

Inside the Murder Room

Michael Capuzzo, Author

Law enforcement at all levels has made great use of the psychology of criminal profiling and crime assessment techniques, combined with the hard evidence of DNA samples, to open a new era of murder investigation. Unfortunately, many smaller police departments lack detectives or forensic psychologists trained in these investigative techniques, and even larger agencies from Chicago and the NYPD to the New South Wales Police are overwhelmed by their homicide caseload – in short, many people get away with murder, and murder increasingly depraved.

But what if a group of the finest homicide detectives and forensic psychologists ever assembled, and their peer medical examiners, federal agents – FBI, ICE, Marshals, NCIS – forensic artists, forensic anthropologists and entomologists, DNA specialists, agents from the New Scotland Yard, La Sûreté Nationale (the French National Police), NYPD, Interpol – men and women, 82 of them in all – gathered to help beleaguered law enforcement agencies solve their “unsolvable” cold cases, working pro bono for years at a time.

And what if they heard the cases, presented for example by the Kansas Bureau of Investigation or the Lubbock, Oklahoma police, in a walnut-paneled room in the Union League in Philadelphia, with a gourmet lunch under cloche and dead bodies up the screen, encouraging bonhomie as well as the pursuit of justice? That was the premise of William Fleisher, former FBI agent, Philadelphia cop, and head of U.S. Customs law enforcement in Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware, his friend Frank Bender, the world’s most accomplished forensic artist and an eccentric libertine with a wife and 100 girlfriends, who solved more than a dozen murders with eerily psychic busts of victims and perpetrators, and the renowned forensic psychologist and consulting detective Richard Walter, an acerbic character known on three continents as “the living Sherlock Holmes.”

In 1990, these three brilliant, unusual detectives founded The Vidocq Society, named for Eugene Francois Vidocq, a colorful Napoleonic era criminal-turned-father of forensic science and founder of the Surete (who lived to age 82, from 1775 to 1857, thus the 82 members). Acclaimed for innovating a new investigative form that solved cold cases, put murderers in jail, and helped overworked police and grieving families across the country, the Vidocq Society sleuths were celebrated by the international press and declared “The Heirs of Holmes” by The New York Times.

Journalist Michael Capuzzo, a former Philadelphia Inquirer reporter nominated six times for the Pulitzer Prize for his articles and books, including the New York Times bestseller *Close to Shore*, penetrated the secretive group in 2010 and published the critically acclaimed New York Times, USA Today, and Publisher’s Weekly bestseller, *The Murder Room*. The book has been called a classic of literary true crime, was nominated for an Edgar Award and recognized as one of the best detective books of the year by the Crime Writers of Great Britain, and also optioned for a television series on CBS by the producers of *Criminal Minds*, *Saving Private Ryan*. One of the most accomplished literary journalist in the country, Capuzzo has appeared many times on NPR, CBS, Fox, CNN and many other outlets.

The book focuses on remarkable cases the three partners and their associates solved, and sometimes didn’t solve, in the past 20 years, and especially on the exploits of Richard Walter, whose colorful personality belies his reputation as one of the finest forensic psychologists since the beginning of modern crime assessment in the Jack the Ripper case. Catching serial killers, cannibals, sadistic child killers, the notorious John List, who massacred his entire family in New Jersey (and was a fugitive from the feds for 17 years before Walter’s profile on America’s Most Wanted caught him in 11 days), and London’s “Gay Slayer” on assignment for Scotland Yard with unusual gusto, Walter chortles, “At the Yard I’m known as the guru of all perversity.”

Be prepared for the most intellectual and yet entertaining tour extant of the varieties of murder and justice, and Walter’s unusual critiques of the FBI and DNA science