

ANYONE YOU WANT ME TO BE

A TRUE STORY OF SEX AND DEATH
ON THE INTERNET

JOHN DOUGLAS
AND STEPHEN SINGULAR

A L I S A D R E W B O O K

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By John Douglas and Mark Olshaker

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Introduction

by John Douglas

By the mid-1980s, I'd been employed by the FBI for more than a decade and had helped create the Behavioral Science Unit at Quantico, Virginia. Using FBI profiling techniques, our unit had been pursuing serial killers from coast to coast and assisting law enforcement in identifying some of the most dangerous criminals in the United States. As we'd gained success and built a national reputation, police departments across the country had sought our help in solving difficult cases. I was consumed with this job and had few colleagues to delegate responsibilities to. More and more people wanted the FBI's help, and how could I turn down requests from those hunting serial killers? How could I not help families that had been victimized by the worst of crimes? When could I learn to say no? The answer to the last question came in 1983, when I went into a coma and barely escaped death. This brush with mortality caused me to lower my workload and to consider retirement. In 1995, I walked away from the job I loved.

I left the Bureau but didn't lose any of my desire to educate the public about protecting themselves from extremely dangerous people. I wrote about my FBI career in *Mindhunter*, which gave laypeople access to information and techniques used by the federal government to locate and catch serial murderers. I spoke on college campuses about how to keep yourself from becoming a victim. After hearing my presentation, listeners often came up to me and shared their own experiences with violent crime. When shaking their hands or looking into their eyes, I could tell that they'd been raped or robbed or deeply hurt by others. They were "silent victims," too ashamed or embarrassed to step forward and talk to law enforcement about what had been done to them. They were afraid of being victimized again—this time by the judicial system. I believe that criminals should be punished to the fullest extent of the law, but I could not fault these people for not wanting to testify because of the fear they lived with every day. Nothing was more satisfying to me than telling people how to protect themselves from predators.

I believed that law enforcement was making progress in the war on crime—until something happened that no one could have predicted. In the midnineties, the Internet arrived, and along with its great contribution to our society in so many areas, it began generating an entirely new criminal realm. The Wild, Wild West had returned, but this time it didn't look like cowboys and Indians or lawmen and gunslingers shooting at each other on the American frontier. Things had become much more complicated. The new outlaws were sitting at keyboards typing—and defrauding, robbing, manipulating, and seducing people all over the world, and in some cases, ending their lives. After watching the dramatic spread of on-line crime, I realized that the same techniques and insights we'd discovered at the FBI could now be applied in cyberspace.

Criminals had found a new hunting ground, and instead of preying on a handful of people as they

might have done in the past, these on-line predators could contact and manipulate tens or hundreds or even thousands of victims at a time. Instead of cruising the streets for potential victims, they were cruising the information highway. The possibilities were infinite and law enforcement was having trouble even figuring out how to use this new technology, let alone how to find and stop the perpetrators. There often weren't enough qualified people tracking on-line criminals, and cyber-investigations were highly complicated. If police departments had had more resources in place a few years ago, the story you are about to read might not have unfolded in the same way with the same number of victims.

In 2000, my coauthor, Stephen Singular, told me that he'd been following the John Robison case in suburban Kansas City. I began reading about the case and talking to some of those involved in the Robison investigation. The more I read, the more intrigued I became. This was the first known example of a serial killer using the Internet to find his victims, seduce them with his charm and the promise of a better life, lure them to his turf, and kill them. It was a deeply compelling example of how the Net could be abused by the most dangerous people in our society. It showed how someone with an extensive criminal background could transfer his predatory skills into the high-tech world—and just how vulnerable people can be in cyberspace. All of my previous work about serial killers seemed to have led me in the direction of this story. I suddenly had a new mission: to tell the public that the same dangers it had needed to be aware of in the regular world, it now had to be aware of in the on-line realm. You absolutely could not take for granted that people were who they said they were in cyberspace. Once you logged on to the Internet and began exchanging e-mails, you needed to be smarter and more vigilant than ever.

The John Robison story, which is an amazing tale in itself, needed to be shared with those looking for romance and sex on-line. It was the best window I'd yet found into the new emotional and criminal reality that high technology had created. New machines had created new crimes—and new law enforcement tools. Robison made history on the Net, and so did those who caught him.

The purpose of this book is educational—and it's intended to be a warning. The on-line world has changed the nature of the awareness required to prevent yourself from being victimized. In the off-line world, you can pick up on the physical signals coming from people who could do you harm. You can use your intuition, your survival instincts, your senses, and your common sense to know when trouble is near. In cyberspace, you're cut off from your senses and some of your instincts. You're often dealing with a fantasyland that is unlike anything that preceded it. You don't see the whole person at the other end of your e-mail but interact with a stranger who is only showing a small and highly selective portion of himself or herself. When you operate in such a place, you need to be keenly attuned to who you are and what you're doing, as well as what possible predators are doing. Had the women in these pages been more discerning about such things, they might be alive today.

More than anything else, the arrival of the Internet inside private residences triggered the need for a new level of thought regarding this magnificent technological tool. The essence of that thought was simple: "Be conscious of what your computer is capable of and whom it can connect you to. It has effectively invited the entire world into your home, but is everyone welcome?"

In other words, you needed to become your own profiler of human behavior. You needed not only to understand the drives of the people the Net had hooked you up to—their desires and their real motivations—but just as importantly, you needed to understand yourself. What were your own

weaknesses and vulnerabilities? What were your most secret longings? Where and how could you be manipulated? What were you afraid of? What kind of flattery were you most susceptible to? How did you see yourself? How did you want others to see you? What did you feel you were lacking that only another person could provide? Where were your emotional buttons and how easily could they be pushed? What parts of yourself did you have control over and which parts were you willing to let someone else control?

Several of these questions might have been casual, but not all of them were. As the following story demonstrates, some held the power of life and death.

Preface

In March 2000, the phone rang in Steve Haymes's office and the voice on the line was urgent. Somebody needed to talk to him right now. Haymes was a parole officer in Liberty, Missouri, a suburb northeast of Kansas City, and in a sense he'd been expecting this call for fifteen years. He'd also been dreading it. The caller was part of a newly created task force put together by the police department in Lenexa, a suburb of Kansas City, Kansas. The Kansas-Missouri border runs through the heart of Kansas City and Haymes worked only a handful of miles from the Lenexa station. As soon as he answered the phone, the parole officer knew the matter was serious.

"The task force said they wanted to speak to me about someone," he recalls. "They didn't tell me who but said they needed to meet with me immediately. They came out here to Liberty that same day and asked me if the name John Robinson meant anything to me. I said, 'Absolutely, and I've got a file here on him about yea thick.'"

"Yea" translated into roughly twelve to fourteen inches high. The file contained, among other things, the names of several local women who'd been missing for about a decade and a half.

Haymes welcomed the men into his office at the Missouri Board of Probation and Parole in a one-story beige building set behind a gas station and mini-mart. They began asking him questions and he began dredging up disturbing memories. The officer's hair was a little grayer than it had been back in 1985, when he'd first looked into Robinson's background, but he was still trim and his blue eyes conveyed intelligence and sensitivity. It was those eyes that had put him in this job throughout the past quarter century. In college, Haymes had studied criminal justice and had wanted to pursue a career in law enforcement, but faulty eyesight had kept him from becoming a policeman. He'd found work overseeing those on parole. Behind his small mustache, soft voice, and polite manner was an intensity and tenacity that in the mid-1980s had led him into the most frustrating investigation of his life.

"I'd maintained Robinson's file for all those years between 1985 and 2000," he says. "Normally after a couple of years, some of that information would be in archives or destroyed, but fifteen years later his entire file was sitting in my desk. It had never gotten far from me."

When he brought the file out for the detectives on the task force, they were amazed at its size and complexity. Haymes himself was surprised to hear about the new allegations against Robinson, especially those involving the Internet. Yet, when he thought about it, he realized that the con man had always used the latest technology for his new schemes. That was part of his pattern, his evolution through the criminal justice system during the past thirty-five years. Until now, Haymes had been the only person who'd closely examined that pattern or paid close attention to Robinson. No one else had woven together the whole tapestry of his past or penetrated the surface of his personality. No one else had seen the full range of his activities, some of which almost defied belief, or where they might be

leading. No one else had looked deeply at Robinson's roots or tried to uncover the source of his behavior or extremely unusual psychology. Nobody but Haymes had imagined what law enforcement was actually confronting.

Early in 1985, the slightly built parole officer had undertaken this mission alone—and in March 2000 he was still haunted by it. He was about to become a lot more haunted.

Hard Choices & Missed Opportunities

In 1919, Al Capone had first arrived in Chicago from Brooklyn. He'd been sent there by Mafia boss Johnny Torrio, who wanted him to take over the rackets in the Windy City. The following year Prohibition was instituted across the United States, and Capone seized this opportunity to turn illicit booze into an empire. His home base was Cicero, a western suburb of Chicago, and prostitution rings, gambling, and bootleg-liquor operations were run from his headquarters in the Hawthorne Arms Hotel on Twenty-second Street. If Cicero had long been known for its buying and selling of police and politicians, the action inside the Hawthorne Arms solidified its reputation for Mob corruption. At the same time, clean cops were aggressively starting to pursue Capone and his gang. Five years after coming to Chicago, Capone got into a gun battle with the authorities on Cicero Avenue, which left his brother Frank dead.

John Robinson's father, Henry, was eight when the violence erupted. The image of Frank Capone getting killed in the neighborhood—and then Al Capone repaying the favor the next year by dumping the corpse of Assistant State's Attorney General William H. McSwiggin on a Cicero street corner—was extremely vivid in the memories of local people. They often talked about the bloodshed and spoke with awe of Capone's headquarters, with its armed guards, metal windows, and impenetrable doors. Stories of the gangster and his crew were handed down from one Cicero generation to the next, part of a living oral history. On December 27, 1943, John Robinson entered a world where tales of legendary gangsters were common to every young boy.

In this neighborhood, having power and using it in illegal ways commanded respect. The streets were full of anecdotes about famous criminals who'd made up their own rules and lived by their own laws. Some locals admired those who could beat the system and make good money doing it, and a few old-timers regarded Capone as a hero. John Robinson heard these stories and absorbed them into his makeup, into his ideas about what was good and what was evil. He would not grow up to be a large boy or a strong one. He would not impress others with his physical prowess or good looks. As a youngster and later as an adult, he looked soft and round, friendly and harmless. If he was going to have power, he would have to find creative ways of getting it and using it. Al Capone had once said that you could go a lot further in life with a kind word and a gun than with just a kind word. Robinson only absorbed half of this adage—he would use kind words and smiles throughout his life to get what he wanted, but guns were not part of his routine. He didn't need them in his line of work.

He grew up with four siblings: an older brother, Henry Jr., whom he did not like at all; a younger brother, Donald, of whom he was quite fond; and two sisters, JoAnn and Mary Ellen. He was much closer to JoAnn than to Mary Ellen (this swinging back and forth between intense personal likes and dislikes would mark him for life). The Robinson family lived in a well-kept but modest home at 4916 West Thirty-second Street. They drew little attention to themselves, and decades later, after Robinson

became infamous, nobody in the neighborhood could even recall the people who'd once lived at this address. John's father, Henry, worked as a machinist for Western Electric. When sober, he was a steady presence in the family, hardworking and law-abiding, totally unlike the gangsters from Cicero's colorful past. From time to time, according to Robinson's prison records, the older man went on bad drinking binges that disrupted everything. Despite this, his middle son had warm memories of him.

John did not feel that way about his mother, Alberta, who held the family together and kept the kids in line. When one of them misbehaved, she meted out the discipline and punishment. Five decades later, Robinson's wife would testify to her coldness to John. Alberta demanded that her children be clean and neat, and she pushed them to better themselves. John seemed to respond to this prodding and was the most promising and ambitious of all the Robinson kids, the most eager to break out of their constraining blue-collar environment.

By thirteen, he'd channeled some of that ambition into becoming an Eagle Scout and was a senior patrol leader of Boy Scout Troop 259, sponsored by the Holy Name Society of Mary Queen of Heaven Roman Catholic Church in Chicago. A picture from that time shows a round-faced boy in his well-pressed Scout uniform; he's offering a cherubic smile to the camera and giving a patriotic three-fingered salute. He'd recently been accepted into downtown Chicago's renowned Quigley Preparatory Seminary for boys who were interested in becoming priests. He'd already told a number of people that he would eventually go to work in service to the Vatican.

A few weeks after making Eagle Scout, Robinson and 120 other Boy Scouts traveled to London to give a royal command performance for the newly crowned Queen Elizabeth II. Robinson, dressed in a bright red outfit, led all the others out onto the Palladium stage, becoming one of the first Americans to sing for Her Majesty and the youngest of his countrymen to appear at this acclaimed venue. The event made the front page of the *Chicago Tribune*, in an article headlined "Chicago Boy Scout Leads Troop to Sing for Queen." His troop put on what they called "The Gang Show," and after singing for the monarch, the boys gathered backstage to look at the celebrities who were also there to perform. When Judy Garland moved past him, Robinson boldly pursued her and caught up with the movie star reaching out and shaking her hand.

"We Americans gotta stick together," he told her.

"You're right," she said, laughing and kissing him on the cheek.

Another actress, the British singer Gracie Fields, hugged Robinson and told him, "You're a mighty handsome youngster."

The kid from Cicero loved the attention and being in the spotlight, but he soon returned to the seminary and quietly resumed his studies, still thinking of becoming a priest. He was a good student but not a great one. He wouldn't be remembered there for his academic success but for his shrewdness: he always seemed to be thinking about what he would say or do next. He appeared to be calculating the effect he had on others and often acted as if he were smarter than everyone else. Yet he didn't leave behind a negative image at the school. He graduated from Quigley at seventeen, not having distinguished himself at all.

Rumors had begun to surround Robinson suggesting that he was involved in a lot of things

besides pursuing a religious education. Growing up in Cicero, he'd been exposed not only to stories of legendary gangsters but to people with ongoing connections to the Mob. He'd watched his father trudge off to the smokestacks at Western Electric each day and watched the older man labor tirelessly to support a family on a workingman's wages. He'd watched his father seek escape from the grind in alcohol. By late adolescence Robinson knew that there were other, faster ways to turn a buck. His first exposure to crime came through meeting low-level underworld characters he did favors or legwork for, in exchange for money. By the close of his teenage years, his life had already become more complicated and entangled than it would have been on the narrow path toward the priesthood.

In 1961, he attended Cicero's Morton Junior College, and in later years he would claim to have become a fully trained medical X-ray technician there. He would also brag about receiving more medical training at West Suburban Hospital in Oak Park, Illinois. With these limited credentials, he was able to land a job in the X-ray department of a Chicago hospital. His career was launched, but it was not a career in medicine.

In 1964, Robinson met an attractive young blonde named Nancy Jo Lynch and she was soon pregnant. They rushed into matrimony in a Catholic ceremony and he went back to work at the hospital. The young couple were starting a marital dance that would last through every imaginable kind of turmoil—and survive into the next millennium. From the beginning, they were locked together by mutual need, a need so deep that apparently nothing could break it. Robinson had avoided legal trouble, but almost as soon he got married, this changed. His living expenses were increasing and he was under pressure to take care of his wife and his about-to-arrive child. He didn't respond to this by working harder or more hours. Before long, he was accused of stealing money from his employer.

Robinson's marrying a pregnant woman had been an embarrassment to his family, but this was worse. The young man whose life had seemed so promising just a few years earlier, when he'd earned the title of Eagle Scout and sung for the queen of England, was on a downward spiral, but maybe he could learn from his mistakes and not repeat them. When confronted by his bosses with the suspicion that he'd embezzled from the hospital, he asked for their help, begged for another chance. If they would not tell the police about his transgressions, he would pay them back everything he'd taken. They agreed to this arrangement and he was not charged with a crime. What he'd learned from his mistakes was that he could get away with doing illegal things—even when he'd been caught doing them.

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