Series" list. From the podcast realm, the megahit *Serial* reached levels of popularity usually reserved for the screen—a testament to true crime's ability to captivate. These days, a new true-crime podcast or docuseries seems to make a splash every week—and these shows have staying power. Why is this genre so resilient? Why are audiences so *obsessed*? Like the narratives that arrest droves of viewers and listeners, the answer isn't so simple.

INSTINCTS

True crime has fascinated audiences throughout history. The 1970s was dubbed the "golden age" of serial killers not only because a large number of them were active at the time, but also because the public and media outlets followed their actions closely. The interest in crime runs back into prehistory, though, probably because it stems from a feeling experts say is deeply psychological rather than a reflection of any particular moment in time. They say that humans calm with the knowledge that they're *not* the victim of something. By absorbing a true-crime plot, audiences become aware of a tragedy that happened in the world they inhabit while simultaneously experiencing a sense of relief that they were not involved.

SAFETY

Beyond any instinctual reassurance true crime can offer, researchers suggest that some people consume true crime to ensure they won't become victims in the future. In 2010,

researchers at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign conducted a survey of reader reviews of true-crime books. The study found that women are more likely than men to read the genre and that women were particularly interested in narratives that explored the motivations of criminals, featured female victims, and included details on how victims escaped. Not only does true crime ensnare fans with the relief that they're safe, but it may also entice with the possibility of tips on how to stay that way.

PROCESSING TRAUMA

Do crime survivors consume true-crime content? One study from the University of South Carolina showed that the answer is yes. The study, which focused on female survivors of domestic violence who counted themselves as true-crime podcast listeners, found that the stories could help those survivors process their own trauma. By engaging with the podcasts, the survivors "have formed a collective identity and a virtual community where their voices are heard, their stories are normalized," the study notes. For both victims and non-victims, true-crime stories can deliver a sense of validation and acknowledgment by articulating the details of something unspeakable.

THE PANDEMIC

The true-crime genre was already on the rise in early 2020, but the COVID-19 pandemic supercharged its popularity. The start of the pandemic lockdown coincided with the launch of the true-crime docuseries *Tiger King*, which revolved around a feud between big cat conservationists that lead to a murder plot. Sud-

denly, millions of bored Netflix subscribers the opportunity to demo the genre and forget about the outside world. Within 10 days, more than 34 million viewers had given the series a try. Other shows, like *Dateline* and *48 Hours* from American broadcast networks NBC and CBS respectively, also experienced bumps in viewership in March 2020 compared with March 2019. Those increases led to speculation that recognizable and clearly defined villains—even those who perpetuate violence—are more satisfying than nebulous enemies (like the world's new heavyweight antagonist: a mystifying illness without an obvious solution). In summation: There's the devil you know and the devil you don't.

A TASTE OF DANGER

Ever craned your neck while driving to get a better view of a car accident on the side of the road? In 2021, a University of Chicago study found that participants were drawn to morbidity, despite its unpleasant nature. There is a level of fascination and curiosity that draws people in. Perhaps it's because even when audiences are mucking about in a crime scene, their feet aren't actually touching bloody linoleum floors. Just as horror movies can drop viewers into the bowels of a dungeon, or roller coaster can let people feel like they're falling from the sky, true crime allows you to encounter a dark, menacing corner of the human experience—and then walk back out safely. True crime derives its stories from fact, so the experience is closer to reality than a soundstage or a roller coaster, but audiences are still insulated by crafty storytelling and high production value. It's another thrill elixir.

NEXT PAGE:
A ROSTER OF
TRUE-CRIME MEDIA

For the Record

True-crime storytelling comes in many shapes and sizes. From classic books to cutting-edge docuseries, these stories pique interest and make spines shiver. If you're looking to get familiar with the genre, start with these iconic retellings

TELEVISION SHOWS



The Jinx

American real estate heir Robert Durst avoided charges despite a series of suspicious deaths around him, starting with the disappearance of his wife in 1982. For this 2015 docuseries, Durst agreed to be interviewed, and what he discloses in front of the camera makes *The Jinx* as much a part of the Durst story as the murders are.

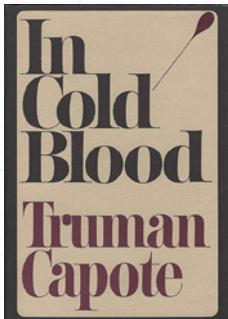
Tiger King

More than 34 million viewers tuned in just 10 days after the series debuted. In part, that was thanks to its serendipitous timing—*Tiger King* hit American streaming service Netflix in March 2020, just as the world shuttered amidst the COVID-19 lockdown. The series' ascension to cultural-phenomenon status came in part from its cast of eccentric characters, namely zookeeper Joe Exotic, who becomes embroiled in a murder plot.

Making a Murderer

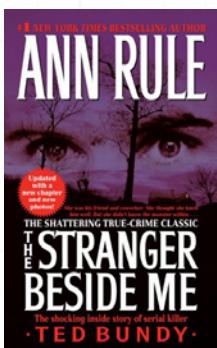
Creative and romantic partners Laura Ricciardi and Moira Demos drove to Wisconsin from New York after learning about Steven Avery, who'd been convicted for attempted murder, sexual assault, and false imprisonment, exonerated, then charged with killing photographer Teresa Halbach in 2005. They brought a camera with them. Their documentation of Avery and his topsy-turvy case premiered on Netflix in 2015.

BOOKS



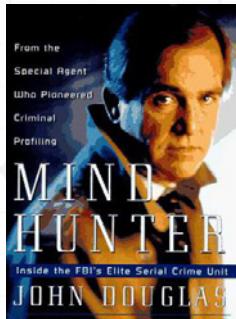
In Cold Blood

The tale that started it all. After a harrowing 1959 quadruple murder in rural Kansas, American writer Truman Capote set out for the Midwest to write a “nonfiction novel” about the event. After six years and numerous interviews with the two killers, *In Cold Blood* was published. It launched Capote into the limelight, becoming a foundational work.



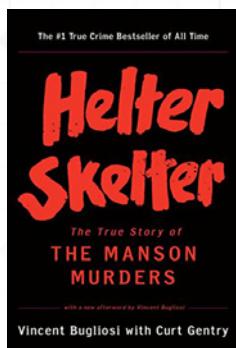
The Stranger Beside Me

When American writer Ann Rule began following the disappearances of women on the news, she was enraptured. Unbeknownst to her, however, the killer had been in her life for years: A coworker at the crisis clinic where she worked was eventually charged with the murders. His name was Ted Bundy. Rule’s relationship with Bundy anchors this spooky account of his murders.



Mindhunter

John was already a legend within the FBI when he published *Mindhunter* in 1995, but the book made his expert status on the human condition publicly known. In it, John recounts his experiences interviewing the 20th century’s most formidable serial killers. In 2017, Netflix launched a series inspired by the book and bearing the same name.



Helter Skelter

After Los Angeles assistant district attorney Vincent Bugliosi achieved convictions against Charles Manson and four of his followers, he teamed up with American writer Curt Gentry to tell the story. The 1974 book takes its name from the subject it explores: Manson’s race-war prophecy stemming from an obsession with the Beatles’ *White Album*.

PODCASTS/RADIO



Serial

This 2014 spin-off of the radio program *This American Life* followed the case of Hae Min Lee, a Maryland high school student who went missing before her body was eventually found in a park. Lee’s ex-boyfriend, Adnan Syed, was convicted of murder. Host Sarah Koenig probes the contours of the case, and jailhouse phone interviews with Syed feature prominently. After serving more than 20 years in prison, Syed’s conviction was vacated in 2022, in part because prosecutors withheld evidence that may have exonerated him, findings that were likely discovered thanks to the podcast’s publicity.



My Favorite Murder

Each episode of *My Favorite Murder* focuses on a different crime, with hosts Karen Kilgariff and Georgia Hardstark presenting the gritty details of each case in a way that lives up to the show’s genre (crime-comedy). The series has cultivated a huge following—fans, dubbed “murderinos,” can even buy merch emblazoned with one of the podcast’s signature catchphrases: “Stay sexy and don’t get murdered.” In 2020, the podcast reached 35 million monthly downloads.



Missing and Murdered

Cree Canadian journalist Connie Walker investigates cold cases with victims who are native women and girls. Walker brings to light the plight of her subjects and the obscured status of indigenous crime victims on the whole.

Fact Versus Fiction: What the Media Gets Wrong About Profilers and Serial Killers

Are depictions of 20-somethings going out into the field to make arrests for a couple of developing hot cases true to life?
(Spoiler alert: no)

Any of America's most popular scripted television shows have revolved around an intrepid team of FBI agents who track down and arrest the nation's foremost criminals every week. In some shows, the squad in question is even a team of profilers. Despite this proliferation of crime procedurals, John still hasn't found a series that's nailed realism. Here's where he says dramatizations of federal law enforcement most often go wrong.

THE MYTH: It's common for young folks to be FBI profilers.

THE FACTS: "Early 20s? There's no way!" John says. "I had a difficult time as the youngest agent at Quantico at 31." John says that most FBI agents tend to have some life experience before joining, often starting in federal law enforcement around age 30. And even after becoming an agent, the profiling positions remain far out of reach. "Once you have five to seven years of experience, then

you may apply," John says. "However, first you must be a profile coordinator." That means that if a department seeks FBI assistance, you retrieve the case particulars, then send that information back to profilers at Quantico, Virginia. In other words, doing what John became famous for would likely put profiling hopefuls squarely in their 40s.

THE MYTH: Profilers get to travel and experience lots of the country as part of the job.

THE FACTS: It's a bit more complicated than that. John traveled frequently while working at the BSU as an instructor. However, most of the work for profilers takes place at the FBI's headquarters in Quantico. "The work comes to us," he says. Rare exceptions exist. The Atlanta Child Murders (more on page 15) case, which required John to go to Georgia, was one example, but only the most experienced agents come along in such situations. Unless the

killer is extremely active, the work stays at the desk.

THE MYTH: When profilers travel for work, they do so in style.

THE FACTS: “We don’t have a private jet,” John says. “We fly commercial—in coach.”

THE MYTH: Profilers often race against the clock to catch an active killer.

THE FACTS: Despite the rhythm and excitement of Hollywood crime shows, which often feature agents pursuing an active killer, the work of a profiler is more of a marathon than a sprint. “Generally they’re cold cases,” John says. “We’re not cracking these cases in a couple of days.”

THE MYTH: Profilers are the ones arresting killers, with guns at the ready.

THE FACTS: Often, FBI profilers join an investigation because a local police department requested “some skill or some technique forensics they don’t have available to them,” John says, and the case remains in the hands of the original investigating department. FBI profilers may have a role in a case all the way to the courtroom, but they’re not the ones calling the shots for local law enforcement. “We may help solve it, but *they* will prosecute it,” he says. Thus, the role of the profiler is more ancillary. For police departments, John calls FBI profiling “another tool in the investigator’s toolbox.”

THE MYTH: When profilers step into a police department to deliver resources and insights they can’t get locally, everything goes smoothly.

THE FACTS: When the BSU formed in 1972, John says it stood in contrast to the “just the facts, man” mentality that dominated police departments at the time—something he says TV shows miss. Often the job of the profiler included not only sharing their findings, but also selling the department on the legitimacy of the craft. “You’re up there alone,” John says. He recalls giving presentations to reticent officers in the 1980s, offering up his theory on who the culprit might be, searching for a sign of the departmental temperament. “You look in the audience and get a look of, *what is this crap?*” he says. “There’s a lot of stress put on you there, and that’s a lot of baggage.”

However, the BSU was able to overcome this struggle. “You’re part of a team,” John says. Whenever the BSU had an impact on a case, “I always gave credit to the local police.” Recognizing good work was significant, but it also bolstered the

status of the unit. “What you have is feedback coming from the people you’ve helped to your own agency,” he says. The resulting effects were an uptick of resources and credibility as the unit grew.

THE MYTH: Real-life serial killers are just like the diabolical geniuses depicted on television and film screens.

THE FACTS: “They are not,” John says. “If 100 is an average IQ, they’re within average to below average.” Dennis Rader, who killed 10 people in Kansas and evaded capture for decades until he revealed himself to police by mistake (more on page 14), had an average IQ, according to John. While some of America’s most famous criminals—like Ed Kemper (more on page 13) and Donald Harvey (more on page 14)—were far above average intelligence, “by and large, the ones we deal with are not super-intellectuals,” John says.

NO. 06

TASK: **John’s Survival Tip**

NAME: **Have a Code System**

“Don’t talk to strangers” is a childhood mantra you might remember your parents saying, but John says it’s misleading. Most people who kidnap children know their victims. In addition to teaching your children to steer clear of strangers, John recommends implementing a code system, one that’s known to the child and adults who can be trusted to care for them. Say someone drives up to the child. “The child asks the person in the car who’s going to give them a lift: ‘What’s the code?’” John says. “If he doesn’t know the code, you run like hell.”

NO. 03

TASK: Assignment

NAME: Creating Your Own Profile

As of 2022, John has been profiling criminals for half a century. Through the decades, the skills he employs at work have proved useful on a personal level, too. The approach John takes to analyze killers can also be turned inward: By taking time to consider your own motivations, you can better understand your inner workings. As with John's professional assessment, your personal assessment can help you grasp your own behavioral patterns and improve yourself.

- | |
|---|
| <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>1. Start by defining yourself. Using either a pen and paper or a drafting program, ask yourself who you are: What are your primary motivations? What are your goals and how are you achieving them? Analyze the spaces you occupy as if they're a crime scene. How do you maintain your bedroom or your work space? From these areas, what can you deduce about your own behavior? Do you notice any patterns? Document your answers.</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>2. After creating a list that represents how you view yourself, turn to the people around you. It might be difficult or awkward, but ask them about their perception of you—including weaknesses or patterns they notice. Document their answers.</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>3. Finally, review the information you've collected. How do the impressions of those around you reinforce or challenge the assessment you made of yourself? Do any predictable behaviors emerge? Are they behaviors you were aware of before? At the end, how accurate do you feel your profile was?</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> |
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[REDACTED]

Staying Grounded in a Stressful Job

In the 1980s, John's relationship with his job was killing him. Here's how he saved himself



**CLASS GUIDE
EXCLUSIVE**



John doesn't launder his memories of the early days with the BSU. "I'll be perfectly honest with you," he says. "I was not very good, initially, at coping with not only the nature of the work, but the volume of the work." He wasn't able to insulate his job from the rest of his life; finding a work-life balance became impossible. By the early 1980s, John's life was a packed itinerary of traveling to various police departments, interspersed with anxiety attacks.

A trip to Seattle almost killed him. After heading to the city with two other agents to give a routine training seminar, John collapsed in his hotel room. Days later, his colleagues kicked down the door and found John slumped on the floor. "I was in a coma for a week," he recalls. He had developed viral encephalitis—brain inflammation typically caused by viral infection—and his body broke down. Stress had weakened his immune system, which couldn't put up a serious



fight. John emerged from the coma with partial paralysis, a setback that required more than four months of rehabilitation to overcome.

The experience forced John to reconsider how he was handling stress. By adopting a series of life-style changes, he was able to continue his career for more than a decade. Try using some of the tips and tricks he has found useful in your own high-stress situations.

1

Practice Mindfulness

John has found that meditation helps regulate his mental state. He'll set himself up in a quiet place alone, take deep breaths, "and think of nothing." In fact, forms of therapy that integrate meditation have been found to drastically decrease anxiety, stress, and depression in patients.

2

Cast Off Worry

John has learned to "not worry about things I cannot control at all." He remembers a recent car accident he had on the interstate. Nobody was hurt, but the collision thwarted plans. Instead of becoming angry, John recognized there was nothing he could do and resigned himself to the situation—saving himself from superfluous stress.

3

Reframe Disruptions

"When you're working in a bureaucracy, there are changes," John says. "That can be stressful." But rather than act on a knee-jerk reaction to orient himself against changes—which are an inevitable part of working in an organization—John adopted a healthier attitude toward them. "I started looking at it less like a threat and more like a challenge."

4

Champion Communication

Disagreements may be inevitable, but you can always address them in a productive manner. While he was at the FBI, John placed a premium on communication within his team. To subordinates feeling pangs of dissent, John's policy was simple: "Tell me. Don't sit on it." Otherwise, the issue could become a source of stress and resentment.

5

Disguise Boundaries as Goals

When John was running the BSU, he attracted some of the FBI's most driven agents. "Top players," he calls them—very self-motivated, but also prone to taking on too much work. To avoid burnout, John had his workers adopt reasonable, measurable goals that ensured progress but weren't too ambitious. "Don't overestimate or overschedule, because it could be a major stressor," he says.

6

Create Peer Spaces

To alleviate stress and bring in additional perspectives, John occasionally scheduled time for "peer support system" gatherings, something that could be as simple as a happy hour. Within these spaces, team members could discuss their cases (and the corresponding stresses) in a casual way. Discussions could become cathartic releases or opportunities for colleagues to offer insights (and comfort) to each other.

“The work is always going to be there for you, so really focus on your family, your friends. That’s the true meaning in life. If you do that, you’ll be a healthy person—and you’ll be a happy person.”

- John



Invest in Professional Associations and Development

According to John, professional associations can offer venues for exchanging ideas, a sense of camaraderie between members, and even training courses. “What gives you confidence psychologically is really developing your professional expertise,” John says. That self-assurance can become useful during stressful situations, when insecurity becomes a poison pill.

8

Exercise Regularly

Creating time in the day to exercise benefits your body *and* your brain. Even a short walk each day can help you clear your mind and find a brief respite. And, according to health experts, more intense exercise can chip away at levels of adrenaline and cortisol, the body’s stress hormones.

9

Eat Well

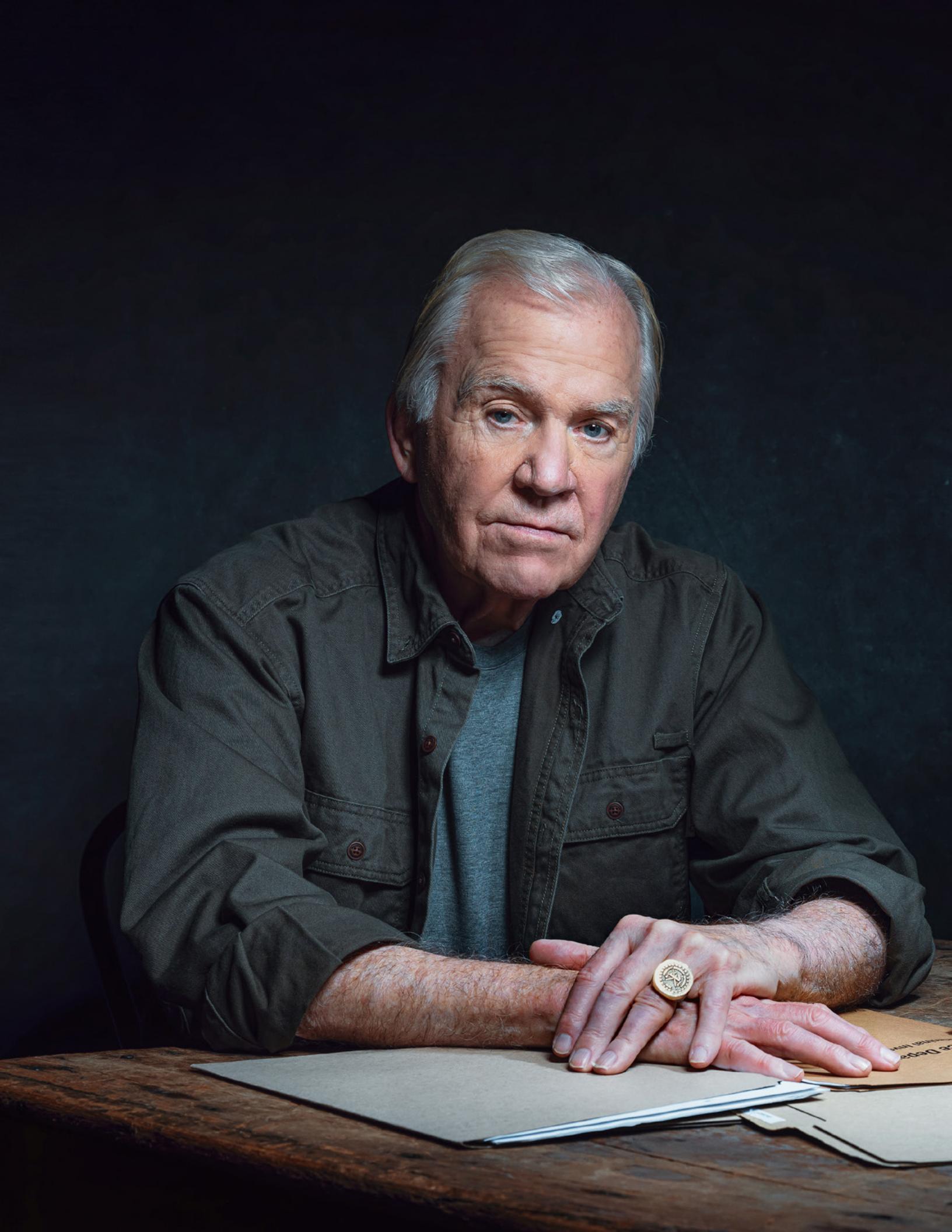
Like exercising, healthy eating is a win through and through. Research shows that consuming highly nutritious food can lead to improved energy reserves for handling stressful moments. More specifically, polyunsaturated fats, which are found in vegetables, can cut stress-causing cortisol levels.

NO. 07

TASK: John’s Survival Tips

NAME: Don't Be Docile

If someone tries to take control of you physically, it's essential that you put up a fight. You may feel wary of escalation, but as John says, “If you don’t fight your way out of this, the odds are that law enforcement’s going to be working a homicide case.” It's also important to keep in mind that by drawing public attention to yourself, you disincentivize your assailant from continuing.



"Never forget: Behavior reflects personality. What you see is most likely what you're going to get."

- John



Credits

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