

## Monstrous Arrogance: Husbands Who Choose Murder over Divorce

By

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*What possesses a husband to kill his wife when divorce is an available alternative? That is the question at the core of the following essay surveying about a dozen cases concerning husbands who have been convicted of killing their wives and whose motive appears to be that of avoiding at least one negative consequence of divorce, whether alimony, loss of child custody, or damage to reputation and standing in the community. Numerous shared elements among these compelling stories limn a profile of this specific kind of spousal murder, which is calculated, dispassionate, and abetted by a husband's ability to dehumanize his wife.*

"I was her *best* friend." Helen Harden gently corrects me after I venture that she and Elsie Eskridge had been long-time friends when Elsie was found dead in the house she owned with her estranged husband in August of 1988. "We belonged to each other. Helen and Elsie . . . we never had an argument." Even so, Helen never liked Herbert Eskridge, a younger man who flattered Elsie, in her mid-forties, with attention he was also known to shower on younger women. "After they got married," says Helen, "his attitude with the women never did change." He saw other women while married to Elsie and, once the couple separated in the spring of 1988, regularly took his girlfriend along when he met Elsie at the empty house in Glenwood Park, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago. Herb and Elsie would go upstairs for sexual relations while the girlfriend, Cynthia, stayed below. Eventually, Elsie's corpse would be discovered face down, shirt hiked up around her neck, legs splayed, and a telephone answering machine between them. Because the house was shut up and the air-conditioning turned off, the summer heat had badly decomposed Elsie's remains before the cause of her death could be determined.

Helen is far from alone in believing that Elsie died at Herb's hands. Although he's never been criminally charged, the 1<sup>st</sup> District Appellate Court ruled in a civil lawsuit that Herb was likely her murderer, thus cutting him off from Elsie's life insurance policies, totaling \$328,000. The money went, instead, to Elsie's children by her first marriage. Before Elsie died, Helen suspected Herb's capacity for foul play to satisfy his greed. "She knew I didn't like him," says Helen of her friend. "She never brought him in my house." But when Elsie left Herb, Helen took her in. Knowing about the insurance policies that designated Herb as beneficiary, Helen worried about Elsie's safety at the "breakfast" meetings with Herb. Now in her 60s, Helen recalls saying to her friend, "You're living dangerously. What color dress do you want me to wear to your funeral—red or black?" Elsie laughed and said, "Red." Helen joked about being a "hot mama" at Elsie's funeral. Later, once her premonition had come true, Helen could think only of Herb Eskridge. "I knew in my heart that he had done this," she says. Today, Helen still believes that he lured an emotionally needy Elsie to a spot where he could easily overcome her, possibly with an overdose of insulin. In the end, Helen didn't attend Elsie's funeral. "It was just too devastating—something I couldn't do."

That the predominant motive for Elsie Eskridge's murder was probably the insurance money exempts it in one significant way from a sub-species of spousal murder in which motive is more difficult to define, but often seems to be on the unthinkable order of convenience. These are murders in which husbands apparently kill their wives to save themselves some consequence of divorce that they perceive to be too costly. If and when the wives' bodies turn up—and they disappear (or are cremated) almost as often as they are found—they are typically in such poor condition that either the cause of death cannot be pinpointed or they appear to have been subjected to overkill. Or, as in Elsie's case, they are posed, perhaps to suggest a deranged killer, not the normal-seeming spouse.

I learned about this type of spousal murder while researching a specific case—an unsolved homicide in which the husband is one of two men suspected of savaging 32-year-old Kim Thomas at her Charlotte, North Carolina, home in 1990. Like Elsie, Kim was posed on her stomach, head turned to the side, nightgown raised to expose bare buttocks, and legs widely splayed. Her throat was cut nearly to the point of decapitation. To equip myself better for evaluating the evidence against the husband, I resolved to gain more background in spousal murder and sent my research assistant to the library for a few clear-cut cases I could study. From the beginning, I restricted the cases to men who were convicted (or, as in the example of Herbert Eskridge, who had had a civil judgment against them) and one of whose apparent motives was avoiding divorce; if the husband in the Thomas case had a motive, that was the likely one. I ruled out ostensible crimes of passion or desperation—as, for example, in the case of Mark Hacking, who seems to have exploded in Salt Lake City when his wife discovered in 2004 that he hadn't actually

been accepted to medical school. I sought out only spousal murders involving cold, careful, practical calculation. With the help of a determined reference librarian, my assistant began bringing me reading about a few cases at a time—3, 5, 9, 15. I finally lowered the gate at 30, but could have kept counting, and I hadn't yet added such recent, high profile cases as Scott Peterson in Modesto, California, Michael Peterson in Durham, North Carolina, and Rae Carruth in Charlotte, North Carolina, or well-known cases from the more distant past, like Klaus Von Bulow's and Jeffrey Macdonald's.

Not long after beginning to read about the cases I had in hand and to interview people connected with them, I started wondering what it is about contemporary American culture that might permit (or even encourage) a husband to choose murder when divorce is available. Or what is it about the husband? The easy answer is that at least most of these men are psychopaths. They kill without conscience and lack empathy. The easiness of the answer doesn't make it wrong, though the cases, both singly and as a group, defy single and simple explanations. They seem to breed and to feed on complication that, in turn, derives from a matrix of cultural factors.

While reviewing the murders themselves, I've come to recognize recurring themes and elements among them. Not every characteristic attends every case, of course, although nearly all the husbands have another woman waiting in the wings. But certain traits resurface frequently enough to sketch out a profile of murder that substitutes for divorce. Elsie Eskridge's death is typical and atypical in about equal measure. Herb's sense of entitlement when romancing Elsie in the presence of another woman emerges in some fashion across the board. Less predictable is that Herbert Eskridge was an African-American postal employee and an open womanizer, rather than white, white-collar, and superficially respectable.

Among the men who have been convicted for killing their wives or conspiring to have their wives killed, rather than sacrifice financial, social, and various other losses through legal divorce, an overwhelming number are physicians, thus explaining the efficient dispatch of the victim and either the disposal or the desecration of the body. Dr. Bill Sybers, a pathologist in Panama City, Florida, and county coroner, was initially convicted in 2001 of first-degree murder for injecting his 52-year-old wife, Kay, with an untraceable drug, in 1991, that stopped her heart as if she'd suffered a heart attack—possibly succinylcholine, which causes gradual paralysis, followed by potassium chloride, which would have ended her suffering almost instantly. The verdict was overturned on grounds that the scientific evidence for tracing succinylcholine was inadequate (toxic levels of potassium chloride are virtually impossible to detect, since the human body always contains some of the chemical). But, when the appeals court ordered a new trial, Sybers pled guilty to the lesser charge of manslaughter and, having already served three years to date, was released from prison. He was deported from Canada as a

convicted felon and relocated to Pensacola with the former Judy Ray, the woman he was involved with when Kay died. They married soon thereafter.

Harry Shorstein, Florida State Attorney for Duval, Clay, and Nassau Counties, was specially appointed by the governor to try the case, which consumed 8 years of his career. When I spoke with Shorstein about the complexities of the case, he explained that, while authorities are even now uncertain as to which lethal drug (or drugs) Sybers used to poison Kay, too many elements of the doctor's story implicate, rather than vindicate him. According to Sybers, Kay went into distress at 5:00 in the morning, at which point he tried repeatedly and unsuccessfully to draw blood from her for testing in his office, thus accounting for the two puncture marks on her arm. On his way to work at 6:00, he threw the needle away in a nearby dumpster, called Judy Ray, and, once in the lab, sent two assistants to check on Kay. According to Shorstein, when Sybers received the call from an assistant that Kay was dead, "the first words out of his mouth were 'no autopsy.'" This, Sybers protested, was Kay's wish. Sybers ordered the body sent directly to a funeral home for embalming, a process that would make detecting poison as difficult as retrieving the needle Sybers had pitched into the garbage to test it for poison. As a pathologist, he would be fully aware of such points.

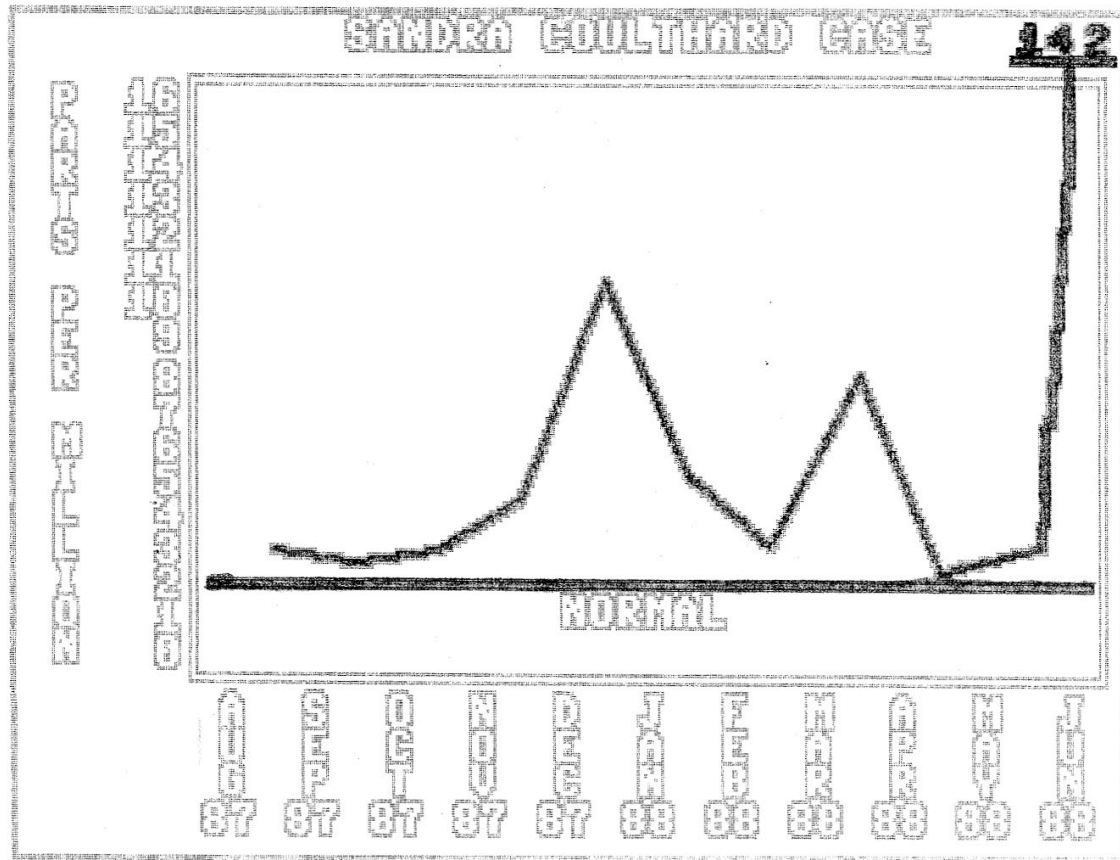
Sybers maintained that Kay's fear of doctors other than himself deterred him from calling for help earlier in the morning of the death. But Shorstein energetically responds, "I made a big deal out of this at the trial—what anybody would do, whether you were the world's leading cardiologist or an uneducated person—there are only two possible responses. One is to take your wife to the emergency room and the other is call 911." On closer examination, what Sybers said about Kay's phobia of doctors was part of a larger fiction he had long been creating to make Kay's death appear natural and inevitable. Widespread rumors that she suffered from symptoms of heart disease—chest pains, shortness of breath, and the like—ultimately traced back to Sybers himself. Although Kay bordered on obesity and the effects thereof, evidence suggests that she traveled and enjoyed a healthy social life, sometimes shopping all day with friends and, earlier on the evening she died, dining out with her husband. The two bottles of wine she shared with him during dinner may signify her hardiness, his planning, or both. In any case, they must have taken their soporific toll, along with the sleeping pill Sybers administered to her between 2:00 and 3:00 a.m. Did she ever wake up after that, as Sybers testified? Even if she did, Sybers' claim that he tried to withdraw her blood to test in his lab must be a concoction: what could a blood test have determined if she were suffering a mortal heart attack? Before Kay was buried, her heart was examined thoroughly by a Dade County coroner, whose finding, says Shorstein, "was that it was a normal heart."

When I asked Shorstein about Sybers' motive, he mentioned that Kay may have discovered some criminal activity on her husband's part that she was threatening to expose. But Shorstein can say with certainty that, at the time of Kay's death, Sybers had a "net worth, that we knew of, between five and six million dollars—a fair amount of money in 1991." Evidently, Sybers hoped to move on seamlessly to another life, with another person and without financial loss in an Equitable Distribution state—where, in other words, the court could decide to give his wife more than half of his wealth. So he gradually constructed the back-story of Kay's ill health, a fabrication that might have prevailed had Sybers not had a Deep Throat. Dr. Terrence Steiner, his partner in the pathology practice, explained to me that Sybers and a third partner, both of whom had begun to buy out Steiner's share of the practice before Kay died, completed the buy-out on the very day of Kay's death—a year and a half ahead of schedule. Steiner reported his suspicions, which comprised not only the early buy-out, but also Sybers' illegal dismissal of an autopsy for a healthy woman of Kay's age, his history of prescription drug abuse, and his current, as well as previous, affairs. Stephen Seigel, Assistant State Attorney and fellow prosecutor of Shorstein, told me that, as early as 20 years before her death, "Kay used to sit in her mother's kitchen and cry about Bill's affairs."

Poisoning effectively disguises murder of this type because it can be manipulated, even by amateurs, to imitate natural illness and is rarely tested for, especially in women whose family life would seem almost perfect. Such a woman was Sandra Coulthard, who fell desperately ill, at age 30, in July of 1988, shortly after having given birth to her second child with her husband, Rob. He was a manager at a furniture manufacturing company in High Point, North Carolina; she was a member of the local Junior League and from a prominent family, also involved in furniture manufacturing, in nearby Lexington. Both Wake Forest University graduates, they lived well and were regarded as the ideal couple.

Doctors believed that Sandy's symptoms, including severe nausea and numbness in her extremities, signaled a nervous disorder, probably Guillain-Barre Syndrome. In reality, Rob was slowly poisoning her with arsenic. As a strand of her hair would later confirm, once her body had been exhumed, Coulthard poisoned her gradually—five times over seven months, to be exact. When I visited Detective Mark McNeill, who investigated the case, he showed me the graph that toxicologists were able to plot after examining the hair. The final spike is, literally, off the chart. That was the dose Coulthard administered to Sandy in the Duke University Medical Center, where she had been transferred from High Point because of escalating symptoms. She was so bloated by then from arsenic, which causes water retention, that her skin, says McNeill, would "weep" if touched. McNeill relates how Coulthard, at Sandy's bedside "looking like a good, caring husband," gave her the final toxic ice chip, watched her expire, and went out into the hospital corridor, where he called his mistress from a pay phone. Rob became a

suspect when a physician who remembered seeing elevated levels of arsenic in Sandy's blood before she died read her obituary in the Sunday paper and contacted authorities.



Described by McNeill as an “organized psychopath,” Coulthard plotted Sandy’s demise in detail as carefully monitored as Bill Sybers’ plan. He’d ordered the arsenic in 1986 and paid for it with a check for \$196.49. But, when the box was delivered to his workplace displaying a skull and crossbones, he realized he’d miscalculated. A woman co-worker even teased him about whether he was planning to kill his wife. He responded that, no, he had a rat problem at home. Two years later, after Rob had changed jobs, the poisoning began. In the meantime, he had amassed insurance policies on Sandy’s life totaling \$351,000. That the policies designated the two children, rather than Rob himself, partly kept prosecutor Richard Lyle from arguing successfully at a pre-trial hearing to try the murder as a capital case: if the children were to inherit the insurance money, then Rob couldn’t be accused of the aggravating circumstance of profiting from her murder.

Before the hearing, even Coulthard's lawyers understood that the evidence against him was sound. So, once the death penalty was removed from the table, Coulthard almost instantaneously submitted a guilty plea to first-degree murder, thus obviating a trial, avoiding execution (the death penalty could have been re-introduced later, had the case gone to trial), and securing the possibility of parole (for which he'll first become eligible this year) within 20 years. Lyle recalls the public outrage that followed Coulthard's escape from the death penalty. "This poor unsuspecting mother—who died this unexpected death with her husband continually poisoning her while she's in the hospital—was just a death penalty case for a lot of people." The judge presiding over the case, Bill Helms, received death threats as a result of the plea. Says Lyle, "He was literally afraid and never came back, never held court here again."

Coulthard's naming his children as beneficiaries also hinted at his larger plan. According to Lyle, he wasn't just seeking divorce; he was looking to escape the whole family. "He just didn't want to be in the family situation. He wanted to live the high life—high roller, good looking, and available young guy." By the time Sandy's poisoning began, Rob Coulthard had indeed waded into gambling and consorting with other women. In debt and addicted to gambling, he once called a bookie from his Baptist church to place a bet. Perhaps he planned to bleed the insurance money from the children to sustain this lifestyle. But Lyle thinks that the insurance was intended as a trust fund for the children, whom he hoped to place with Sandy's parents. The children, like Sandy, would be an obstacle to what Mark McNeill refers to as Coulthard's "pleasure-seeking." As Lyle puts it, "Part of the deal was to make sure those children wouldn't be a liability to him." McNeill adds, "It was pretty clear in his mind that divorce was not an option because it was going to cost him money he didn't have and probably position." All the more poignant that Coulthard's parents, a school teacher and a librarian from rural North Carolina, bartered everything they owned to hire two of the best lawyers in the state to defend their son. Although not in the way he'd intended, his small children, who are now young adults, did indeed grow up under the care of Sandy's parents.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of this case to understand is Sandy's lack of awareness toward Rob's intentions and behavior. I have heard it explained variously by friends and officials. She was busy with her new baby and focused on her illness, some say. Richard Lyle contends that Coulthard "didn't *not* like Sandy, you know? That wasn't the problem." When I ask, "She was in his way?" he responds, "Yeah." Without real feelings toward her, he could, apparently, counterfeit worry and concern. By all reports, Coulthard was a prodigious actor, with a gift for promoting himself and enlisting others' trust. McNeill talks about how, "after the fact, people started comparing notes. At work he had the appearance of being efficient and doing well. Actually, he was just playing. But nobody knows this because he's projecting this image of competence. One of his former bosses said, 'I don't know if he did it or not, but if you get him for doing it,

you got the sharpest boy that ever came through this town.”” In effect, Coulthard didn’t leave traces of emotion for even his wife to pick up on because, as McNeill says, “This wasn’t an emotional crime. It wasn’t a crime of passion. It wasn’t the usual spouse-killing. It was a practical matter.”

The salient elements of both the Sybers and Coulthard cases are hallmarks of the particular spousal murder that McNeill cites as atypically devoid of feeling: icy and shrewd calculation, preservation of outward cool and well-being that relies on the family’s idealized image, and self-centeredness that the word *narcissism* only begins to convey. Both the killer’s ingenious planning and his ability to blend in and move on easily after the fact enhance his elusiveness. The long gap between Kay Sybers’ death and her husband’s murder conviction—10 years—is not unusual in this kind of case. In another example, Andy Rosenzweig, then Chief Investigator for the Manhattan District Attorney, reopened the case against plastic surgeon Robert Bierenbaum in Manhattan, 11 years after Gail Katz-Bierenbaum had vanished. Rosenzweig is also the focus of Philip Gourevitch’s 2000 *New Yorker* article “A Cold Case,” expanded into a book by the same title and concerning the other of the two cases that, as Rosenzweig readied to retire from his position, he says, “were gnawing at me.” Initially treated as a missing persons case, Gail’s sudden disappearance in 1985 had always struck Rosenzweig as involving her husband, though at the time the case was initially turned over to him—in 1986—people who had known the couple were reluctant to say much. Hence, Rosenzweig’s interviews yielded little evidence that could lead to an indictment.

On a June morning, I spoke with Rosenzweig by phone, at his home, about how he reopened the case, which, once solved, became the basis of an episode of *Law and Order*. Rosenzweig emerged from retirement twice, first serving as Assistant Chief of Police in Providence, then moving to Hartford, where he became Assistant Chief of Police. His grainy baritone is unmistakably inflected with the accent of his first home base, the South Bronx. When he returned to the Bierenbaum case in 1997, he found that some witnesses were more approachable. Dr. Bierenbaum, who had his private pilot’s license, had been flying out to Las Vegas to gamble and to be with women since before Gail disappeared. Now, several of those women told Rosenzweig and his partner about a persistent pattern of behavior. At first, says Rosenzweig, Bierenbaum “presented very well—as this Renaissance man.” He was well off, good-looking, and multi-talented—a pilot, gourmet cook, classical guitarist, and skier. But “within a short time,” Rosenzweig continues, “he had these maniacal traits and was just so overbearing and controlling” with the women he had initially impressed.

By now, Bierenbaum had remarried (this time, a physician), begun a family, and relocated to Minot, South Dakota, where he lived like a model citizen, making regular *pro bono* trips to Mexico to perform corrective surgery on children’s facial deformities.



But Rosenzweig knew that Bierenbaum had been reported by other women to fly off the handle at the slightest irritation and had once nearly strangled Gail to death in their Manhattan apartment for going out on their balcony to smoke after he'd forbidden cigarettes inside. In addition, he had nearly drowned Gail's cat before she married him because he thought she loved it more than him. Bierenbaum had in fact drowned a former girlfriend's cat.

A turning point came when Rosenzweig's co-investigator found out about the pilot's license, a detail Bierenbaum had kept from police. Upon checking with several rental establishments, the detective learned that Bierenbaum had rented a Cessna for 2 hours on the afternoon of Gail's disappearance. The past began to take shape. Rosenzweig theorized that Bierenbaum had somehow murdered Gail in the apartment (probably just after she had announced that she was leaving him) and put her possibly dismembered remains in one or more duffle bags, which he tossed from the Cessna into the Atlantic. The presiding judge at Bierenbaum's trial (Leslie Crocker Snyder, who has herself appeared in *Law and Order* as Judge Rebecca Logan) later speculated that he'd used his surgical skill to cut apart Gail's body. Another foundational layer of the case became the testimony of Gail's former psychiatrist, Michael Stone, who had seen Bierenbaum once with Gail and had heard enough from Gail alone to fear for her safety. When Rosenzweig first called Stone, the doctor said, "Well, I've been waiting a long time for this phone call." Rosenzweig told Stone, "We still feel strongly that Dr. Bierenbaum might have killed his wife," to which Stone replied, "Oh, I know he killed her." So threatened had Stone himself felt about Gail's situation that, before she died, he'd asked her to sign a waiver releasing him from responsibility if her husband harmed her. He'd warned her repeatedly to remove herself from her dangerous circumstances.

With Stone's testimony, remembers Rosenzweig, "this was really becoming a tryable case," despite the long delay between the crime and a trial, the lack of physical evidence, and the missing body. Early in the reinvestigation process, when Rosenzweig phoned Gail's sister Alayne to apprise her of his intent, he had met with some bitterness about the lack of progress on the case to date. Then, says Rosenzweig, "one of the most astonishing things" happened. Alayne said, "Well, you know, they found my sister's torso." Rosenzweig comments, "I think it was astonishing to her that I didn't know that." The family had interred the torso with full burial rites because a pathologist had matched it with previous X-rays. Reluctantly, Rosenzweig asked the family to allow exhumation for DNA testing. If they had a match, then they had a murder, especially because the torso was found disarticulated—that is, with limbs surgically removed. The family consented, but the DNA didn't match. To this day, Rosenzweig is loath to confirm that the torso is not Gail's and, instead, considers the lack of a DNA match a mystery. Still, without the DNA evidence, Gail's death—as well as her murder—would have to be established circumstantially. One of the most damning anecdotes about Bierenbaum at

prosecutors' disposal concerned a call he received at night while in bed with a girlfriend, Roberta Karnofsky, in Las Vegas. Port Authority Police were calling to tell him that they'd found a homeless woman in New York who looked like Gail. Karnofsky related that Bierenbaum seemed annoyed and said simply, "Don't worry, it's not her."

How Bierenbaum might have known as much didn't surface during his trial for first-degree murder. Juror Henry Lumpkin credits the prosecution's painstakingly argued case for the conviction. "The defendant really had no case," says Lumpkin, "but all the evidence the prosecutor presented had to be pretty close to accurate because the defendant's attorney had no back-up." Prosecutors Stephen Saracco and Daniel Bibb demonstrated step-by-step how the murder could have happened. The defense hardly countered, except to advance a sketch or two about how Gail's loose living must have led to her demise: she had engaged in affairs and experimented with drugs recreationally, details Bierenbaum's lawyers tried to exploit. Lumpkin also remembers how startling Bierenbaum's drowning of the cats seemed, although he didn't hear about it until after the trial. "To drown a cat," he comments, "that in itself is horrible." It confirmed for Lumpkin the verdict that jurors had spent two days deliberating.

"You know," Rosenzweig tells me, "people tend to credit me with reopening this case, and I tend to say, 'What the hell took me so long?'" He regrets that Gail's parents died relatively young, under distress about Gail's disappearance and without ever knowing of Bierenbaum's conviction, for which he's serving 20 years to life. I asked Rosenzweig how Bierenbaum could have possibly behaved so brutally toward his wife, then gone on to live such a seemingly placid, Midwestern existence. He answered that the doctor's parents had been pressuring their son to monitor his aggression, impulse to control, and sense of superiority. (About the last trait, one of the doctor's colleagues remarked, "Let's just say he had a low tolerance for stupidity.") Rosenzweig says, "This is a very complicated person, and people do operate on different levels all the time. I think this is an extreme of that." Rosenzweig also admits that this man, who Dr. Stone once told him was beyond treatment, "wasn't a normally developed man," but "a warped, warped individual." Even so, he resembles many of the other husbands in this group, who kill once—often brutally—then never again.

Like Bierenbaum, Mark Winger almost evaded detection. By the time his meticulous manner of extricating himself from his marriage was unmasked, he had created a new life for himself. And like Bierenbaum, Winger thought highly of himself. His hubris finally proved his undoing. Donnah Winger was a 31-year-old mother of a newly adopted 3-month-old daughter in Springfield, Illinois, when, in August of 1995, rescue workers arrived at her home in response to her husband's 911 call. Donnah appeared to have been badly beaten by a man whom Mark Winger had shot twice. Both Donnah and the man, Roger Harrington, still had faint pulses. As medics struggled to

keep them alive, they, of course, treated the crime scene as a rescue scene, thwarting later forensic reconstruction of what happened. Neither Donnah nor Roger pulled through. Winger reported that he had been upstairs when he heard a thump and ran to get a gun on his way to find Donnah; he swore he'd discovered Harrington striking Donnah's head with a ball and claw hammer and killed him in the act. The community huddled around Mark Winger, bereaved widower, single parent of an infant, and brave slayer of his wife's murderer. Soon, he married the baby's nanny, hired five months after Donnah's death.

Winger had pulled off what might have been the perfect double murder. Weeks earlier, Donnah had been taken home from the airport in a limousine driven by Harrington, who spooked her with seemingly delusional ramblings about his out-of-body experiences. Harrington's perceptions were indeed distorted, although probably not a threat to Donnah, owing to Schizotypal Personality Disorder, a malady that induces strange beliefs, behaviors, and speech in its victims. When Donnah arrived home safe, but rattled, Winger seized his opportunity. He complained to Harrington's boss at BART Transportation and thus caused Harrington's suspension from a much needed job, pending his success at making amends with Winger. Although Winger denied ever having met or talked with Harrington, the latter's live-in girlfriend testified that Winger had called Harrington (she had the evidence on caller-id), and, on the day that Harrington arrived at Winger's house, he had Winger's name, address, and apparent appointment time (4:30) on a slip of paper in his car. Evidently, Winger had lured Harrington to his home under the pretext of smoothing things out between them.

John Schmidt, Sangamon County State's Attorney, theorizes that, as soon as Harrington entered the house, Winger shot him in the head, bringing Donnah running from upstairs, where she left the baby on a bed. Winger attacked her from behind, delivering seven sharp blows to her head, the first of which, Schmidt surmises, was "incapacitating." When Winger then called to report an emergency, Harrington began to groan, as is audible on the 911 tape. Winger hung up, pretending the baby needed him, shot Harrington a second time, and dialed 911 again. (In such calculated murders, the husband's 911 call often implicates him because he's so obviously setting up his alibi through what he divulges to the operator.) Later, when Winger maintained that he fired both shots in rapid succession, the next-door neighbor, Lauralee Smith, contradicted him with testimony that, as she was getting out of her car that afternoon with several children, she heard only one gunshot. The other, argued Schmidt, had already been fired sometime before Smith arrived home. The crime scene was the goriest that Springfield detectives had ever seen. Schmidt calls the attack on Donnah "very, very violent" and "up close and personal." Was Winger trying to frame an alleged madman, was he extremely angry at his wife, or did he want to ensure that he killed her?

Three particular events led to Winger's indictment, six years later. One was the recovery of three previously misplaced Polaroids a detective had taken of the two bodies before they had been moved by the rescue workers. The positioning of the bodies didn't conform to Winger's account of events, but, rather, suggested that Winger killed both. A second crucial occurrence was the revelation by Donnah's best friend, DeAnn Schultz, that she was having an affair with Winger at the time of Donnah's murder. So tortured had been Schultz's conscience before she went to the police with information about Mark's self-incriminating statements that she suffered severe depression for years. Testifying that Winger had remarked how much easier life would be for them if Donnah died and that Winger had urged DeAnn to participate in Donnah's murder, DeAnn felt that, if she didn't come forward, she "would cease to be a vital person." The third key element in Winger's exposure was all his own: when he filed a civil suit against BART Transportation, Harrington's employer, he was, necessarily, deposed. That's when he got caught in the lie that he didn't know who Harrington was before the day Donnah died.

Winger, who had fathered several more children with his new wife and cut off Donnah's family completely from the daughter adopted in 1995, stood trial seven years after Donnah's death. Fifty-one witnesses testified over ten days, helping prosecutors bridge the hiatus between the crime and the trial. Long before his arrest, Winger, who is now serving a life sentence without the possibility of parole, acted in a way common to murderers of his type when he visited the police department to check in with detectives about how the investigation was going. He did so, in fact, after the detectives had begun considering the case closed. Other husbands who kill their wives tend to contact neighbors and family members to see what they know about the progress of the investigation, often feigning concern about whether the killer has been identified. But, since the killer is the husband, he's fishing for clues about suspicion toward himself. Another of Winger's traits also recurs in similar cases: his exploitation of his loss to pose as the real victim, bereft of his spouse and parenting on his own.

But even more pronounced about Winger—and a major element tying together spousal murders that circumvent divorce—is the arrogance he displayed in suing Harrington's company, a move perhaps related to cultivating the image of the bereaved husband. Winger overreached, paralleling Eric Thomas, the New Jersey dentist who sued Ford Motor Company when his pregnant wife, Tracy, was apparently killed by a deployed air bag in an Explorer. Thomas' actions led to his being investigated by Ford's lawyers far more rigorously in connection with Tracy's death than he was by the trusting community of Cape May Courthouse, who had rallied around the grieving widower. Thomas, who had quickly remarried a woman he was involved with before Tracy's death, had had his first wife's remains cremated. Thus, the most significant piece of forensic evidence was gone when he and his lawyers complained that Tracy had been suffocated by an air bag. But Ford retorted that air bags don't stay inflated long enough to suffocate

a passenger and maintained that, somehow, Thomas himself had killed Tracy. As in Thomas' case, which remains open-ended, Winger trained attention on himself by taking his sense of injury one step beyond emotional loss to financial gain. John Schmidt put the idea to me in classic Midwestern terms. "Pigs get fat," he quipped, "hogs get slaughtered." Winger's guilt might have gone undetected.

Winger, says Schmidt, is a "man's man," who owned a big truck and who "considered himself a sexual prowler." The *State Journal-Register* wrote of him that he was "ultimately just another restless spouse who apparently wanted out of his marriage without the social strain or expense of a divorce." But Winger had another motive. While he clearly wanted out of his marriage to Donnah, he hoped to keep custody of the newly adopted baby. He had been asking around, before Donnah's death, about what would happen to the baby if she died.

Winger's case shares many elements with that of Bruce Koklich, found guilty, after an initial mistrial, of murdering his wife, Jana, in 2001. She was 41 years old. The Kokliches' marriage—which, like the Wingers', seemed perfectly happy to outsiders—had yielded no children, but a great deal of financial prosperity from a thriving real estate business in Lakewood, California. The simultaneity of this case with Scott Peterson's eclipsed it, but it was at least as gruesome and memorable. When I phoned Eleanor Hunter, the prosecutor in both trials and now a Los Angeles Superior Court Judge, I immediately explained that I was writing about husbands who kill, rather than divorce, their wives. "Ah," she said wryly and without hesitation, "Mr. Koklich."

Captain Ray Peavy, of the LA County Sheriff's Homicide Bureau, is a natural-born story-teller who understands this case as still another that might have proved the perfect murder. I listened to Captain Peavy, together with the primary investigator for the Koklich case, Deputy Sheriff Stephen Davis, talk about the particulars. Says Peavy, "Bruce had a plan, and it was a good plan." Koklich, he and Davis believe, was trying to implicate innocent residents in a nearby suburb for Jana's murder, but his masterful design went awry in a few irredeemable ways.

Like Gail Katz-Bierenbaum, Jana Carpenter-Koklich, daughter of former California State Senator Paul Carpenter, has never been found. When Koklich reported on a Tuesday that she'd been missing for one day, he maintained that he'd spent a quiet weekend with her at home and that, thereafter, she hadn't returned home since leaving on Monday morning. But investigators soon came to suspect that Jana hadn't been seen even by her husband after the previous Friday night, when she'd returned from a concert she'd attended with a friend. Eventually, they concluded that Koklich shot Jana late that night, when music emanating from their lavish house was louder than usual, using a pillow that turned up missing from their bed as a muffler. Wrapping her in a sheet that

was also mysteriously missing from the bed, he moved her to the back seat of her Pathfinder, where she bled profusely and nearly invisibly into the dark carpet. (Alternatively, he may have shot her in the car.) He disposed of her body and left the unlocked car, containing keys, Jana's purse, and the gun he'd used to kill her, in an area of Long Beach that is predominantly African-American. Despite his mother's warning, one young resident and his friends couldn't resist a joy-ride in a nice car. Once they had parked the car in a garage in nearby Signal Hill, it was reported by the apartment's owner. Soon after, the mother called the police to report that her son had been in the car, which by now had been on television, but she maintained that he had had nothing to do with Jana's disappearance.

Koklich, the theory goes, had attempted to frame whichever black teens might take his bait. They would be driving the car in plain view, where police would be looking for it. When apprehended, they would be in possession of Jana's purse, the gun that took her life, and unbeknownst to them, a car whose carpet was soaked with her blood. As Captain Peavy notes, if police had pursued the boys, they would likely have tried to escape, knowing that the car wasn't theirs and increasing the appearance of their guilt. "I got to tell you," says Peavy, "it's a perfect crime." But then, the glitches.

First was the report of a woman in Long Beach who saw the Pathfinder at 6:30 a.m. on the Monday that Koklich said Jana had disappeared. He'd already stated that, when he'd left home at 6:30, she was still asleep. Furthermore, the boys who had driven the car were never stopped, and, if they had been, they wouldn't have had various incriminating items with them. They had thrown Jana's purse and cell phone on top of an apartment building, from where they were eventually recovered, and had sold the gun. A local minister left \$100 of his own outside his door in hopes of retrieving the gun, which was dropped off anonymously in exchange for the money. Koklich, in addition, exposed himself by telling a co-worker he was going home to check on Jana when she didn't come into work on the Monday that, he later maintained, she went missing. The concerned co-worker insisted on going with him; when they arrived at the house, Koklich had to deactivate the burglar alarm. Thus his story of an intruder's kidnapping Jana was compromised—that is, unless the intruder had reset the alarm on his way out earlier that Monday.

Judge Hunter says that the single most meaningful piece of evidence in the second, successful trial was the person she established Jana to be—meticulous and punctual, keeping a detailed personal schedule, never having missed a hair appointment in 20 years, and rarely failing to return phone calls. On the Saturday morning that Koklich stated she was with him, she missed a massage appointment, and she didn't keep a date with her mother on the following Sunday. She never once answered her phone over the weekend—an altogether strange occurrence in view of her father's serious health

condition—or returned any calls. Says Hunter, “The evidence was just overwhelming.” Koklich was lying as to Jana’s whereabouts during three days when he knew she was already dead. Like Winger, Sybers, and others, he was asking people what they knew about the investigation and trying to create the false impression that Jana wasn’t really as reliable and organized as everyone thought.

Prosecutors will tell you that trying a case on exclusively circumstantial evidence is not the albatross that most lay people assume it is. Presumably “hard” evidence can be softened—manipulated in various ways to suit a multitude of agendas. Hunter had neither body nor definite motive. The first trial had ended with a hung jury, in fact, because, according to juror Becky Brune, some of the jurors couldn’t square the Kokliches’ apparently happy marriage with the savagery of the alleged crime. “No one, absolutely no one,” Brune remembers, thought the marriage was troubled. But, in the second trial, Hunter had the advantage with Jana’s personal habits and Koklich’s overt arrogance. Even Brune, who opposed conviction in the first trial, disliked his “posture,” which she describes as that of “a rooster—chest out, head cocked, and very smug.” Several accounts of Koklich’s womanizing affirm the perceived cockiness. Although Hunter didn’t emphasize this part of his past during the second trial, Koklich was known to have solicited prostitutes before Jana’s disappearance and to have propositioned women very soon thereafter, including his 18-year-old niece, whom he invited to model Jana’s underwear and to live with him. Before Jana’s death, he had tried to seduce a fellow real estate agent by attesting that sleeping with her would increase his low sperm count. She refused, and he returned with documentation of his medical condition and an offer of \$1000. Captain Peavy took plenty of grief when he initially showed sympathy on camera toward Koklich, who was visibly pretending concern about Jana at a press conference that he himself had assembled at his house. “He was giving this really exaggerated boo-hoo,” says Peavy. “And then, all of a sudden, in the same breath, he says, ‘we also run one of the most successful real estate offices in the Lakewood-Long Beach area, so, when in town, stop by and see us.’ He turned this grieving husband thing into an infomercial.” At this same event, he also hit on a camera woman.

The “very healthy ego” that Judge Hunter attributes to Koklich strikes me as apparent in a news photograph of Scott Falater, who, having stabbed his wife Yarmila 44 times in their backyard, then dragged her to their swimming pool to drown her, submitted that, all the while, he’d been sleepwalking. The photo, available on an Internet news site, shows Falater coolly waving to someone in the courtroom where he’s on trial for Yarmila’s murder, more in the posture of a politician schmoozing for votes than of a defendant. A look of confident ease marks his face where one might expect to see either sorrow or shame, depending on whether he were innocent or guilty.

Maricopa County Deputy Attorney Juan Martinez, who prosecuted the 1997 case in Arizona, says that he took the sleepwalking defense seriously—so much so that he amassed countless arguments against its validity in this instance. The same defense had worked in a well known Canadian case. But Martinez, who persuaded a jury to award a guilty verdict for premeditated murder, proposes that Falater had originally planned to blame the murder on an intruder, then was foiled by a neighbor who, hearing commotion next door, looked out on most of the brutal events. When the witness finally understood that Yarmila was groaning because she was in trouble (not inebriated or engaging in sexual activities), he called the police. The getaway that Falater had obviously been undertaking by stashing his soiled clothes and a bloody knife in the tire well of his Volvo was aborted. The sleepwalking defense, which Martinez thinks Falater researched before the murder, was likely his Plan B. His motive, Martinez infers, was to rid himself of a spouse who was embarrassing him because she had lost interest in the Mormon faith, to which she had converted and Falater still clung. The irony of Falater's resorting to killing in order to preserve his own stature in the church wasn't lost on Martinez.

For all of Falater's self-possession and acuity, however, he, like Koklich, fell short of performing his emotions convincingly. "He pretended to cry and be remorseful about what happened," says Martinez, "but hard as he might try, he never actually shed a tear, and I pointed this out to the jury." Also like Koklich and others, Falater made the mistake of testifying in his own behalf. "He was abysmal," Martinez remembers. "He absolutely helped me make the case." Repeatedly in such cases, the defendants, who take for granted their public poise and ease at persuading others—and who, above all, enjoy a substantial degree of control over their situations and over people in their orbit—underestimate the strain they will face when being cross-examined by skilled prosecutors. Eleanor Hunter remembers Koklich's sub-par performance in the first of his two trials—probably the reason that he didn't testify in the second.

The most calamitous strike-out on the witness stand I've come across is that of Rabbi Fred Neulander, tried in New Jersey for conspiring with assassins who bludgeoned his 52-year-old wife, Carol, to death in 1994. Yet another case with a long lapse between the murder and the trial—six years—this one broke when one of the two hired killers said enough to a newspaper reporter to raise serious suspicions. Like Koklich's, this case was tried twice—not unusual for these crimes—because the first trial resulted in a hung jury. The second trial occurred in Freehold, New Jersey, to escape the closed, opinionated community of Cherry Hill, where the Neulanders had founded a temple and lived, as more than one news account reported, an "outwardly idyllic life." But the rabbi had engaged in a string of affairs, some with congregants, for many years at the point when he attempted to use assassination, as Scott Falater used murder, to protect his outward rectitude. Divorce might have been an option for a Reformed rabbi, but also a choice that could have opened the window on his unacceptable dalliances. Once the proceedings



were underway, Neulander's coveted respectability warped and peeled like so much veneer. Elaine Soncini, a Philadelphia radio personality with whom Neulander was involved when Carol died, was deeply humiliated. By then, Rabbi Neulander had moved on to a new paramour, Victoria Lombardi—A.K.A. Miss Vicki, former go-go dancer and the ex-Mrs. Tiny Tim—who maintained the rabbi's innocence.

Despite such disclosures, Neulander was convinced that his homiletic experience would serve him well when he spoke in his own behalf. James Lynch, First Assistant Prosecutor for Camden County, told me that, to the contrary, when Neulander testified in the first trial, "He did horribly." Accustomed to making speeches and giving sermons on his own turf and his own terms, he was suddenly "forced," says Lynch, "to respond to questions he didn't like and to go over areas that he was uncomfortable going over." When the second trial arrived, Lynch recalls, "I didn't anticipate that he'd testify again." Instead, Neulander spoke to the jury at his sentencing—and to equally deleterious effect. "I think it put the death penalty into play," Lynch says. By the time he got around to speaking of his love for Carol, he'd alienated the jurors by trying to make eye contact with them and pressuring them—twice—to respond in kind to his "Good morning," as if they were his congregants. "The people I spoke with," remembers Lynch, "were almost in a state of shock at the conclusion of the remarks because they viewed the tone and the content as being terribly inappropriate and insulting—talking down and speaking in a didactic fashion, like he's trying to teach them something. It's hard for me to describe—you had to be there." Neulander is serving a life sentence. In December 2006, a New Jersey appeals court unanimously upheld his conviction, which he appealed on grounds that his trial had been unfair.

Also notable about Neulander's trial was the testimony of his son, Matthew, a physician in Charlotte, North Carolina. The toll that such situations take on children is, of course, inestimable. The younger they are, the heavier the legacy as they grow up dealing with their circumstances, a burden made even more challenging for the almost unbelievable number of children who have been at home—in *the house*—during the murder. Adult children, however, carry a weight created by their understanding that one parent has killed another, the height of presumption from any angle, but particularly from that of a child, whose love divides equally between father and mother. Tim Sybers, Bill Sybers' eldest son, shot himself, unable, he said, to live while knowing that his father had killed his mother. Matthew Neulander spoke to the same anguish and disbelief. Although a witness for the prosecution, Matthew, by Lynch's estimate, may have harbored doubt in the first trial as to his father's guilt. "But," Lynch says, "there was an intensity about his testimony the second time." After the sentencing—and his father's speech to the jury—Matthew referred to Fred Neulander as "arrogant beyond anyone I have ever met," the words of his father's oration to the jury having come across as "so

absolutely galling, absolutely so inappropriate, so frustrating and so maddening and yet so like him . . . that he would sit there as a convicted felon and eulogize my mother.”

Probably in the interest of objectivity, many juries don’t sense—or, at the least, express—the effrontery at these crimes that relatives, investigators, prosecutors, and even judges often aim at the perpetrators. Circuit Judge Jessica Cooper, presiding over the trial of attorney Michael Fletcher in Oakland County, Michigan, inveighed against the defendant, found guilty of shooting his wife Leann in the head: “You have a monstrous arrogance. In all my years on the bench, I don’t think I’ve ever seen a crime so incredibly cold-blooded or heartless. The jury didn’t buy your story, and neither do I.” Actually, at least one member of the jury bought neither Fletcher’s story nor the prosecution’s. What was obviously an instance of pre-meditated murder for Cooper and Major Crimes Prosecutor Gregory Townsend was, for juror John Patterson, less clear-cut. Referring to evidence introduced against Fletcher in court as “garbage,” he told me the second-degree murder conviction was a compromise between a majority who wanted to hand down a first-degree conviction and a vocal minority who were far less convinced of Fletcher’s guilt. Patterson, no doubt, was in the minority.

The narrative that the prosecution pieced together, which I heard about from Townsend, manifests many familiar themes in addition to detached calculation, the attempt to project responsibility for the death onto someone else, and arrogance. Fletcher contended that, in August of 1999, Leann accidentally shot herself with a gun he had been trying to load before he stepped into the bathroom. Townsend knew that Fletcher had taken Leann to a firing range earlier that evening, probably so that she would have gunpowder on her hands. But Fletcher himself shot her soon after they had reached home and had sexual relations. (Ultimately, Leann’s hands didn’t show gunpowder, but she was known to be uncomfortable with guns and probably never touched one that night.) The Fletchers’ toddler, Hannah, was at home. Leann had learned just four days earlier that she was pregnant with their second child. But Fletcher, it seems, had another future in mind for himself than that of husband to a manicurist and father to two children. Like Bill Sybers, Rob Coulthard, Bob Bierenbaum, Mark Winger, and Fred Neulander, he was leading a double life.

He was involved with a judge, Susan Chrzanowski, whose position, Townsend believes, promised him more “upward mobility” than did his family. Leann informed her sisters that she knew about the infidelity. When I asked Townsend about whether Fletcher was exploiting Chrzanowski as surely as he was betraying Leann, he replied, “Oh, no question about it. Absolutely.” Fletcher would separate from Leann, heat things up with the judge, who was illegally assigning him cases that fattened his earnings, then go back to Leann. While Chrzanowski believed him when he swore he wanted to be with her, Fletcher was lying to her about having discontinued sexual relations with his wife.

He also tried to create the impression that Leann was despondent enough about being pregnant that she might have willingly killed herself. In reality, Leann was thrilled. “He used Leann, and he used the judge,” observes Townsend, “and the judge fell for it.” Eventually, Chrzanowski apologized publicly for her misbehavior.

Leann’s mother, Gloria Meisner, is reported to have asked Fletcher out loud, “I’d like to know why? Why not divorce?” The answer in this case may well be because he thought he could and presumed he was entitled to. “He didn’t think he was going to get caught,” Townsend says. “He thought he could get away with it.” Such narcissism is connected in plenty of these cases, I’m convinced, to a husband’s thirst for control, whether fear of losing it over the wife or enjoyment of fooling others. While no clear motive emerges in the Koklich case, investigators discovered that Jana had been losing weight and attending to her appearance, going out with friends (and without Bruce), and threatening, either overtly or inadvertently, to leave the marriage. For Koklich, described by Detective Steve Davis as “very controlling,” losing Jana as a wife was also losing the co-owner of his business—to be exact, the co-owner of 51% of his business and, according to Judge Hunter, “the nuts and bolts” of the company. In all likelihood, he just wouldn’t have it that way.

Nor, it appears, would Dr. Dirk Greineder, an allergist in Boston, whose 58-year-old wife, May, had, in 1999, recently undertaken her degree in nursing and had indulged in a facelift. He abandoned her in Morse’s Pond, a park in Wellesley, Massachusetts, after he’d hit her head with a sledge hammer and, reminiscent of Kim Thomas’ 1990 murder in Charlotte, severed the arteries in her neck down to her spinal cord so that she quickly bled out. He also stabbed her heart through her ribs with a small knife. In his 911 call, which he made after running a distance to his car, he stated that he’d just found her dead, pretending that he’d left her earlier with a hurt back and had planned to meet her back in the parking lot. The copious physical evidence in the case convinced jurors, however, that Greineder’s blueprint for killing May had run amuck, possibly because the initial blow, meant to knock her unconscious, hadn’t worked and she had struggled, throwing him off course. Juror Cheryl Nixon views Greineder as a “perfectionist doctor,” who, when he lost control of the situation, “panicked,” a plausible explanation for what could be construed as overkill. (Forensic consultant Rod Englert, who testified in the case, doesn’t see overkill in this instance, but, rather, assurance that the victim is dead. “It is very difficult to kill someone,” he explains. And in cases like this one, he adds, “it’s got to be final.”) Jury foreman Stan Smith notes that, for a trained emergency room physician, Greineder did little to revive May. “This is the most controlling guy you could run into. So you think he would be able to do something besides run away.”

Charles Salvi, another juror, bluntly calls Greineder a “control nut.” When my call caught Salvi by surprise, he agreed to speak with me, although these days he prefers

not to discuss the case. The jury, he says, gave little weight to the knowledge that Greineder, another man with a double life, appeared addicted to Internet pornography and to soliciting prostitutes. Salvi believes the key to the killing is that May was going to divorce Greineder and that “he couldn’t stand the thought of her leaving him.” Nixon wonders whether, when May used the household computer to write a paper for one of her nursing courses, she came across her husband’s recent illicit Internet activity, causing Greineder to suppress her and refuse to let “tawdry revelations about the Internet sex” cause “the perfect façade of the happy family to fall apart.” Salvi gives more credence to a sign of Greineder’s overbearing control that came out after the trial: the family’s dogs could be spoken to only in German—Greineder’s, but no one else’s, native language.

“That’s the characteristic in most domestic violence situations—that kind of control.” I’m listening to Dr. Malcolm Rogers, a forensic psychologist at Boston’s Brigham and Women’s Hospital, where Dirk Greineder was once a resident. We are discussing another case in Massachusetts—that of Richard Sharpe, who, in July of 2000, gunned down his estranged wife at her Gloucester home in front of several witnesses. Rogers testified for the prosecution, specifically about Sharpe’s insanity plea, which didn’t hold. Sharpe’s crime rests on the borderline between dispassionate orchestration and spontaneous passion. Rogers thinks that, although Sharpe acted in a rage, the killing was premeditated and that Sharpe, whose jailhouse machinations have included trying to contract the death of the prosecutor who convicted him, is one excellent schemer. “Arrogant?” I ask. “Very arrogant. A very narcissistic, arrogant guy.” “Controlling?” I ask. “Very controlling. Controlling in his work as well. ‘Control freak,’ they said.” The urge to control is consistent, I suppose, with a killer’s detached calculation.

According to the *Mental Health Journal*, an electronic resource, “It is estimated that two million to four million US women are assaulted by a domestic partner every year.” Yes, wives kill husbands, and women enact violence on men, but the National Criminal Justice Reference Center, sponsored by the US Department of Justice, states that “female murder victims are substantially more likely than male murder victims to have been killed by an intimate.” Among closed cases, reports the Bureau, about one third of murdered women are known to be victims of an intimate partner. By contrast, 3-4% of male victims are killed by an intimate. Pregnancy as much as doubles a woman’s vulnerability. The need to maintain control over the spouse, insofar as it can be measured, may be the leading cause of spousal murder. So Dr. Rogers indicates, and he confirms a great deal of literature on that topic.

A man’s desire to escape responsibility and inconvenience, though, is another matter. When one of my students remarked that these husbands are rare exceptions in a generally compassionate population, I nodded, then later realized that I didn’t fully agree. Although their behavior is an aberration in the sense that it is extreme, it is also reflected

by the myriad of ways that, in our culture, we minimize, dehumanize, and depersonalize one another all day, every day. Every time an answering service assures us that, although we're on hold, our call is "very important," every time an office worker excuses a lapse in focusing on our conversation because he's "multi-tasking," every time audience members talk audibly through a movie that we'd prefer to listen to instead, we are, in effect, being objectified by others who demonstrate that, even if they value our well-being and preferences to a degree, their agendas come first. Even the latex gloves and the masks that greet us in medical offices—necessary and justifiable though they are—suggest, in their very protectiveness, emotional distance. When Meredith Vieira turns to Matt Lauer and remarks about another instance of what they call human "tragedy," they model the ease with which anyone can move on quickly from others' pain. "How awful for those people," says Meredith, as Matt sympathetically nods. "Oh, well. . . . Next: new, noninvasive procedures for fixing your double chin and stomach pouch."

As a culture inundated with news and images of others' suffering, we're understandably given to shutting down as a result of feeling overwhelmed. In response to the same barrage of human suffering, however, we've also learned to keep our distance from others' humanity, to glide past the feelings of those whose wishes and needs take too much time, energy, investment, and concern. While most of us conjure a good deal more humanity and sympathetic imagination than the likes of a Coulthard, a Winger, or a Greineder, especially if we're pressed to do so, trying to distinguish ourselves entirely from such figures is both hypocritical and a form of denial—and dangerous denial at that, since letting all blame fall upon a handful of outrageously cruel killers is tantamount to ignoring the pervasive cultural factors that give rise to such cruelty and for which responsibility is far more widespread.

Then there are those like Charles Salvi, exemplifying the spectrum's other end. Before hanging up, Salvi talks to me about his week of sequestration during deliberations over the Greineder case. At the end of that week, he says, he missed his family so much that he'd reevaluated the death penalty. Now he sees the separation from loved ones that imprisonment entails as worse punishment than death. "Do you know what I did when I came home and saw my wife?" Salvi asks me in his Massachusetts accent. "I'm a big guy, a macho guy. I was crying. I broke down and cried when I hugged my wife. . . . What he did to her, I could not fathom. I had bottled up my emotions—the judge had asked us to do that . . . I've never done that—I've always expressed myself. . . . And I'm telling you, I broke down, like a baby."