

# CHAPTER

# 2

## Science of Preying

Ridgway acknowledged that he devoted considerable time and effort to finding appropriate victims. He would spend hours before work and after, driving through areas of prostitution.

*King County Prosecutor's Summary of Evidence*<sup>1</sup>

One of the deepest mysteries shrouding the everlasting Green River Murders revolved around the disappearance of the victims. How could the killer abduct so many women? Why seemingly no witnesses? Someone must have seen something? How could over 60 women vanish along a strip known for its hustle and bustle? The streets never seemed to sleep along the Sea-Tac Strip south of Seattle, Washington, let alone nod off long enough for someone to snatch a prostitute against her will.

Denise D. Bush vanished in a matter of minutes. The 23-year-old and her “boyfriend” were staying at a seedy motel on the strip on October 8, 1982, when they discovered they ran out of cigarettes.<sup>2</sup> The two flipped a coin and Bush lost. At 12:30 P.M., during a break in the soap operas, Bush hurried to a convenience store across the street from the hotel on Pacific Highway South near South 144th Street. She was never seen alive again. It would be three years before a few fragments of her bones would be found on Bull Mountain south of Portland, Oregon. Later, more of her skeletal remains would be discovered at the base of a wooded hill just blocks from where she disappeared south of Seattle.

It was the same scenario with Maureen S. Feeney, a smiley 19-year-old who had studied to be a daycare worker at a community college. In trying to become independent from her family, she rented an apartment in a Seattle neighborhood known as Capital Hill. The apartment sat at the edge of an area with a “dope stroll.” Day and night men and women hooked on drugs, alcohol, and the underside of life gravitated to the area to get their fix of whatever controlled them. It was inevitable that Feeney would bump into people who would push her toward prostitution. Feeney had not left her family’s home long when she ventured out of her apartment on September 28, 1983, about noon to look for a job at a preschool.<sup>3</sup> Across the street from her apartment was a convenience store similar to the one Bush had walked to in search of cigarettes. Feeney disappeared that day. Her skeletal remains were found May 2, 1986, in a wooded area about half an hour east of Seattle near Highway 18.

For years the mystery of the disappearances haunted residents of the Pacific Northwest and investigators and criminologists nationwide. How was the killer abducting the women without a trace? Prostitutes get feisty if taken too far from the strip. Was the killer using a gun to control them? Perhaps he pressed a rag with chloroform to their noses and mouths to render them unconscious? Some detectives speculated that the killer used a vehicle without passenger-door handles inside the vehicle, which would prevent the victims from getting out of the vehicle as it sped away to a secluded area. Maybe the killer was taking his prey to a motel? Every time the question of an abduction came up, the overriding image that surfaced depicted violence. The women had been taken against their will so there had to be some kind of violence in the initial abduction, investigators often thought. Relatives and friends of the victims were certain, in their own mind, that their loved one resisted violently and caused a commotion for someone to witness. Surely, many thought, the victims could sense the killer’s motive and tried to get away. How could so many women not know they were in danger? Didn’t the killer look crazy? Why were there no reports of women bolting from the killer’s vehicle or hotel room?

The answers to those questions and overall mystery did not come until the summer of 2003 when Gary Leon Ridgway opted to confess to avoid the death penalty. Throughout his six-month confession, he described how he turned his sexual fetish into a “career”<sup>4</sup> and became a “killing machine.”<sup>5</sup> How was Ridgway so successful at abducting women without causing a public scene or leaving behind witnesses? He duped the women, he tricked them, he conned them into letting down their defenses. Chicanery proved to be Ridgway’s key to success. Ridgway had a knack for reading/sensing the women’s emotions and needs. It is clear from a detailed examination of the confession, however, that Ridgway’s talent for being deceitfully glib took some time to develop. He refined his techniques with every victim he killed, with every passing year he went uncaught. Also clear throughout the confession is how Ridgway’s relationship with family and friends strongly affected his urge to kill and hunting patterns.

## EXPERIMENTING

Gary Leon Ridgway started experimenting with murderous behavior as a young boy, long before the Green River would be infamously associated with the nation’s biggest serial murder case. There was little doubt in the minds of the many investigators and psychologists who interrogated Ridgway that his urge to harm and likely kill people surfaced early. A deep-seeded anger manifested itself in a variety of deviant behavior, although Ridgway was unaware of its significance then. Ridgway admitted during his confession that his pattern of stalking prostitutes actually began in junior high school. Experts call this “practice behavior.”

DR. ROBERT WHEELER: You started stalking people, following people didn’t ya?

RIDGWAY: I started following a few, I mean it wasn’t . . . you know, it wasn’t a . . . a . . .<sup>6</sup>

WHEELER: I want some details now.

RIDGWAY: That started when I was, ah, in . . . in, ah, probably junior high. I was following a . . . a . . . a girl home that lived in the same area, not goin’ way outta the area, but just following her and . . . and, ah, seeing what it . . . it was like. I didn’t never think it was called, you know, stalking, just . . . just following her and curiosity where she’d go and what kinda reaction when I’m, you know, when I’m . . . I’m following her and. . .

WHEELER: Where did you follow her to?

RIDGWAY: I just followed her up the hill towards where I lived and was the way . . . one of the ways I’d go. . . . She looked like a nice, ah, nice, ah, girl and. . .

WHEELER: So you were attracted to her.

RIDGWAY: I was attracted to her.

WHEELER: And what was your attraction? Describe the attraction.

RIDGWAY: Well she was, ah, I knew she was fourteen or fifteen or sixteen or somethin’ like that, ah, well proportioned, ah, young . . . young woman. Ah, and she just, ah, ah, somebody, you know, wanted to . . . you might wanna talk to some time or. . . . And that was just about it. I think I did it about twice and, ah, . . .

WHEELER: And then she confronted you?

RIDGWAY: She confronted me on the . . . maybe on the first time, but after I told her I live over here on the other side of that tower, she didn’t think anything of it.

WHEELER: Did you go home and masturbate thinking about her?

RIDGWAY: No. I didn’t . . . didn’t masturbate about her.

WHEELER: How do you know you didn’t?

RIDGWAY: Cause I don’t think I did. I mighta just picked up . . . if I did I probably just picked up a Play . . . Playboy and looked at it and. . .

WHEELER: And maybe imagined that she was the person in the Playboy?<sup>7</sup>

RIDGWAY: Maybe . . . maybe once or twice I might have, I don’t know<sup>8</sup>

About the same time in his life, Ridgway experimented with using a knife to take out his anger out on people. At the time, he was a sixth grader. In talking with FBI Profilist Mary Ellen O’Toole, Ridgway blurted out:

RIDGWAY: Um, I stabbed a kid one time.

O’TOOLE: Tell me about that.

RIDGWAY: Uh, it was down by uh, Chinook where I used to go to school, and a boy was playin'. I stabbed him in the side and . . . uh, didn't kill him. And uh, I, I was about um, sixth grade, or I think it was, go . . . it was seventh grade, and I, I uh, that was at the same time I was, you know, breaking out windows, throwin', was throwin' rocks at windows at school, but . . .<sup>9</sup>

The victim ran home, bleeding profusely, but he survived. His assailant remained unknown until Ridgway detailed his involvement.

That episode and Ridgway's habit of getting nosebleeds convinced Ridgway that he lacked the appetite for seeing or shedding blood when he felt the need to kill to lessen his anger.

During the confession Ridgway revealed a third major incident that illustrated his drive to harm people. He confessed to trying to drown a boy who kept splashing him.

At one point during the interrogation, O'Toole stated

All of those are behaviors now that you're carrying into your . . . you know, 16–17 year old time frame. . . . I mean can we safely say at that point, Mr. Ridgway, that um, these are behaviors that have followed you until, 'til the time you're 54 years old—the enjoyment of the watching and the following and the control and getting somebody into your comfort zone, and you know in your head what you're gonna do to them and they don't have any idea. That's kind of exciting for you.<sup>10</sup> Um, you're not going back to being um, um, you know, a "Leave It To Beaver" type young man. That's just not happening. So as, as this, as you develop and you get older um, you brought all these behaviors with you and, in fact, you carried them into um, you know, your forties and your fifties. Am I right?

RIDGWAY: Yeah . . .

O'TOOLE: I mean that's just, that's the anatomy of this thing.<sup>11</sup>

Indeed it was. Eventually, Ridgway settled on the type of victim on whom he would mercilessly inflict his vengeful anger. And he made that decision in a very premeditated fashion. Ridgway told Dr. O'Toole:

Well low risk victims would be, ah, ah, prostitutes who eagerly get in your car for . . . for money, and they wouldn't be missed. Where the high risk victim would be like somebody at a college. . . . They would be more of a . . . of a risk of . . . of, ah, people caring more about 'em, and friends asking questions . . . low risk prostitutes they're not . . . they're not as valued as much as a college person . . . or a business person.<sup>12</sup>

Victims of opportunity became Ridgway's mainstay. But when Ridgway first decided to prey on prostitutes, he was tentative. Several times he began choking them, then released them. Luckily for him, no one turned him in. Occasionally, he considered using other methods to disable and kill the women. One elaborate scheme involved creating his own mini-electric chair:

You put on the hot wire and you—you hold this to the ground and then you turn on the ignition and it goes on a little bit and comes up. Well, I thought about taking the hot wire off the coil, running it over under the dash with some kind of wire, just thinkin' of running it to the seats—the passenger seat of the vehicle and making some kind of a grate or something so that she sits on it. And then make sure she's touchin' some metal or a door handle and switch it, you know. Hittin' the switch (unintelligible—over talking) like a little electric chair.<sup>13</sup>

In the end, Ridgway thought the scheme too complicated and abandoned it.

Most nights, Ridgway left his small, rambler house in a cul-de-sac south of Seattle and cruised the Sea-Tac Strip, a road crowded with motels, fast-food restaurants, and heavy traffic leading to the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport. In 1982, the strip constantly was full of streetwalkers who sashayed in high heels. For Ridgway, it was a perfect hunting ground. He liked to say that his victims underestimated him.

I look like an ordinary person. . . . I was shakin' but I, ah, I . . . I played into it. Ah, I, ah, acted in a way with the . . . prostitutes to make 'em feel more comfortable . . . got in their comfort zone . . . here's a guy . . . he's not really muscle bound, he's not, ah, look like a . . . a fighter, just an ordinary john, and yet that was their downfall . . . my appearance was different from what I really was. I was able to dupe them.<sup>14</sup>

Ridgway picked up women and killed them with ease and impunity. He'd been right, no one seemed to miss *these* victims. He'd offer them a few bucks and drive his pickup a block or two away from the strip into dark residential neighborhoods. To convince the women to get in the back of the truck under a canopy, he liked to carry a spare tire in the cab to make it too crowded to engage in sex. "We can't date in the front, I've got this tire," Ridgway told investigators. "And so that was a ploy to get them in the back or out in the field. So I always had a tire in there or tools or something or a bunch of clothes."<sup>15</sup> Once the women were in the back of the truck, Ridgway jumped behind them and used a choke hold with his arm to kill them. Most of the women were dead within minutes of climbing into the pickup. Ridgway's first victim in the summer of 1982, Wendy L. Coffield, 16, was dumped in the Green River southeast of Seattle. That summer four more women, including Debra L. Bonner, ended up in or on the bank of the river. Some of the women in the river were weighted down with heavy rocks. Small rocks were inserted in the vagina of two of the river victims.

Amid the slaying of the river victims, Ridgway preyed on Gisele A. Lovvorn, 19, and hid her body in the woods. Her abduction revealed to what lengths Ridgway was willing to go to psychologically disarm a potential victim. At the time, Ridgway was twice divorced. He and his second wife had a son, Matthew, who was at that time 8 years old. On the night of July 17, 1982, Ridgway had his son with him when he desired to kill a prostitute. Ridgway told investigators:

I took her there with, ah, Matthew in the car. She was next to Matthew, I picked her up some place. Either before, ah, from my parents to that site or from my house to . . . it had to a been from my . . . from my parents house to the site where I . . . I killed her. Ah, I . . . I took her in, we walked into . . . a space where we couldn't see the truck.

When Ridgway was behind the woman, he tricked her into raising her head by saying his son was coming into the woods. When Lovvorn raised her head, Ridgway choked her with his arm, then a pair of black socks tied together.<sup>16</sup> Asked what he told his son about the woman leaving, Ridgway said, "She wanted to walk home. She only lives a close distance."<sup>17</sup> Since Ridgway needed to attend to his son and leave the area, he returned the following day to better hide the body, but not before having intercourse with the corpse.

Ridgway considered taking his first victims to his home, but at that time he was renting out his house to help pay the mortgage. While a family with children lived in the home, Ridgway slept in the garage of the house located adjacent to Military Road. The morning after a kill, Ridgway always felt nervous, but by the time he left work that afternoon, he looked forward to outsmarting another woman during the hunt.

Those first few weeks the preying did not always go smoothly. Sometimes a prostitute wanted too much money or seemed too cocky for Ridgway. How did Ridgway get rid of her?

I'd just drop her off at a, a block away from where the uh, bank was, and I would use that ploy. Or, or uh, "Here's," you know, "I'll go up to the bank and here's five dollars. I need a, I have to have sex with a rubber," so she'd get five dollars and go into the store for a rubber, and then I would take off and f-forget about her.<sup>18</sup>

Sometimes, however, Ridgway would forget who he tricked into getting out of his pickup and he would pick up the same woman again another night. Ridgway re-created a heated conversation that followed:

"You picked me up the other day and you, you . . . you dropped me off at the uh, the damned store and, 'cause you didn't have uh, didn't have e-enough money for me. Uh, I been with you three times now. I been, three, three times you haven't dated me and I'm getting a little bit pissed off at you pickin' me up. Don't ever pick me up again." And, 'cause each time I picked her up there was some'n wrong and, and she's, she was a, a bitch that I didn't wanna date, but here I go, and she's dressed up different, and now I pick her up and I says, Oh, my God, I got this bitch out here that I don't wanna date, uh, because she's . . . some'n . . . I, I screwed up her on the last two times, now I got her back in the car and we're gonna go through this shit again, and I just got to get rid a this, this woman. And, and I, you know, I lied to her two times before and now I got to lie to her again, uh, about some'n. And then she, she jumps down my throat, "Next time I see ya, I'll have my boyfriend uh, you don't do that with women out here on the street."<sup>19</sup>

## IN THE GROOVE

Although Gary Ridgway never did well in school, he turned out to be an exceptional student of the street. It did not take him long to learn the ways of the prostitutes and their pimps. He particularly proved an astute student of the little clues that give away a person's thoughts. Through trial and error, he honed his skills at taking advantage of a twitch in a prostitute's eye or a teenager's yearning for a donut. In academic terms, he was a quick study. During those years, Ridgway "always wanted to date,"<sup>20</sup> and he quickly developed a hunting routine. He'd get off of work, stop and have a beer, grab a burger or fried chicken at a fast-food restaurant with a cup or two of coffee, and then start cruising for prostitutes.

If I found a, a lady to date, I'd drive by and uh, check out anything, you know, anybody watching her or anything like this, or . . . and uh, then I'd go pull in a alley, or come back and pull in an alley and wave to her or, and I'd drive around the block and wave to her and if she sees me again, I, the woman, I, I'd pick her up and go date.<sup>21</sup>

Often, to grab a prostitute's attention, Ridgway waved money at them as he drove by. Once the women jumped into the cab of his truck, the psychological game began. Some women suggested they go to a motel room acquired by the prostitute prior to the pair meeting. Ridgway would make up an excuse not to go to the room. Sometimes he said he had a sister who worked at that motel. "I had a lot'a different lines, and I used every one of 'em to my advantage."<sup>22</sup> If a woman asked for more money than Ridgway carried that night, he would drive to a cash bank machine. As the prostitute stood near by, Ridgway withdrew the amount the woman demanded. That exercise turned out to be just another Ridgway ruse since the money he would pay the prostitute would end up back in Ridgway's wallet after he killed her. To disarm the most leery women and convince them he was not a cop, he regularly carried beer in his truck. Or he would expose himself. Ridgway stopped at nothing to get the women from "bein' afraid."<sup>23</sup> He knew many of the women needed money and always sought small jobs to make ends meet. As he cruised the strip, Ridgway made it a point to find "help wanted" signs. After picking up a prostitute, Ridgway managed to introduce jobs into the conversation. Soon, Ridgway would be driving the prostitute to fast-food businesses and hotels for the woman to pick up applications for cleaning or maintenance openings. Then he'd take the woman out on the date.

No, I didn't help them to fill it out. I'd just be kinda, you know, anxious with them, "I'm glad you're getting a job so close by here that we can get together and have, have dates," and uh, you know, "Because it's so close to where I live, or so close where I can help ya, help ya out." . . . I'd have sex with 'em, and . . . they would be uh, thinkin' I'm gonna . . . drop 'em back off at hotel or some'n like that . . . and ninety percent a the time you'd never see the woman again.<sup>24</sup>

Ridgway even offered his car to teenagers to con them into cooperating.

I was tryin' to talk to one of 'em, if they wanna be a regular I'll give ya' my car keys to the car and you, you supply the gas and, and you can have the car to drive around, but I, I killed her. . . . I didn't have to go through with the promise.<sup>25</sup>

Even though Ridgway sometimes did not have time to abduct a prostitute, kill her, and then dispose of her body, he still cruised and picked them up on his way to a union meeting or work. It was time well invested, in his mind. He was always trying to get the confidence of potential victims so he enjoyed picking up young girls and buying them donuts, coffee, or beer. His benevolence also was intended to debunk any possible talk on the street that he might be the Green River Killer. He succeeded in having streetwalkers think: "You seem like a safe guy."<sup>26</sup>

On at least one occasion, however, Ridgway lost track of time and gave in to his strong desire to kill.

There was another time I killed a woman . . . in the back of my truck there. And I left her in there. Um, uh . . . drove to work and killed her. So I must've killed her in the morning. Left in there, work all day. Went out and uh, made sure . . . made sure she was dead. It was all locked up and covered up. Um, and I went back up to her at lunchtime, now I remember, and pulled in the parking lot and had sex with her again after she was dead. . . . Uh, I finished my job . . . wasn't worried at all about . . . just take my time. I'm always late getting out anyway.<sup>27</sup>

Despite his many ruses, Ridgway failed to abduct and kill some of the women he picked up. The ones who were lucky enough to get away were older, more experienced. Ridgway referred to them as hardcore.

There's a few of them that were just too tough to kill. Too uh . . . too um, mean . . . mean lookin'. And hardcore. . . . Yeah, I had conversation with 'em and, and then I'd uh, drop 'em off and tell 'em I'd pick 'em up later and never would.<sup>28</sup> . . . had one woman, I don't know what the reason was, I acted insane with her. I picked her up. She got mad at me for something and she wanted . . . she wanted \$20 so I took the truck and I speed up and I said, "you're not going to get no money from me. We're going to go down here and run into that telephone pole." She said, "I want the fuck out." I threw on the brake, she hit the dash and opened the door and told her to "get the fuck out. You're not going to get anything from me." She slams the door and almost breaks the window.<sup>29</sup>

Ninety-nine percent of the time, Ridgway found it easy to catch his prey, even without having to drive around. He liked parking his pickup truck at convenience stores and raising the hood to pretend he was troubleshooting a mechanical problem. When a woman passed by on her way into the store, Ridgway enticed her into his truck with serious money. That appears to have happened to Denise D. Bush and Maureen S. Feeney, who vanished in 1982 and 1983, respectively. Even Ridgway can't be 100 percent sure that is how he abducted Bush and Feeney. Why? He preyed on so many women the actual details of many of the abductions and the women's faces have become a blur.

Many of Ridgway's victims were dead within 20 minutes of losing the cat-and-mouse game with their abductor. The rest appear to have died within an hour of getting into Ridgway's pickup truck. Ridgway claimed he cried "a lot" as his rage subsided after each kill and then he drove randomly to secluded wooded areas to deposit the bodies.<sup>30</sup> Frequently, he gravitated toward roads he'd driven while visiting his two former wives and former girlfriends. Ridgway was as cunning in discarding his victims as he was in abducting them. When he found a dark, secluded road, he would pull off the road near the guard rail, pull the woman out of the truck, and lay her down just off the side of the road. He would then drive a short distance down the road, park, and return to the body to move it farther into the woods to hide it. Why this routine? Ridgway sought to distance his vehicle from the corpse in case a law enforcement officer happened on his vehicle.

To the many psychologists and investigators who listened to Ridgway for months detail his many ruses to kill women, there was only one way to describe him: *a chameleon*. Ridgway possessed an innate ability to adopt to endless scenarios on the street. He could think on his feet as the situation and environment changed.

## LIKE A MACHINE

Ridgway had a voracious appetite for sex. He desired it four or five times a week. During his most prolific killing years in the early 1980s, he had a steady girlfriend he met at a Parents Without Partners gathering. They liked going out for drinks and dancing. Their sexual and social relationship, however, flourished mostly on weekends since she was a single parent and had children to care for. Ridgway, too, seemed to want to limit their days together because he believed his girlfriend was a bit on the heavy side and unattractive. He rationalized that he needed weekdays to date thin, young, pretty, sexy girls who walked the streets. Toward that end, Ridgway constantly connived to refine his techniques of preying. Hence, he created what FBI Profelist O'Toole dubbed the "Ridgway Code."<sup>31</sup> The code consisted of a combination of telephone numbers, grocery list, names, merchandise receipts, and paint codes, the type Ridgway used as a truck painter at a Seattle-area truck company. When Ridgway met a prostitute he wished to date a second time or to set up to kill at a later date, he would write down her first name in a booklet. Next to the name he wrote the name of a male. Reason? To make it seem the notation pertained to a couple. If the booklet fell into the wrong hands—police or one of his girlfriends—the names would not arouse suspicion. Next to the woman's name Ridgway cryptically wrote "black car" if the woman was African American or "white house" if the woman was Caucasian. If Ridgway had paid the prostitute \$20, next to the woman's name he'd write \$20.75 and "price for the clutch."<sup>32</sup> Anyone reading the information would think Ridgway purchased a clutch for \$20.75. Often Ridgway would combine the woman's home telephone number with numbers used to designate a paint color. Adjacent to some names Ridgway wrote "maid," meaning the woman once talked about trying to get a job as a maid. This tidbit of information proved valuable to recontact the woman for an assignation, which ended in a date or the woman being murdered. Ridgway described to investigators the typical phone call he made to some of the women's homes: "This is John from so and so motel. Alicia put an application in last week and we'd like to talk to her."<sup>33</sup> Sometimes Ridgway would speak to the woman's father or mother. Ridgway claimed to have 50 phone numbers in his book, which he said he destroyed long before being arrested.

One of Ridgway's most successful ruses to abduct women called for using his son's toys and elementary school picture. To allay the fear of potential victims, Ridgway took to putting toys on the dashboard of his truck. There was nothing better to get the women to trust Ridgway and think of him as a family man, not a killer. If they were still leery after getting into the truck, he would pull out his wallet to show identification and give his victims a glimpse of his son.

So I whip out my ID and with my ID would be my, I'd put my finger over my driver's license to hide my name . . . but on the opposite side was um, pictures . . . and uh, picture of my son . . . and then she'd uh, see my son and they would know I was prob'ly a normal person.<sup>34</sup>

Perhaps the most significant event that transformed Ridgway from a random serial killer to a systematic serial killer involved his house. For some time Ridgway had been living in his garage while renters occupied his home. He eventually grew tired of the rent coming in late and the renters abusing the house. When Ridgway kicked them out, the horrific deviant behavior began that would make him this country's most prolific serial killer. Woman after woman would be brought to the house to meet their death. In the end, most of Ridgway's victims would die in that house.

How did Ridgway convince so many woman to enter his home? For Ridgway, it was simple: *money*. All Ridgway had to do was drive up to his house and open his wallet.

I'd get 'em close to the house. I says, "Well, here's ten dollars . . . I can take you back to where I, I wasted your time if you don't wanna go in the house." But they were wanting that forty dollars, so they'd, every one of 'em I used that ploy as a, a way of getting 'em into the house.<sup>35</sup>

Once in the house, Ridgway encouraged them to look around.

That was to give them the security that nobody else is around. . . . You had to get their defenses down. . . . They look around and everything, they're getting more secure as you go. They look in the bedrooms, nobody's in there, nothin's, you know, there's my son's room, hey, this guy has got a son, he's not gonna hurt anybody. His name's written on the door and it's empty and it's got his bunk bed there, toys on the floor. They look in the master bedroom, there's nothin'. Then we go in the bathroom and, uh, I go to the bathroom if I need to go. She goes to the bathroom, washes up a little bit.<sup>36</sup>

And before they knew it, he was behind them, choking them. Many of the women fought. One even made it to the front door before Ridgway caught up to her. To get a woman to stop struggling, Ridgway would say, "Calm down. I'll let you go if you quit fighting."

O'TOOLE: And did they?

RIDGWAY: They calmed down and. . . .

O'TOOLE: You killed them.

RIDGWAY: I killed them.<sup>37</sup>

Just another Ridgway ruse!

One of the women who fought the hardest was Marie M. Malvar, who was picked up by Ridgway on the strip a short distance from where Ridgway lived. She used her long fingernails to scratch her assailant. She left deep gashes in Ridgway's arm. After that challenging encounter, Ridgway used a ligature—a towel or extension cord—to strangle women who had long fingernails.

Once the women were dead, Ridgway took their clothes and jewelry, dragged them to the front door, and, in the dark of night, put them in the back of his pickup truck. As he drove along secluded highways, he tossed out the victims' clothing. Some he deposited in Goodwill bins. The jewelry he kept for a short time before he hid it in several outdoor locations away from his home.

While in the beginning of his killing series Ridgway deposited his victims in random locations, he soon developed a propensity for grouping bodies. During the lengthy investigation, detectives dubbed the body sites "clusters." And for over two decades they wondered why the victims had been left in clusters. As many as six women were deposited at one location. It was not until Ridgway confessed that investigators learned the answer. Ridgway clustered his victims to better remember where he left them. Why did Ridgway need to recall the dump sites? To return to the scene to have intercourse with the victims after death. Sometimes, Ridgway visited a corpse long after maggots had formed.

In his own twisted thinking, Ridgway thought he would have brought fewer women to his home had he had an attractive woman in his life. "If I had a better looking woman. Um, she was the key if, if, uh, that would have been a hell of a lot less people dying if I had a, a nice woman to go home, go home to." Incredulous, King County Detective Randy Mullinax asked, rhetorically: "So are you telling me that you killed all these women because you had a fat girlfriend, Gary?"<sup>38</sup>

## RETIRING FROM KILLING

At the height of his murderous series, Ridgway was slaying four to five women a month. And it seemed nothing could abate his urge to be with prostitutes or to kill them if he was so inclined. Ridgway's name had been turned in as a suspect, but he was one of thousands of deviant men confounding investigators.

Unbeknownst to anyone, though, there was a mild-mannered woman with back problems who was beginning to have a profound effect on his preying. Her name was Judith and Ridgway had fallen in love with her in 1985. They would eventually marry. When Judith entered the picture, suddenly Ridgway appeared to have little time to hunt. Being a devoted boyfriend, and then husband, meant being accountable to Judith.

The Green River Murders case experienced its most profound change in years when Judith moved in with Ridgway at the Military Road home that Ridgway used to kill young prostitutes. Gone now was Ridgway's chamber of horrors. Judith roped Ridgway into selling Amway with her. Before long, the couple was attending an Amway conference and a Christian Faith Center operated by Amway. Ridgway was meeting so many new people through Amway he was fearful of coming across a customer while preying on the strip. During the week Ridgway had to be mindful that Judith expected him home shortly after Ridgway got off work. And on weekends, Judith and Ridgway frequented swap meets. In short, Judith served as a restraint on Ridgway's activities, no doubt saving the lives of many young ladies during the late 1980s and 1990s.

But it was Ridgway's nature to visit prostitutes, and eventually he began giving in to the urges. "Still had a craving for a prostitute. I wanted sex. I'd have sex at night, and I'd want it again. I didn't wanna w-wear out Judith."<sup>39</sup> Soon, Ridgway began finding ways to prey. Sometimes he stopped at his parents' home for a cup of coffee after work, which was acceptable to Judith. He'd make time on the way home, however, to pick up a prostitute for "a fast one."<sup>40</sup> On those occasions, Ridgway had no time to kill the women. To create time to kill a prostitute, Ridgway liked to offer to work overtime on Saturdays. He would go in and work a couple of hours and on the way home pick up a prostitute to kill. Even when Ridgway managed to create time to hunt, he found he had little money since Judith kept a tight hold on the family finances. Ridgway could not simply spend any amount he wanted like in the early 1980s.

So if I got one for tw . . . less than twenty dollars, that would be fine. A lot 'a times I'd get 'em for, "if you take me down to Kent I'll, I'll do you, I'll do you for twenty, twenty dollars. . . . You take me into Seattle, I'll, I'll do it for twenty dollars, or I'd do it for free."<sup>41</sup>

Ridgway always found ways to acquire a few extra dollars. It was not unusual for him to sneak some of the proceeds from a garage sale or a swap meet deal. Some of the spare change would go for buying condoms, which he hid in various locations. Some went underneath a rug on the floor, some underneath the dashboard of the truck, and some in the wheel well of the driver's side. Ridgway even hid condoms underneath rocks behind a popular department store. Even though Ridgway managed to abduct and kill prostitutes, he felt "ashamed of getting off the wagon."<sup>42</sup> He did not feel good about lying to Judith and feared he would stumble and get caught.

I had, uh, everything paid for. . . . And a, a nice house and everything. . . . I guess told myself that, you know, don't . . . don't, uh, screw anything up by killing any prostitutes, because, uh, you're gonna lose everything.<sup>43</sup> I was . . . in a way getting scott free, and I didn't want to, um, ruin it.<sup>44</sup>

Somehow Ridgway managed to have sexual intercourse with a number of prostitutes during the late 1980s and 1990s and not kill them. Still, the rage he possessed when he killed with impunity in the early 1980s continued to simmer in him. And when he least expected it, it boiled over, and he found himself choking another woman. Those were unplanned kills and they caused him to panic. He thought he was much more in control of his rage, but he wasn't. Ridgway recalled a 1998 murder:

She was a hard core, ah, prostitute. I mean she wasn't one that just started, she was in her twenties and . . . and she was arrested many, many times. But she just didn't . . . gave her the thirty, twenty bucks . . . she's not willing to take five more minutes for me to . . . to have a climax. You know, screw her. . . . Your time is up. She gets up and gets her clothes on. I started to get mad, and get madder and madder, and soon as I get her outta the car, put the tailgate up, open the truck . . . truck door on the passenger side, I reached around and grabbed her and, ah, started chokin' her and she died within, ah, she passed out within ten seconds I think it was.<sup>45</sup> In the late '90's, it was I'd kill 'em and uh, panic and leave 'em there . . . the one I can remember, I, I, I panicked and uh, just left her there instead of putting her in the truck and transporting her someplace where she wouldn't be found . . . she was fully clothed, and uh, I just left her there and pushed her up by, so nobody could see her, and then I got in the truck and uh, got the heck out 'a there. And uh, didn't want to remember about killing her 'cause I, I, I thought I was th-through killing. And this wasn't a, a pl-planned kill and I wasn't in that mode.<sup>46</sup> I was trying to quit. And to, uh, uh, eventually, uh, uh, in the '80's I, uh, semi retired, in a way. In the '90, or in the '90s I was semi-retired. In the 2000s, I was planning on being, not, uh, being around it. And, um, move to someplace where I wouldn't be around them. And, and there's my . . . the Green River Killer's still up in Washington and here I am in, let's say, Oregon. Free, uh, free from all that, um, the dreams, memories of the killings.<sup>47</sup>

Instead, Ridgway "was more of an amateur."<sup>48</sup> Ridgway, in fact, lost his edge in managing to cut down on his killings to please Judith.

And in the end he tried minimizing his vicious preying. He told his interrogators:

I was doing you guys a favor, killing, killing prostitutes, here you guys can't control them, but I can.<sup>49</sup> I mean if its illegal aliens, you can take 'em to the border and fly 'em back out 'a there. But if it's a prostitute, you'd arrest 'em, they were back on the street as soon as they get bail and change their uh, name, and you guys, you guys had the problem. . . . I had the answer.<sup>50</sup>

