Texas Law Magazine

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS SCHOOL OF LAW

SPRING 2026

THE UNDEADLIEST PROTEST

***TRUE* CRIME NUMBERS**

TRACKING DOWN

INVISIBLE KILLERS

THE TRUE CRIME ISSUE

DISCOVERY \ **PROOF**

Rural areas like Marfa, TX, enjoy year-round residents and countless visitors. Public safety in these smaller communities outside the urban core, notes Professor **Maria Ponomarenko**, can be tricky. Most research and policy proposals on policing focus on large cities. The United States has over 17,000 law enforcement agencies, the vast majority of which have fewer than 50 officers. Ponomarenko, who teaches and writes on administrative law, constitutional law, local government law, and criminal procedure, aims to shine a light on challenges small law enforcement agencies face.

Texas Law Magazine

Docket

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Spring 2026, Volume 3, Issue 1

ON THE COVER
Illustration by Aldo Jarillo

26 Tracking Down Invisible Killers

Genetic genealogy, pioneered by Barbara Rae-Venter '85, is the hot new tool for cracking cold cases. *by Robin Berghaus*

art by ALDO JARILLO

STUDIO 2AM/YOU WORK FOR THEM

FEATURES

True Crime

I used to teach evidence. It was great fun. Who doesn't love wrestling with the definition of hearsay and all those exceptions? But, for better or worse, the best teaching moments in that class didn't come from me. They came from Vinny Gambini, the hapless, endearing, and unwittingly hilarious criminal defense attorney played by Joe Pesci in *My Cousin Vinny*. Plenty of those scenes illustrated key points of evidence law in ways that were hard to forget.

The film also conveyed another key lesson: the importance of the quality and commitment of the lawyers involved in all aspects of the criminal justice process. Indeed (and I realize I'm dating myself as I write this), students back then often mentioned that this movie had played a role in inspiring them to become lawyers. For others, of course, the inspiration came from *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Or "Law and Order." Or "The Wire." Or even *Legally Blonde*.

Whatever the source, these fictional examples of vivid and urgent advocacy in the high stakes realm of the criminal justice system helped set many of us on our path towards legal practice. From that point of view, it's no surprise to lawyers that the True Crime genre dominates today's cultural landscape. These stories ask timeless questions lawyers wrestle with every day: What really happened? Who decides the truth? How do process, power, and persuasion shape outcomes?

This issue of *Texas Law Magazine* explores these themes from a variety of angles. There's Barbara Rae-Venter '85, whose pioneering work with investigative genetic genealogy caught the Golden State Killer, and Mindy Montford '95, whose cold case work helped solve the decades-old Yogurt Shop murders. Professor Brian Pérez-Daple, a former federal prosecutor, analyzes what statistics really tell us about crime in America. Judge Jesse F. McClure III '99 talks about life on the bench of the Texas Criminal Court of Appeals. And Guy James Gray '73, a former prosecutor, and Gretchen Sween '03, a defense attorney, reflect on the toll working capital cases can take.

These stories are a powerful reminder of why the rule of law matters, and why doing this work exceptionally well—carefully, ethically, and courageously—is inspiring.

Hook 'em,

BOBBY CHESNEY
Dean, The University of Texas School of Law

1

Sarah WILSON

"What We Carry," p. 18

Sarah Wilson is a photographer, cinematographer, and film producer. She has been on assignment for *The New York Times Magazine, TIME, People, The Atlantic, National Geographic,* and *Texas Monthly,* among others. Her photography featured in *Jasper, Texas: The Road to Redemption*, a 2003 collaboration between Wilson and writer Ricardo Ainslie.

2

Aldo JARILLO

"Tracking Down Invisible Killers," p. 26

Aldo Jarillo is an award-winning visual artist and illustrator specializing in editorial design. His creations, which explore and blend the boundaries between text, image, and design, have appeared in *The New Yorker, The New York Times, The Atlantic, The Wall Street Journal, The Guardian*, and *Texas Monthly,* among others.

3

Robin BERGHAUS

"Tracking Down Invisible Killers," p. 26

Robin Berghaus writes and produces feature articles, documentaries, and podcasts on advances in science, health, medicine, technology, and education. Her work has appeared in and on Texas Public Radio, *Boston University,* and *Documentary Magazine,* among others. This is her second feature article for *Texas Law Magazine*.

4

Angela SHAH

"What We Carry," p. 18

Los Angeles-based writer Angela Shah is an award-winning journalist whose work has appeared in *The New York Times, TIME, Forbes, The Dallas Morning News,* and the *Austin American- Statesman*. She is a graduate of Moody College of Communication at UT Austin. "What We Carry" is her second feature for *Texas Law Magazine.*

5

John SCHWARTZ '84

"The Undeadliest Protest," p. 34

A professor of practice at the UT Austin School of Journalism and Media, John Schwartz took his law degree straight into journalism. Over his extensive career, he wrote for *Newsweek, The Washington Post,* and for 21 years reported for *The New York Times.* During his law school years, Schwartz was editor of *The Daily Texan.*

COURTESY OF CONTRIBUTORS

opening statements

Juan Miguel Matheus
A scholar in exile.

art by RYAN MELGAR

How do countries respond after decades of autocracy? That question has become pressingly urgent for Juan Miguel Matheus, a constitutional law scholar and Venezuelan politician in exile from the Maduro regime. Matheus, the inaugural Bowden Resident Fellow with the Bech-Loughlin First Amendment Center, writes that in a post-Maduro Venezuela, democratic strategies cannot wait for certainty. Moments of rupture are also times of possibility. "The best that political analysis can do is to point out principles that should be defended and limits that should be respected before it is too late."

BY LIZ ANDERSON HILTON

Mindy Montford '95 Fighting for answers.

Halfway through Mindy Montford's undergraduate senior year at UT Austin, someone brutally murdered four Austin teenagers. Big-city crime is common. Dallas and Houston had racked up 500–600 murders each in 1991. But Austin's murder count that year totaled a mere 45.

On Dec. 6, 1991, the city added four more: Amy Ayers (13), Sarah Harbison (15), Sarah's older sister Jennifer Harbison (17), and Eliza Thomas (17). The quadruple homicide, known simply as Yogurt Shop, remained unsolved for decades. But as fate would have it, the college student would become the lawyer championing its resolution in 2025.

No Leads

The Yogurt Shop victims were sexually assaulted, tied up, and shot in the back of the head before the killer set fire to the store, burning the victims and torching most of the incriminating evidence.

The investigation would be plagued by that lack of evidence, with more than 50 false confessions, four wrongful accusations, two overturned convictions, and the disconsolate passage of time. Normally, time works against answers. But in Yogurt Shop, it was the 34-year gap that eventually yielded enough advances in forensic investigation to finally connect the dots.

Noting the families' pain, Montford says, "I wish it had been sooner." But she reflects, "Yogurt Shop couldn't have been solved before 2025. That was just the year for it."

Taking on the Case

In January 2017, after being named First Assistant District Attorney for Travis County, Montford met with the family of the youngest victim, Amy Ayers. "They wanted Margaret's [Moore '72] assurances that she was going to continue looking into the case," Montford says. That was when she and Angie Ayers, Amy Ayers' sister-in-law, first considered what it would take to tackle cold cases systematically. Montford started the Travis County DA's first cold case unit and, a few years later, the first statewide cold case unit at the Office of the Attorney General.

By 2021, Montford, now working through the OAG, stayed closely connected to the Yogurt Shop case. She talked with the victims' families typically monthly and sometimes weekly. "And that's since 2017," she says. Taking on the case "was life changing. I didn't know how life changing it was going to be. I was humbled. I was scared. I was excited."

Heating Up

Though it was too early to know, the case began heating up in 2018 when amateur sleuths cracked the code on a new forensic science: investigative genetic genealogy. (See "Tracking Down Invisible Killers" on page 26.) Using the same technique that identified and led to the arrest of the Golden State Killer in the spring of 2018, Missouri investigators linked Robert Eugene Brashers, now dead, to two cold cases: a 1990 murder in South Carolina and a 1998 double homicide in Missouri. Though there was no evidence at the time linking Brashers to Yogurt Shop, his identification in 2018 proved pivotal for solving Yogurt Shop seven years later.

The first significant break in Yogurt Shop came in June 2025, when Austin Police Department Detective Daniel Jackson, whom Montford describes as the quintessential detective, noticed that the shell casing from the .380 caliber weapon used to shoot the victims was no longer in a national database. The National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN) links gun crimes and shooters by matching unique markings on spent cartridge cases. Montford confirmed that the Yogurt Shop .380 casing had been in NIBIN, and that sometime before 2025, it had dropped out of the database.

In June 2025, when Jackson uploaded the .380 data into NIBIN again, he had a hit within 24 hours. The same gun had been used in another crime: an unsolved 1998 murder in Kentucky with a similar *modus operandi* to Yogurt Shop. Linda Rutledge had been raped, tied up, and killed with a .380 gunshot to the back of her head in a strip mall, and the crime scene was set on fire. Critically, the Kentucky investigators had a fully intact rape kit.

Closing In

The Yogurt Shop investigators now had a ballistics match to another crime with a similar MO. Could DNA evidence now lead to the killer's identity?

In Yogurt Shop, APD investigators had been working with a Y-STR (single tandem repeat) of DNA recovered from one of the four victims. The Y-STR, carried only on the male chromosome, is helpful in rape cases where the DNA becomes mixed with that of the female victim. It isn't an individual's DNA profile; related men will share the same Y-STR markers. Because they are inconclusive and time consuming, "not every jurisdiction will run manual keyboard Y-STR searches," Montford notes. "Texas doesn't," she adds. "But Kentucky does. And so does South Carolina."

That's when Montford and Jackson caught their second big break. After asking labs and jurisdictions around the country for help, South Carolina law enforcement — running their first-ever manual keyboard search — connected the Yogurt Shop Y-STR markers to Robert Eugene Brashers, the man identified in 2018 as the killer in the 1990 South Carolina murder and in the 1998 double homicide in Missouri.

"I DIDN'T KNOW HOW LIFE CHANGING IT WAS GOING TO BE. I WAS HUMBLED. I WAS SCARED. I WAS EXCITED."

Brashers Under Her Nails

Now, with 34 years of not knowing, pacing almost breathlessly toward an answer, Montford and Jackson knew that they needed proof that Brashers did it. Having his Y-STR type isn't proof. Rather, it simply places him among a pool of possible perpetrators. Investigators decided to test the precious little DNA remaining — scrapings from under the fingernails of Amy Ayers. When Montford and Jackson heard back, Montford remembers the analyst saying, "I hope you're sitting down. Robert Brashers is under her fingernails." The Kentucky rape kit confirmed that Brashers had murdered Linda Rutledge, too, bringing his known murder count to eight, all women and girls, including a mother and her daughter.

As the families strained to come to terms with the answer at a hastily organized press conference last September, the victims' families expressed a range of emotions: anger, relief, exhaustion, but mostly gratitude. Through raw, throat-catching emotion, Shawn Ayers, Amy's brother, praised Montford. "Mindy has been there since the beginning, and yes, she told us face-to-face that she would never stop fighting

CONTINUED ON PAGE 53

Mindy Montford in the Dee J. Kelly Courtyard and Patman Family Plaza at the University of Texas School of Law in Austin, on Nov. 13, 2025.

portrait by MICHAEL THAD CARTER

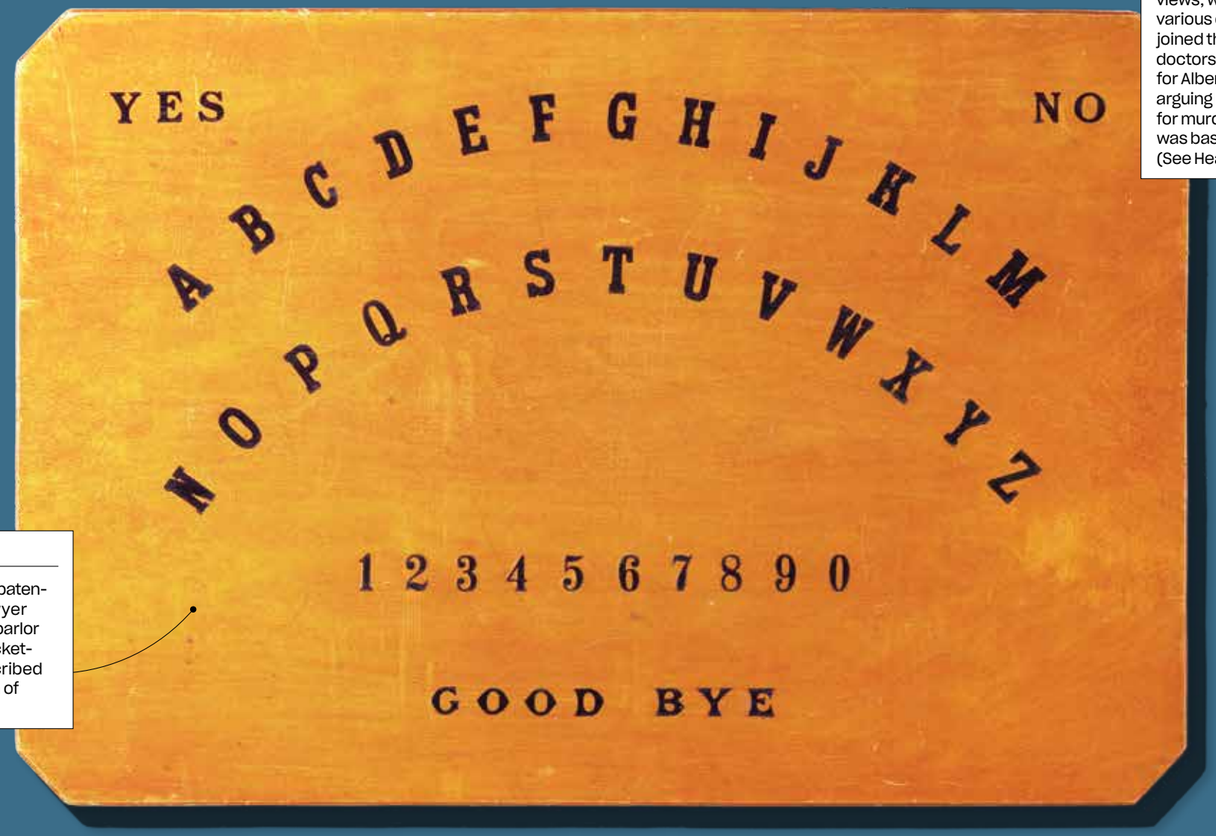
The Talking Dead

BY LIZ ANDERSON HILTON

THE CREATOR OF THE WORLD'S MOST FAMOUS DETECTIVE MORE THAN DABBLED IN SPIRITUALISM. IT MAY HAVE BEEN THE REASON SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE KILLED OFF HIS HYPER-RATIONALIST SHERLOCK HOLMES.

HARRY HOUDINI

The great illusionist Harry Houdini and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle became friends, and then fell out over Spiritualism. Houdini sought to convince Doyle it was all trickery.



PATENT

The Ouija board was patented in 1890 by a lawyer from Maryland as a parlor game. Its use skyrocketed among self-described mediums at the turn of the century.

JUNK SCIENCE

Doyle as an amateur sleuth occasionally offered his views, welcome or not, in various criminal cases. He joined thousands of other doctors in seeking a pardon for Albert J. Patrick (1886), arguing Patrick's conviction for murder by chloroform was based on junk science. (See Hearsay, p. 44.)

THE MEDIUM WIFE

Doyle's second wife, Jean, was a medium. She hosted the séance that ultimately splintered the friendship between the illusionist Harry Houdini and her husband.

"This agency stands flat-footed upon the ground, and there it must remain. The world is big enough for us. No ghosts need apply." So said Sherlock Holmes to his trusted companion, Dr. John Watson, in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's 1924 story, "The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire." ¶ But where Holmes was literature's ultimate rationalist, his creator was something else. ¶ A novelist, war correspondent, doctor, and amateur detective, Doyle was, curiously, an apostle for spiritualism throughout his lifetime. He pursued the belief that the spirit was distinct from the body and lived on after death. What's more, he believed the living could communicate with the dead, and vice versa. ¶ As a spiritual seeker, he attended his first séance in 1880, at age 21, and his book, *Wanderings of a Spiritualist*, published 40 years later, reads like an evangelist's testimony enumerating encounters with the dead. ¶ Some of those encounters may have occurred over Doyle's Ouija board, part of a collection of the writer's personal effects at the Harry Ransom Center. After one particularly moving séance, Doyle described his missionary zeal. "'My God, if they only knew—if they could only know!' Perhaps in that cry, wrung from my very soul, lay the inception of my voyage to the other side of the world. The wish to serve was strong upon us both [he and his wife]. God had given us wonderful signs, and they were surely not for ourselves alone." ¶ Did the rift between Doyle and the renowned empiricist of his own making lead to Holmes's demise in 1893's "The Final Problem?" Perhaps. We know only that Doyle didn't love Holmes as much as his adoring public. "That overrated character," he once wrote, mocking the stories he'd created as "rather childish things." ¶ "I have been much blamed for doing [Holmes] to death, but I hold that it was not murder, but justifiable homicide in self-defense, since, if I had not killed him, he would certainly have killed me," Doyle pleaded with his audience. ¶ For Doyle, there were more significant questions to tackle. What is it to be human? To live? To die? And can we prove the truth of those mysteries? ¶ Yes? No? The question still lingers. *Good Bye.*

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE PERSONAL EFFECTS COLLECTION. PHOTO BY PETE SMITH

BRIEF

A TOTAL *PRO*: MAKENNA MCGRAW EARNS ACCESS TO JUSTICE HONOR

MaKenna McGraw '26 started doing pro bono work at the law school before she even became a law student. As a UT undergrad pursuing her social work degree, McGraw volunteered in the Capital Punishment Clinic. The summer before her 1L year, she worked in the Texas state public defender's office, in the Office of Capital and Forensic Writs. ¶ Once she got to Texas Law, McGraw immersed herself in a broad range of pro bono projects: assembling parole packets, helping with driver's license recoveries, drafting of wills, and support on guardianship issues. She was recognized as a Pro Bono Beacon in her first two years, an honor reserved for the top contributors in each class. ¶ It's thus no surprise that McGraw was recognized as the Texas Access to Justice Commission Pro Bono Law Student for 2025. The annual award recognizes her outstanding service to low-income Texans. ¶ "Sitting with people in their hardest moments is profoundly grounding," says McGraw of her all-consuming passion for pro bono projects. "Legal doctrine becomes more than abstract rules. It becomes a tool to tangibly impact someone's life and brings a sense of purpose to my studies and a reminder why I chose this path in the first place." ¶ The Flower Mound native hasn't decided which of several opportunities she'll pursue after graduating this May, but criminal and capital defense is her focus. The big goal, though, is elected office back home. "I'm a Texan who loves Texas," she says. "My goal is to help make Texas a just and equitable place for everyone, recognizing the intersecting realities people across our state experience."

BY CHRISTOPHER ROBERTS

Elvis Has *NOT* Left the Building

Why 50,000,000 Stanley Johanson fans can't be wrong.

After 63 years in the classroom, Stanley Johanson not only has nothing left to prove, but he scarcely has anything more he can achieve. He's among the most influential and enduring Texas Law professors in the school's 140-plus-year history—which is saying something for a school that's boasted Charles Alan Wright, Page Keeton, Bill Powers, and Johanson's longtime contemporary, Ernest Smith—and he's won every accolade imaginable, including a slew of Lifetime Achievement recognitions and a handful of Hall of Fame inductions.

He was, naturally, a member of the inaugural class of the university's Academy of Distinguished Teachers. In fact, he turns out to have been the inspiration to create the academy in the first place.

It's nearly impossible to count up all the people Johanson has taught, mentored, or served with, through more than six decades in the classroom. Spot any familiar faces in the crowd?

"In my opinion, Stanley was and is the best teacher ever at Texas Law," says Mark Yudof, who served as Johanson's dean from 1984 to 1994 before becoming UT Austin's provost. In 1995, Yudof was determined to recognize great teaching across the university and so started the Academy. Membership remains the highest honor the university can bestow on a professor.

"The truth is that Stanley was my inspiration to do that," Yudof adds.

Can't Help Falling in Love

Those expecting to read about Johanson's retirement must continue waiting. At age 92, he's wrapped up another fall semester of teaching his legendary Wills and Estates class and is hard at work on edits to the latest edition of Johanson's *Texas Estates Code Annotated*, the authoritative text on the topic. He's now been named the Dean's Distinguished Scholar by Dean Bobby Chesney.

Chesney has been Johanson's colleague for nearly 20 years and considers his impact and longevity something to which he aspires. "When I'm with alumni, I'm inevitably asked, 'Is Stanley still there?'" says Chesney. "That's the kind of recognition anyone who steps in front of a classroom can only dream of. It's awe-inspiring."

Pompadour and Circumstance

As famous as Johanson is for his teaching and writing, for many the enduring memory of his class is the regular end-of-semester cameo from Johanson's alter ego—The King.

"You're sitting in class and the teaching assistant comes in to tell you that Professor Johanson is out and there's a guest lecturer," recalls Michelle Hood '15. "And then 'Elvis' appears."

"WHEN I'M WITH ALUMNI, I'M INEVITABLY ASKED, 'IS STANLEY STILL THERE?' "

Elvis doesn't just live in the classroom. "We were heading to my son's bachelor party in Vegas," recalls Johanson's son-in-law Tim Klitch. "It's me, my sons, and Elvis. Stanley was in full costume in the airport, on the plane, and the trip."

And people loved it. "So many folks were trying to get a picture with him, we nearly missed our flight! That's star power," adds Klitch.

His Way

Johanson is on a research leave this semester, but he's not kicking back. "He's just as busy as ever," says wife Gerrie, who celebrated 70 years of marriage to her King this past year.

To celebrate, the couple are preparing for a travel adventure with as many of their six kids and 13 grandchildren as possible. And he's thrilled to be gathering with at least a half-dozen former students from his very first Texas Law class from the fall of 1963 when in Austin for their 60th law school reunion this April.

But those are B-sides for the classroom legend. "I'm pleased and proud to be the Dean's Distinguished Scholar, but what I'm really excited about is my class this fall," says Johanson, beaming. "Teaching is what I love!"

MUSIC BY FREDERICK LOEWE; LYRICS BY STANLEY JOHANSON

ALL SHOOK UP ABOUT SONGWRITING

Johanson's not just a crooner; he's a composer. One of his hits is this tune "borrowed" from *Camelot*, which he sings to students capping off the semester.

"Whatever I Would Leave You."

If ever I would leave you
It wouldn't be intestate
If it were intestate
I never would go
The shares to be taken
By my distributees
Would produce consternation
And I'd be displeased

Whatever I would leave you
It wouldn't be in probate
If it were in probate
The neighbors would know
How much did I leave you?
How much you could spend?
For it's all public record
Right down to the end

And could I trust an executor to hold the line
Against a tax collector screaming, everything is mine?

Whatever I would leave you
It wouldn't be in trust, dear
If it were in trust, dear
I'd lose all control
Not intestate or probate
Not in trust, for a fee
Perhaps I'll choose
To spend it on me

art by MAX-O-MATIC

BY JEREMY SIMON

Listening is Lawyering

Reasons why trauma-informed interviewing works.

At its core, lawyering is an exercise in story-telling. Whether in a courtroom or a conference room, lawyers are charged with telling other people's stories fully and persuasively. But that task becomes far more difficult when those stories involve trauma.

Clients and witnesses who have experienced violence, abuse, loss, or catastrophe are often asked to recount the most painful moments of their lives. If lawyers do not know how trauma affects memory, emotion, and communication, critical facts can be distorted, misunderstood, or simply lost.

That stark reality has encouraged lawyers on both sides of the docket to hone skills in trauma-informed interviewing, an approach that helps them gather case information more effectively by understanding how trauma shapes the way people tell their stories. Drawing on decades of research in psychology and neuroscience, trauma-informed practice recognizes that trauma can disrupt memory, flatten or intensify emotional responses, and impair decision-making, which might lead to responses being mistaken for evasiveness or unreliability.

With trauma-informed interviewing, "we get better information, stronger relationships, and better outcomes," says Marshall Sales '15, a family law litigator at Hennan Culp in Austin. It's a practice Sales first learned as a student in Texas Law's Domestic Violence Clinic.

Overwhelm

"Trauma is an event that overwhelms a person's ability to cope, and it impacts how the brain works," explains Jeana Lungwitz, the Domestic Violence Clinic's director and co-founder. "So, people may not remember events chronologically or recall details the way lawyers expect them to."

When that's the case, "lawyers need to be prepared for those symptoms to emerge during litigation," says Texas Law Adjunct Professor Jamie M. Kerr '12, also a family law practitioner. "And they need to know how to work with them." Trauma survivors may appear emotionally volatile, or unexpectedly flat, when recounting events. They may minimize what happened or struggle to describe daily realities.

These are common trauma responses, not necessarily credibility flaws.

Restoring Control

Trauma-informed interviewing begins with a "do no harm" mindset, allowing clients or witnesses to speak at their own pace. Initial meetings prioritize listening over control. "Patience—much patience—is required," says Robert N. Kepple, a Texas Law adjunct professor and a former prosecutor who specializes in criminal law.

"We're not their therapists," says Lori Duke '95, the co-director of Texas Law's Children's Rights Clinic. "But we can be someone who listens."

Lawyers with trauma-informed skills will prepare clients for when testimony becomes more difficult. And they can help clients identify gaps that might need to be filled in when the trauma makes their experience hard to articulate. "Our job is to [help a client] paint a picture for the court of what life is actually like," Lungwitz says. "Sometimes people need help doing that."

Trauma-informed lawyers will also reduce redundancy. In prosecuting child abuse cases, "Child Advocacy Centers taught us the importance of interviewing children once, not multiple times in ways that re-traumatize," says Kepple. That model is now widely viewed as best practice.

"At the crux of trauma is a loss of control," says Alyse Munrose '23, an associate at Bollier Ciccone Stinson in Austin. Done rightly, trauma-informed interviewing "can give some of that control back."

For lawyers, the payoff is practical as well as humane. Trauma-informed interviewing improves fact development, credibility assessment, client preparation, and advocacy. It allows lawyers to tell stories that are not only more compassionate, but more complete, true, and compelling.

It Starts in the Classroom

Trauma-informed interviewing became a structured practice in abuse prosecutions in the 1990s. By the early 2000s law schools began incorporating trauma-informed principles into clinical education. Texas Law was an early adopter, eventually bringing the practice into the pedagogy for the Domestic Violence, Children's Rights, Immigration, Criminal Defense, and Capital Punishment clinics.

Early training better prepares lawyers for a simple truth: how you gather facts shapes both the case and the client. The result is lawyers who are technically skilled and professionally mature earlier in their careers.

"You can help in a client's healing," Duke says. "And teaching these skills to law students at the beginning of their careers helps build their long-term success and satisfaction with their work."

art by DAVIAN-LYNN HOPKINS

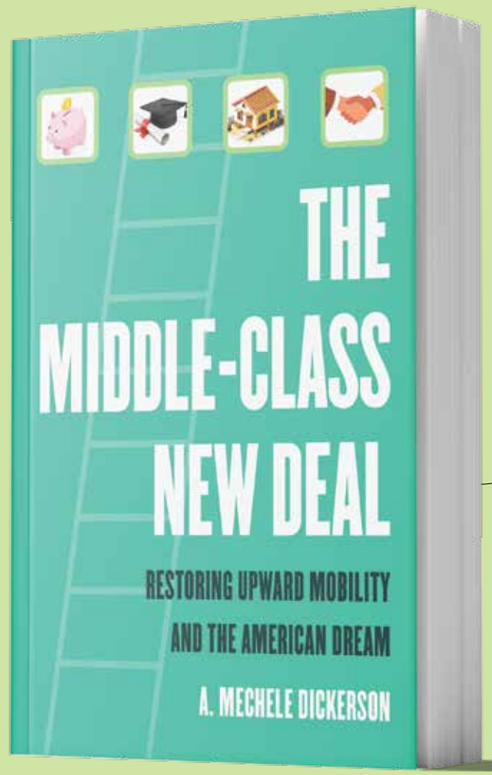
BY CHRISTOPHER ROBERTS

Mid-Century Modern

PROFESSOR A. MECHELE DICKERSON TAKES US ON A JOURNEY INTO THE MIDDLE CLASS, WHY IT'S STRUGGLING, AND WHAT IT WILL TAKE TO FIX IT.

America's middle class didn't just happen. It was built. ¶ That's a core premise of Professor Mechele Dickerson's new book, *The Middle-Class New Deal*, and it cuts against one of the most persistent assumptions in American economic life: that prosperity for all naturally emerges from free markets and argues instead that the American middle class was a deliberate political project, created in the 1930s and 1940s through New Deal policies and the G.I. Bill. ¶ That argument isn't merely historical or rhetorical. It's a call to action to do more for the middle class of today—or what's left of it. ¶ Dickerson marshals an extensive body of data on homeownership rates, education, wages, and affordability to demonstrate how sharply the economic foundations of middle-class life have eroded. The data show that what many Americans experience as personal financial stress is in fact structural: a housing market that no longer produces affordable supply at scale, labor markets mired in stagnant wages, and regulations that shift risk from institutions to households. ¶ But, Dickerson writes, if we created the middle class then, we could also rebuild it now if leaders have the political will. "We believed that having a financially stable middle class —neither rich nor poor— was in the economic and political interest of the country as a whole," she says. "We still believe that, but we don't back it up with policy." ¶ Published in January, the book has been an immediate hit with a broad, bipartisan range of political podcasters and news outlets. This March she was interviewed on "The Daily Show" and debuted at # 5 on *The New York Times* bestseller list for paperback nonfiction. Dickerson welcomes the attention, but cares more about impact. ¶ "What I really want is to share the facts with policymakers, the people who could really help the middle class," she says. The book is grounded in history and law, but also in lived experience. Drawing on her parents' careers as public school teachers in the segregated South, she illustrates how mid-century policies created affordable higher education, stable full-time employment with benefits, accessible homeownership, and the ability to save, all of which made long-term security possible even amid profound social inequality. The supports were imperfect and unevenly distributed, but they were real. ¶ The middle class was a choice once. Dickerson asks whether it will be again.

Professor Mechele Dickerson is the Arthur L. Moller Chair in Bankruptcy Law and Practice.



HORNS UP

Dickerson has her horns up for the Texas-friendly studio audience at her appearance with Jon Stewart on "The Daily Show." Hook 'em!

INSET IMAGE, DICKERSON: BRIAN BIRZER; INSET IMAGE, THE DAILY SHOW: MATT WILSON

Isn't it Grand? The 2026 chancellors inducted.

Becoming a lawyer has always been Alexia Malcom's dream, and Texas Law was always her dream school. But even dreaming big didn't prepare Malcom for the distinction of finishing at the very top of the Class of 2026.

"I am beyond grateful to have been taught by, and to have studied among, some of the brightest minds in the legal field," says Malcom, who was announced in January as the school's newest Grand Chancellor.

The Chancellor Society is the law school's oldest and most prestigious honor society, recognizing those students with the highest grade-point averages in their class year. The society only exists at Texas Law and is more selective than national programs such as the Order of the Coif. The top four Chancellors serve as officers, with the first three being granted the titles of Grand Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, and Clerk.

The fourth member enjoys a title distinctive to Texas Law's history: Keeper of the Peregrinus, in honor of the school's quirky and fun mascot (whose history was featured in *Texas Law Magazine* Volume 2, Issue 1). Traditionally, 12 more students hold the title of Chancellor-at-Large, though ties can produce more than 16 chancellors in any given year.

For 2026, the ties were at the top of the rankings, with Micah Clark, Colin Kober, and Jaron Petreas enjoying a three-way tie for Vice Chancellor, and Francesca Lan Chu and Rebecca Traber sharing the title of Clerk.

Chancellors have gone on to highly successful careers in a wide range of roles, often as professional and community leaders, including as judges and members of Congress—and even as Texas Law faculty, including notables such as Kamela Bridges '91, John Dzienkowski '83, Tom McGarity '74, Heather Way '96, and Jay Westbrook '68, among others.

As for Malcom, after graduation, she will join Sidley Austin's general litigation department in Dallas. The Vice Chancellors are set in their plans, too. Clark will clerk on the 5th Circuit for Judge Priscilla Richman before joining Scott, Douglass & McConnico in Austin. Kober will work in the mergers & acquisitions/private equity group in the Dallas office of Kirkland & Ellis. Petreas, meanwhile, is headed to Houston and Norton Rose Fulbright's litigation department.

While recognition for academic achievement is meaningful to the Chancellors, they seem to know that true success is about something deeper.

"It reflects perseverance," says Malcom. "And the guidance of faculty mentors who continually challenged and supported me."

Dean Bobby Chesney thinks there's wisdom in that attitude.

THEY SEEM TO KNOW THAT TRUE SUCCESS IS ABOUT SOMETHING DEEPER.

"Grades in and of themselves don't necessarily matter," says Chesney. "But the hard work and the investment you make in yourself to make the most of your opportunities here matters a lot."

"That's what induction into the Chancellors Society really stands for."

THOMAS MEREDITH

FREE SPEECH CONTEST BRINGS WISDOM AND REWARD

The textualist interpretation of the Bech-Loughlin First Amendment Center is straightforward. It educates students and the public on the meaning and value of the First Amendment and the rights to speech, assembly, and religious freedom it enshrines. That's the plain meaning. ¶ An originalist interpretation, however, suggests a more complex view of what purposes it might serve. A paragon of similar centers launched in the last decade, including at the law schools at Yale, Columbia, Harvard, and Notre Dame, it is at the leading edge of a broader cultural recognition that a polarized society must keep in touch with its first principles. ¶ Both aspects were brought together through the latest edition of an annual Free Speech Essay contest, established to "nurture high levels of scholarship and thought among students," says Professor Steven Collis, the Center's director. ¶ Open to all UT Austin students, entrants compete for meaningful awards: $5,000, $3,000, and $2,000 (for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd, respectively) in both undergraduate and graduate categories, and up to three $1,000 honorable mention prizes. ¶ The top prize in this year's graduate category went to Tomas Cancio '27, for his essay, "Speech is a Drug." Cancio, managing editor of *The Texas Law Review*, wrote about the need for thoughtful conversation around the Texas-led movement to research Ibogaine as a possible treatment for neuropsychiatric conditions. Legalizing the drug implicates profound questions about health and wellness, the powers and limits of the administrative state, and the standing of individual liberty versus the common good. ¶ "It takes courage to exercise your free speech responsibly rather than anonymously lobbing figurative fireballs," says Collis. "I'm so impressed with how many students really took us up on the challenge to talk about difficult topics respectfully."

art by NADZEYA MAKEYEVA

Trio Sweeps Paper Chase

Texas Law aces writing contest.

Kayla Shelkey '26, Elizabeth Graff '27, and Beth Ann Baker '26

For the first time in the history of the Paper Chase Legal Writing Competition, students from one school claimed the top three spots. Second-year student Elizabeth Graff '27 took first place, while third-year students Kayla Shelkey '26 and Beth Ann Baker '26 finished second and third, respectively, marking a historic sweep for the law school.

Hosted each fall by the Texas Young Lawyers Association and Baylor Law School, the Paper Chase invites law students in Texas to test their legal writing skills through a fictional scenario. Last fall's participants had to write a trial brief supporting a motion to disqualify opposing counsel, applying legal presumptions established by Texas courts, within a 10-page limit.

"Going in, I knew my toughest competition would be my peers here at Texas Law," said Graff, who credits her success to being surrounded by strong classmates and learning from faculty who emphasize clarity and precision in legal writing. "Even the strongest arguments and best ideas are seldom persuasive if they cannot be articulated clearly and concisely."

The results reflect the strong foundation students receive through the Texas Law's writing program, which is housed in the David J. Beck Center for Legal Research, Writing, and Appellate Advocacy.

"The Paper Chase competition is judged by practicing lawyers, and they see the same talent and skill in our students that we see," says Kamela Bridges '91, the Beck Center director.

For Baker, the program is central to students' success. "We are trained not just to write persuasively, but to write responsibly," she says. "Anticipating counterarguments, grounding claims in authority, and communicating in a way that's useful to the reader."

Shelkey agrees. "That foundation is invaluable to me as a law student and a writer," she says.

With this year's historic sweep, the results offer clear evidence that Texas Law students are not only learning legal writing—they are mastering it.

True Crime Numbers

The hidden math of justice: crime without punishment.

What percentage of criminals should get away with it? Ten? Twenty? More than fifty?

You might imagine the natural answer is *none*. From the mid-1930s until around 1968, most Hollywood films followed the Hays Code, a set of rules about what was acceptable to depict. In the unacceptable category: criminals who get away with their crimes. But the Code proved unworkable as a standard for the movies, and it's unworkable as a standard for real life, too. Making sure *every* criminal is caught and punished would be wildly expensive and require a kind of society nobody wants—and it still wouldn't work. We don't drive our cars as if we want zero accidents ever to happen, and we don't run our justice system as if we want zero criminals ever to get away with it. But what does our justice system imply about how many criminals *should* get away with it? Should we be happy with the way things stand now?

Brian Pérez-Daple is a lecturer teaching criminal law, criminal procedure, statutory interpretation, and evidence.

Estimating the gap

How big is the gap between crimes committed and criminals punished?

Let's start with the clearance rate—the percentage of crimes police close, whether by arrest or by "exceptional means" (where police think they've identified the perpetrator but can't make an arrest for some reason). According to the FBI, in 2024 American law enforcement cleared 43.8% of violent crimes—meaning 56.2% went unsolved. But, of course, there are variations among crimes. For that same year, the FBI reported the national clearance rate for wire fraud was just 3.2%. (The annual losses from fraud nationwide are in the ballpark of $10 billion per year.) Homicides were cleared at 61.4% (up from 52.3% in 2022), rape at 26.5%, property crimes at just under 16%.

There are local variations, too. The Houston police cleared over 90% of homicides in 2024 but just 9.9% of rape cases. Clearance rates are generally lower in poorer areas where crime rates are higher. Race matters, also. A recent study of homicide clearance rates in big cities found lower clearance rates in poorer communities that were predominantly Black or mixed minority. In mostly white neighborhoods, economic disadvantage didn't have the same effect. What's more, in a mostly Black neighborhood, each additional percentage point of Black population was associated with a 2.5% decrease in expected homicide clearances.

Even these numbers overstate accountability. Many jurisdictions lump arrests together with those cases cleared by "exceptional means," where no arrest is made at all. The Baltimore County Police Department reported a 70% clearance rate for rape in 2016 but made arrests only about 30% of the time. It's usually impossible to tell how many of these cases could have produced arrests if the police had more resources (or more will).

Clearance rates can also be gamed. Because funding is often tied to them, police departments have incentives to inflate clearance numbers. (Viewers of "The Wire" will recall colorful examples of this.) Investigations in some cities have found police systematically misclassifying serious crimes as less serious ones. Errors tended to run in one direction: they made the police look better.

At best, then, clearance rates tell us what percentage of reported crimes are solved. They say nothing about crimes never reported to police—and most crimes aren't reported. In 2024, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, only 47.9% of violent crimes and 30.5% of property crimes were reported to police at all. (We know this from national surveys administered annually. Victims are willing to share with the surveyors what they don't share with the police.)

Combine reporting rates with clearance rates, and the picture sharpens: roughly four out of five violent crimes are never solved. Because not every solved crime is prosecuted, we can conclude fewer than one in five violent crimes are prosecuted.

BECAUSE NOT EVERY SOLVED CRIME IS PROSECUTED, WE CAN CONCLUDE FEWER THAN ONE IN FIVE VIOLENT CRIMES ARE PROSECUTED.

Prosecutions usually succeed once in court, but their high success rate depends in part on concealed failures. In the federal system in 2023, 93.5% of defendants were convicted. State rates are lower, but still relatively high. In New York in 2024, only 62% of felony cases ended in felony convictions, but roughly 17% of the remaining cases were resolved as misdemeanors. Around 10% were dismissed or resulted in acquittals. Those numbers hide the prosecutions that were declined because not enough evidence had been collected to convict a guilty defendant, or because that evidence couldn't be used because there was a problem with a search warrant or some other investigatory slipup.

A different balance?

People who study the issue generally agree that if you want to deter crime, the most important thing isn't how severely you punish it. It's how certain the crime is to be punished at all, and how quickly. Our system inverts this: most crimes go unpunished; and when punishment comes, it comes slowly, and it's severe. This is probably a bad approach. When criminals usually get away with it, crime is encouraged, and people stop trusting their government, especially in the poorer communities where most crimes are committed. Bringing the hammer down hard when criminals are caught doesn't make up for that.

Suppose we wanted to strike a different balance. How? Larger police forces and lower caseloads are both associated with higher clearance rates. The same logic applies to prosecutors: more staffing means more ability to pursue hard cases instead of just reaching for lower-hanging fruit. It would also enable better quality work, leading to fewer shoddy search warrants, less excluded evidence, and fewer abandoned prosecutions. But notice that more prosecutions would also mean more

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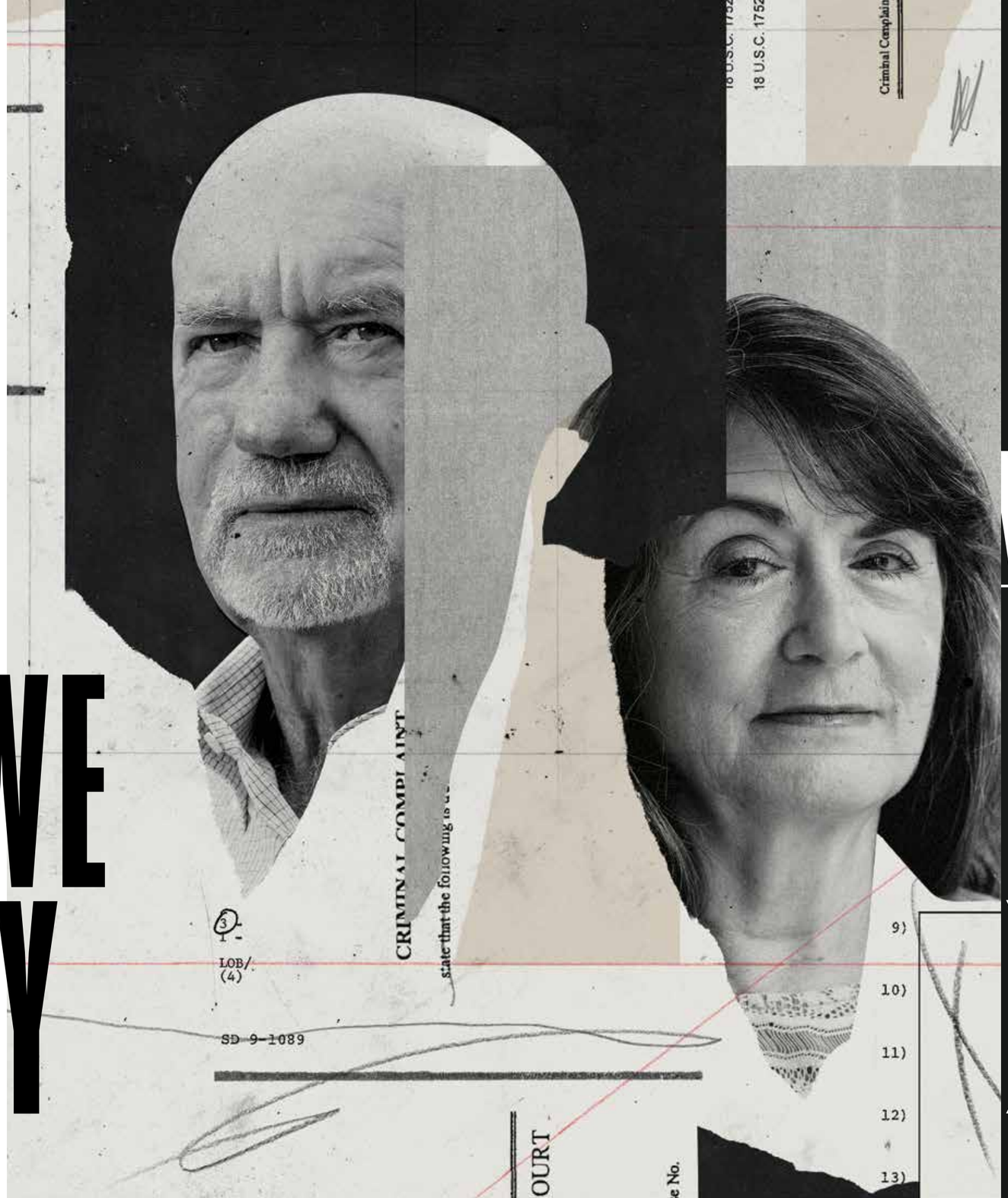
art by VARTIKA SHARMA

WHAT WE CARRY



AT WE RY

A prosecutor and a capital defense lawyer reflect on the toll of pursuing justice from opposite sides of the courtroom.

Written by Angela Shah

Portraits by Sarah Wilson

Collage by Mike McQuade

WHAT IS IT LIKE TO HOLD ANOTHER HUMAN BEING'S LIFE IN YOUR HANDS?

FOR LAWYERS WORKING within the Texas criminal justice system, that is not a rhetorical question. Public attention, rightly, centers on victims and their families, on the violence that sets the machinery of justice in motion. Far less visible is the toll the work takes on the lawyers within that machinery.

Guy James Gray Jr. '73, and Gretchen Sween '03, came of age in different eras and from opposite sides of the docket — one working inside the system for decades, the other often standing outside, challenging it.

A career prosecutor, Gray defied societal pressure to force his community to confront racial wounds, leaving permanent scars on his life. Sween traded in a comfortable life as a corporate attorney for a capital defense practice, often paying a personal price for revealing uncomfortable truths of how justice is unevenly applied.

Both say their time at Texas Law instilled the values that would guide them through the most difficult stretches of their careers. "You don't spend time in Austin and not be changed," Gray said.

Though fierce in practice, prosecutors and criminal defense lawyers generally avoid discussing the cost of justice on themselves. Gray and Sween candidly share how years of proximity to the violence and loss of crime leave their mark, and what it means to carry that weight long after the case files are closed.

THE PROSECUTOR

GUY JAMES GRAY JR. still has the photos.

It's not that he needs them to remember. Images of James Byrd Jr.'s dismembered, bloodied body have lived in Gray's mind since that brutal night in 1998. Byrd, a Black man, was beaten, stripped naked, chained to the back of a pickup truck by three white men, and dragged down a dirt road outside Jasper, TX, his body torn apart and scattered in the truck's wake.

Gray, now 76, is nearly three decades removed from prosecuting Byrd's killers in trials that brought unwanted international attention and infamy to the small East Texas town. "Those images pop up in my mind almost daily," he said. "They can't be erased. I've just learned to live with them."

One image stands out. A year after the murder, while preparing for the trial of the first suspect, Gray found himself sitting on the floor of his office at the Jasper County Courthouse, staring at scores of autopsy photographs scattered all around him. A capital murder conviction required proof of two underlying felonies. Murder was clear. The second was not.

Witnesses said Byrd had voluntarily gotten into the rusted 1982 pickup with the three white men and was seen drinking and smoking cigarettes with them. Then Gray realized the gruesome truth: The most severe damage from the dragging was on Byrd's elbows, ground nearly to the joint. But there were no marks on the back of his head.

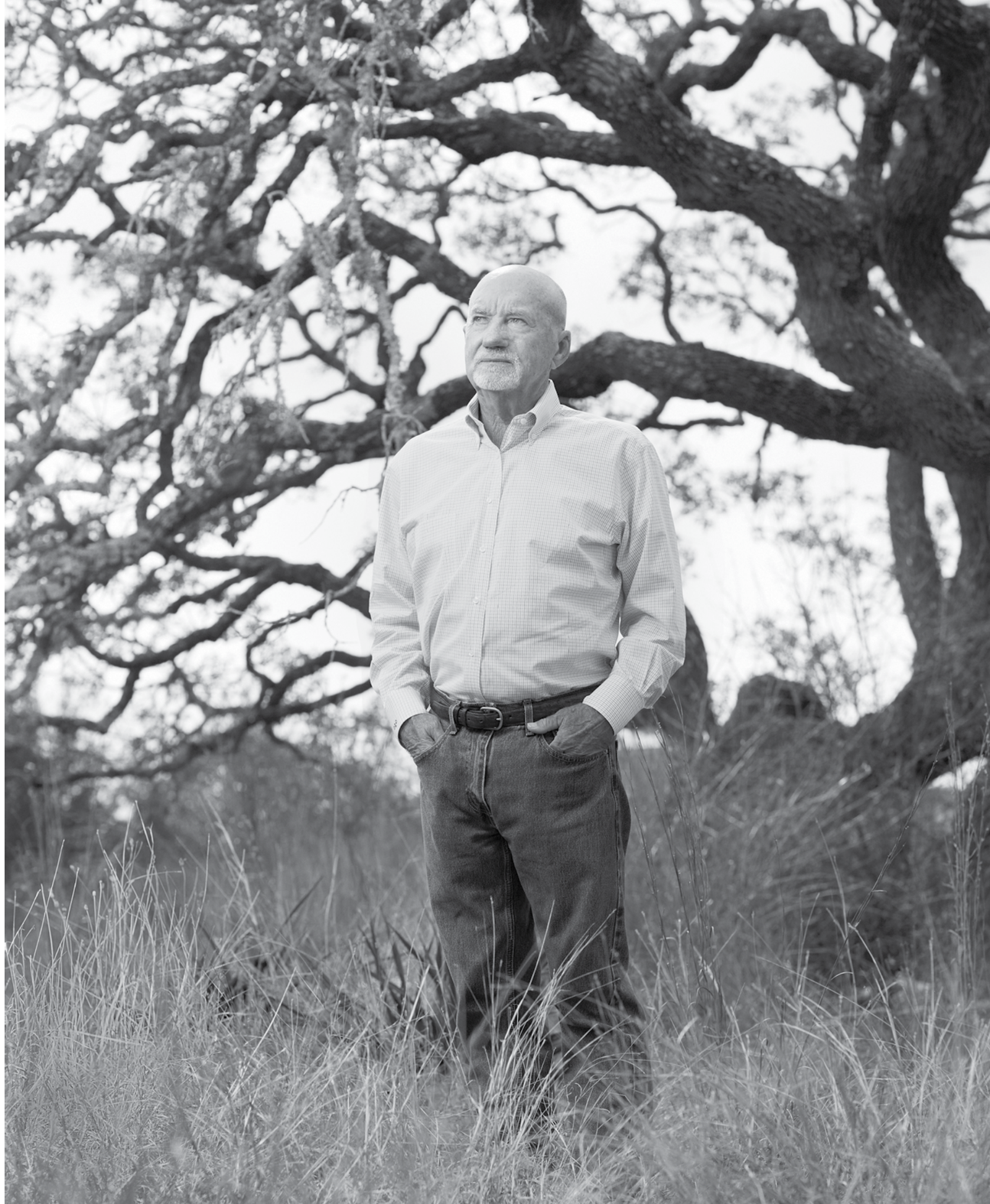
"He had to be alive when they chained him and started dragging him," Gray said. "He had to use his elbows to hold his head up off the pavement. They kidnapped him," the second felony, "and dragged him alive."

"There is no forgetting that."

MORAL COMPASS. When he first began prosecuting capital cases, Gray, who is Catholic, sought guidance from church leaders. The Vatican is against the death penalty, but getting moral clearance to do his job was important to him. "You have to make sure that you mentally can live with the fact that you went to the jury and asked for and got the death penalty," he said.

Where he lost faith was in his community. A fourth-generation resident of Jasper, Gray was deeply woven into the town's social and civic fabric. His father and grandfather had served in local leadership roles. It was the kind of close-knit community where an accused killer might once have been a child who played in your home with your own son (which one of Byrd's killers did).

That familiarity did not translate into support. Gray's pursuit of justice for Byrd made him a target of residents who were angry that he was giving the community a black eye. "They'd tell me," Gray recalled, "'What in the hell are you doing, Guy James? He's just a crackhead n*****.'"



Guy James Gray Jr. on his Kerrville, TX, property on Feb. 20, 2026.

The racism itself did not surprise him; he had grown up with it. What shocked him was their conditional morality, rationed along color lines. "Even the extremely racist ones knew there had to be a prosecution, but pursuing the death penalty, and inviting the publicity, was disloyal to our Southern history," he said.

The case drew national and global attention, including threats from hate groups emboldened by the spotlight. "One morning on the [home] answering machine was a message — three spaced-out gunshots," Gray recalled. The FBI, assessing the threats as credible, installed the courthouse's first metal detectors.

The Klan had long made a home in East Texas, though for years with a generally muted presence. Byrd's killing, however, brought outsiders like Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton and the Black Panthers to Jasper to protest. The Klan responded in kind.

When Gray and his family ran everyday errands, he said they constantly looked over their shoulders, a big-city reflex unusual in a small town. Gray knew that many local Klan members rode motorcycles, so hearing the roar of one put them on alert immediately. Gray's sons slept with shotguns under their beds.

"

SOMEONE I KNEW, WHO KNEW ME, CALLED ME A 'TRAITOR TO THE CAUSE.' WE ARE NOT IN THE DAMN CIVIL WAR.

— **GUY JAMES GRAY JR.**
PROSECUTOR

"Someone I knew, who knew me, called me a 'traitor to the cause,'" he said. "We are not still in the damn Civil War." He sighs and shakes his head slowly, as if, even decades later, he can't understand that thinking.

"I'm not a progressive," Gray said plainly. But he also refused to go along simply to get along.

CONVICTED. One by one, Gray prosecuted, and won convictions for, each of Byrd's killers – all in one year. Two of the three juries, each nearly entirely white, returned death sentences.

Only he, a "hillbilly insider," could have pulled it off, reflected Gray. "Thousands of prosecutors could do a trial," Gray said. "It's an art form to pick a jury to try a white man for killing a Black man in East Texas. Only a prosecutor who was raised in East Texas culture could have successfully picked this jury," he said.

The exposure to the killers' hate-filled worlds, along with his neighbors' scorn, forced him to build what he describes as a hard shell. "You just have to get mean to survive," he said. "The more pressure that came with this, the better I was able to focus." He adds, "You can't be a good D.A. unless you get in there and fight."

It helped that Gray's wife, who he calls his "rock," never asked him to back down. "She told me I had to," he said.

Still, his pugilistic approach carried a physical cost. "I'm not a therapy guy," Gray said. "I probably drank too much." He briefly tried Valium to sleep but stopped because the drug left him groggy. He played golf but ate poorly, gained 30 pounds, and his blood pressure spiked. Within six months of the final trial's conclusion in 1999, Gray was hospitalized and underwent a quadruple bypass heart surgery.

"I feel like one of those old football players or boxers with a little bit of Alzheimer's," he said. "I sometimes struggle to remember like I want to."

'SPEAK UP.' Gray was shaped by a strong sense of civic service. His grandfather served as county judge, and his father had always intended to go to law school. Gray fulfilled those ambitions.

Texas Law degree in hand, he returned home, missing country life. Private practice quickly soured him on "paperwork lawyering." The prosecutor's office — working with police, assisting witnesses, picking juries — was a better fit.

By 1998, he was more than two decades into prosecuting crimes. For Gray, Byrd's murder echoed an earlier injustice.

Back in the 1930s, he explains, the region had "barrel houses," honky-tonks where Black men could drink bootleg "white lightning," gamble, and otherwise find entertainment. White patrons would drive out and take an attractive woman to divert attention, Gray said, "while they switched dice or decks so they could swindle the Black patrons." It was a common con across the country but racially devastating in Jasper.

One night, the woman assigned to distract a man named Sunday became drunk and passed out in bed with him. The pair was discovered fully clothed and without any evidence of intimacy. "They tied him to the back of an old Model-T truck and dragged him around the courthouse square," Gray said. "They hung him from a tree limb and shot him, I believe, 17 times."

No one was ever prosecuted.

Gray said he first heard Sunday's story around a campfire at around age 10. His father and uncle had been young men at the time and felt there was nothing they could do. "I got the feeling my daddy was telling me, 'If it's ever you, speak up,'" Gray said.

AFTERMATH. The Byrd case did not turn Gray into a hometown hero. There was, instead, what he describes as a polite ostracism. He chose not to run for another term as district attorney. Around that time, one of his sons died in a traffic accident, and the family decided to leave Jasper and move to Kerrville.

He has not returned.

"I don't have anything pulling me there," Gray said. "I had lots of friends I could no longer count as friends after the trials. You don't really get over it."

I asked Gray about his tenacity in pursuing the death penalty for Byrd's killers, especially in light of the decades-old murder of the man called Sunday. What do you think your father would say?

"It made me proud," Gray said. "And I knew my daddy would've been proud of me."

THE / DEFENSE ATTORNEY

GRETCHEN SWEEN never met the client who changed the trajectory of her career.

Raphael Holiday was executed at the Walls Unit in Huntsville, TX, on an unseasonably warm evening in November 2015. Around 150 miles away in Austin, Sween was sitting in her parked car, sobbing and ignoring the steady stream of phone calls from the condemned man's supporters.

She had been his lawyer for just one month: "I was consumed with feeling the senselessness of it all," she said, "anger, frustration, impotence."

The next day, Sween found an envelope addressed to her sitting on her office chair. Holiday had sent her a card; bright yellow and red flowers and the word "generosity" decorated the cover. "He was telling me it'll be OK, that it meant so much for him to have someone fighting for him at the end and not being abandoned," she said.

Sween felt an overwhelming sense of failure. Despite her best efforts, her client was dead. Yet, once her anguish gave way to a dull pain, his beyond-the-grave gratitude revealed to her a way forward.

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SOME PEOPLE WILL SAY, 'WAIT, YOU'RE REPRESENTING THE BOY WITH THE BB GUN, KILLING THE BUNNIES?'

— **GRETCHEN SWEEN**
DEFENSE ATTORNEY

In the following weeks, Sween said Leonard Cohen's song "Anthem" slipped into her mind's soundtrack. Cohen sings that brokenness is not a dead end, but a pathway through which change can happen. "Raphael's execution was a catalyst compelling me to do my part to let more light" into a broken criminal justice system, she said.

A little over two months later, in January 2016, Sween left a comfortable practice as a civil appellate attorney and began working for the Texas Office of Capital and Forensic Writs, a public defender specializing in post-conviction legal representation primarily for indigent individuals.

IT'S PERSONAL. The change was more than a simple switch from civil to criminal law. In this work, the stakes were her clients' lives. Sween also realized a hard truth: no matter how well she did her job, the odds were low she would succeed. "This is a law practice where, if you lose, they kill your client," she said. "Yeah ... it feels very personal."

Today, Sween has six clients, including Robert Roberson, who was convicted of abusing and killing his daughter Nikki in 2002. Law enforcement, Sween said, used Roberson's autism — the perceived lack of emotion, for example — as evidence of guilt and failed to properly investigate the child's death.

At trial, prosecutors relied on the now-widely debunked "shaken baby syndrome" to convict him. Sween argues that new medical science, as well as a fresh look at old evidence, shows the 2-year-old likely died from chronic illnesses or accidental causes, not abuse.

In the decade Sween has represented Roberson, he – and she – have faced three execution dates, including two in the last two years – all stayed at the 11th hour. The reprieves are welcome, of course. But, she said, "I was back to where I was when I started fighting for him in 2016." She feels like Sisyphus; the rock is heavy and the path is steep.

STAMINA. Now at age 62, she realizes her work is taking a toll on her life. Recently, she's been intentional about making sure she does "something life-affirming," even if small, each day: watching sports on TV, relishing dinner conversation with her husband, or playing with her menagerie of pets. "I'm never going to say I'm 'off the clock,' so it wasn't about working less," she said. "I just have to do something to make sure I have the stamina for this."

Capital defense lawyers reside in a corner of the legal community that ranks high on both compassion fatigue and social isolation. Yes, Sween is embraced by those in the anti-death penalty movement — John Grisham, the best-selling novelist and Innocence Project board member, features Roberson's case in *Shaken: The Rush to Execute an Innocent Man* (due out June 2026) as a stark example of the criminal justice system's flaws.

Day to day, though, Sween said it can be lonely work. Many lawyers mercilessly battle one another in court and socialize afterwards. That's something she enjoyed about her days in civil litigation, she said. But when the "other side's job is to try to kill your client, it's hard to have the [same] attitude of 'it's just a job.'"

Beyond her "day job," Sween regularly works a second shift — raising public awareness for her clients by holding courthouse press conferences, death-row exonerees often by her side, and in interviews with media ranging from *People* magazine to *The Guardian* newspaper to a *Dateline* podcast series, along with Reddit AMAs and social media posts.

Her ease in front of the camera isn't accidental. Sween studied drama at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, eventually earning a PhD in Humanities at The University of Texas at Dallas. "Acting," she said, "is not about faking; it's empathizing with someone else's story."

By the time she hit her 30s, though, she had grown tired of scraping by. "Law school," she said, "seemed like the least cynical option." A decade older than the typical Texas Law 1L, Sween came to campus in 2000 feeling like an interloper. But winning a moot court competition, thanks in part to her theater chops, helped her feel as if she belonged. She also signed up for the law school's Capital Punishment Clinic.

Gretchen Sween in the Dee J. Kelly Courtyard and Patman Family Plaza at The University of Texas School of Law, on Feb. 9, 2026.

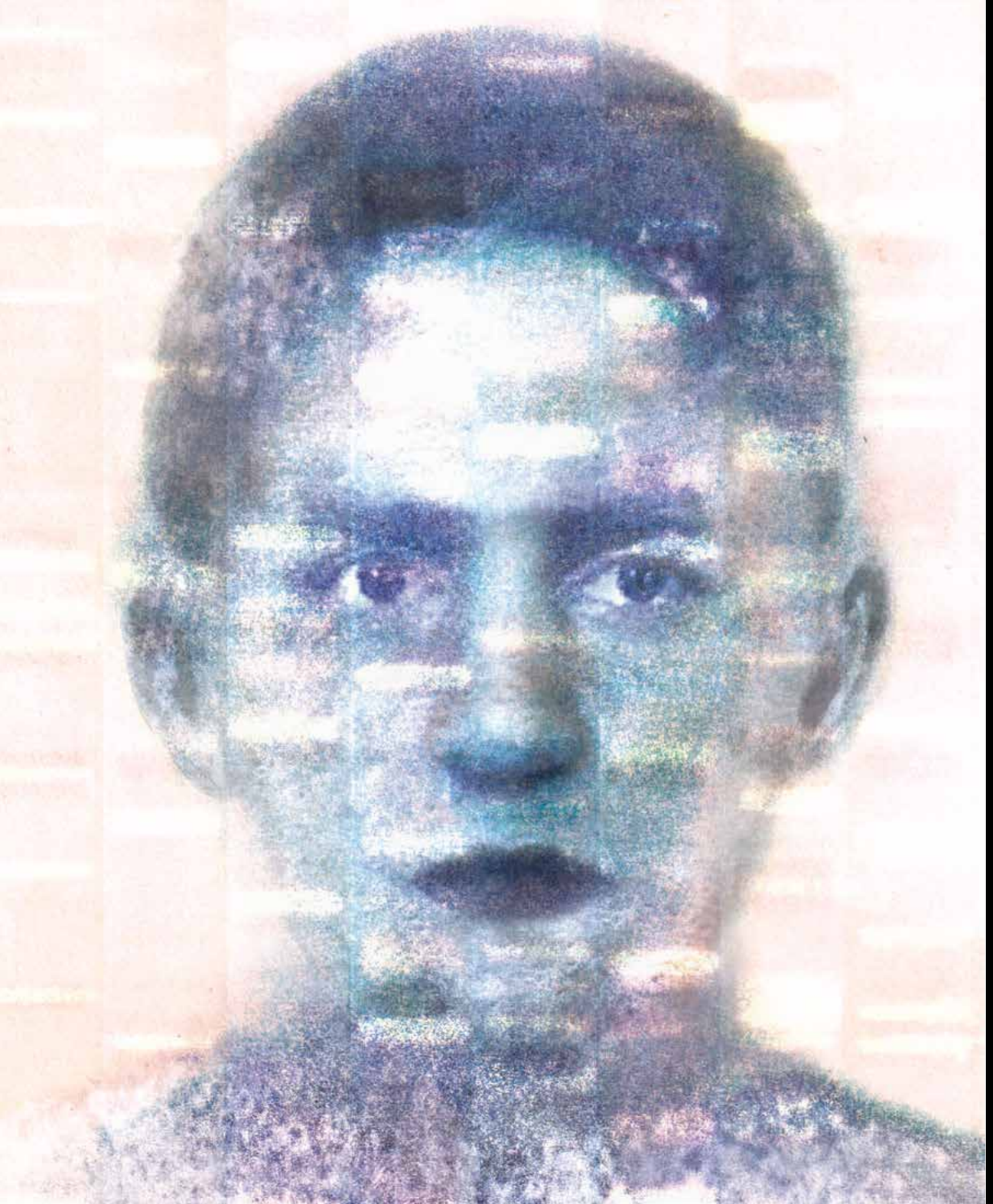
> "THE THING ABOUT BEING A DEFENDER OF THE VULNERABLE IS THE VULNERABLE ISN'T ALWAYS WHO YOU THINK IT IS."
>
> — **GRETCHEN SWEEN**
> DEFENSE ATTORNEY

Sween began to see that the law wasn't a rejection of her earlier life but a maturation of it. Death penalty advocacy helped fulfill the social activism that had fueled her in her theater work and drew out her empathy.

WHY? When Sween was about four years old, her mother left her abusive, alcoholic husband, Sween's biological father. In their new apartment, Sween would stand on the balcony and call for her pet rabbit, Bunny, who roamed the woods behind the building. One afternoon, she saw a boy on a nearby balcony lift a BB gun. "He killed my rabbit," she said, pausing to remember the grief she felt as a child.

Why would he do that, she asked. Decades later, she's no closer to answering that question, but she hopes her work can help her understand. "Some people will say, 'Wait. You're representing the boy with the BB gun, killing the bunnies,'" she said. "The thing about being a defender of the vulnerable is the vulnerable isn't always who you think it is."

That's an uncomfortable stance in a black-and-white world, and Sween said she often feels like she is "screaming into the wilderness." But stopping would exact an even greater price. "I have to figure out a new way to push on that boulder," she said.

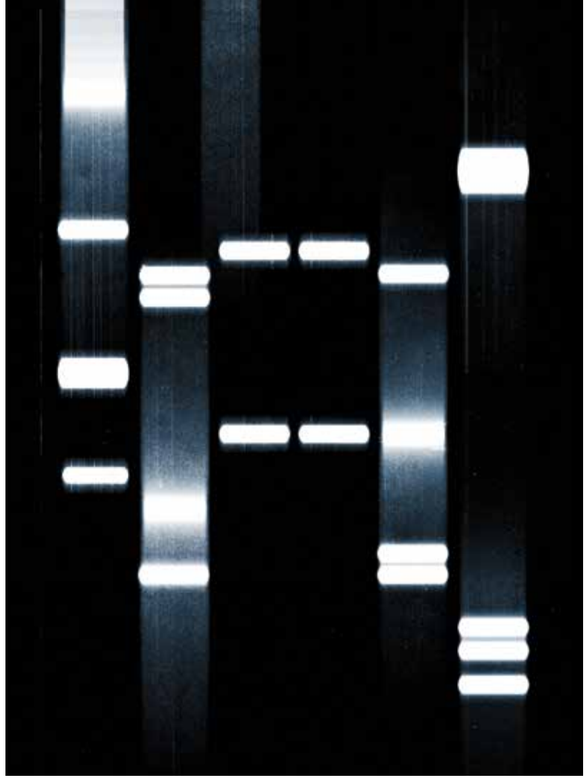


TRACKING INVISIBLE DOWN KILLERS

HOW GENETIC GENEALOGY BECAME LAW ENFORCEMENT'S UNEXPECTED BREAKTHROUGH TOOL

BY ROBIN BERGHAUS

ART BY ALDO JARILLO



AT 3 O'CLOCK ONE MORNING IN APRIL 2018,

Barbara Rae-Venter '85 was working alone at home, too wired to quit. ¶ For months, she helped investigators track down one of the most heinous criminals in U.S. history. Now, they were closing in on his identity, anxiously awaiting the final pieces of a puzzle that would unlock a decades-old investigation. ¶ The Golden State Killer began his crime spree in the 1970s — murdering at least 13 people, and torturing and raping dozens of victims throughout California. In 1986, after his last-known crime, he vanished, leaving behind bits of his DNA. ¶ Even after thousands of people were surveilled, investigators lacked a solid lead, and the case went cold for decades. ¶ As law enforcement searched for their moonshot, they discovered Rae-Venter. Using a unique skillset, she would not only guide investigators to identify the Golden State Killer and other criminals, but, in doing so, help launch the most important breakthrough in forensic science in decades.

AMATEUR SLEUTH. She is not a police officer nor a prosecutor. She never trained as a criminal investigator. RAE-VENTER is a retired patent attorney whose past life as a scientist and passion for family history prepared her to become a genetic sleuth. Pioneering investigative genetic genealogy (IGG) before it had a name, Rae-Venter helps solve unsolvable crimes.

Rae-Venter happened into IGG in 2015 while researching her family roots and volunteering at DNAAdoption. There, as a search angel, she helped adoptees find their biological relatives. That service brought her to the attention of Peter Headley, then a sheriff's deputy in San Bernardino County, CA. He wondered if Rae-Venter could help uncover the true identity of Lisa Jensen, a woman who had been abducted as an infant.

Without any clues about her family or birthplace, they used Jensen's DNA to find her relatives through genealogy websites. It was the first use of IGG in a criminal case. "I couldn't have done it without Barbara," says Headley.

That case was just the beginning. After pinpointing where Jensen had lived as a baby, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children realized her home was near the scene of a 1980s unsolved quadruple homicide, the Bear Brook murders in Allenstown, NH. Headley informed the New Hampshire State Police and teamed up with Rae-Venter again. Using IGG, they identified three of the Bear Brook victims, all of whom were killed by Jensen's abductor. The serial killer, whose real name is Terry Rasmussen, would murder women then steal their children. Posing as a single dad, he lured in more victims.

Investigators assume Rasmussen, now dead, killed Jensen's mother — she has never been found.

GOLDEN STATE KILLER. When Paul Holes learned about these cases, he perked up. The Contra Costa County investigator had been hunting the Golden State Killer for more than 20 years. Holes and FBI attorney Steve Kramer thought IGG could bring the killer out of the shadows, but they needed help. Rae-Venter signed on to mentor their team, which included three additional investigators from the FBI and the Sacramento District Attorney's Office.

Moments of serendipity, like this, occur more frequently than Rae-Venter is willing to chalk up to chance. When a door is shut, something fortuitous nudges it open. Crucial evidence is rescued. A stranger offers key details about a family tree she's researching. Someone submits their DNA which cracks open a case. Rae-Venter admits it must be strange to hear her — a trained scientist — speak about guardian angels. But, she believes she's not alone in her views. "As Albert Einstein purportedly once said, 'Coincidence is God's way of remaining anonymous.'"

Solving decades-old cases is difficult for many reasons. Memories fade. Witnesses move or die. Their biggest hurdle: evidence was running out.

Plenty of the Golden State Killer's DNA had been collected at dozens of crime scenes. But every time DNA is used to run a test, less physical evidence remains. Since Contra Costa County had used all the DNA it possessed, the team inquired with other counties where the killer had struck. Most authorities declined — either they had run out of DNA or opted to save the little they had left for their own investigations.

After six months of knocking on doors, they finally caught a break.

The Ventura County Medical Examiner's Office was once home to a fastidious forensic pathologist. Dr. Peter Speth always prepared two rape kits — one for police, and the other he preserved. The practice wasn't common, but Speth thought a backup was prudent.

Deep inside Speth's former lab freezer were the duplicate rape kits, including one he collected in 1980. Charlene Smith had been raped before she and her husband were bludgeoned to death with a wooden log. For 37 years the kit sat in the freezer, never opened, perfectly preserving the Golden State Killer's DNA.

"It was like we had a GUARDIAN ANGEL out there helping us," says Rae-Venter.

Investigators had the killer's DNA, but needed to translate it into a usable digital SNP file, short for single nucleotide polymorphism. SNP files are vast and contain specific genetic information required for deep ancestry research. Unfortunately, government labs weren't equipped to produce one. They create STR files for law enforcement databases.

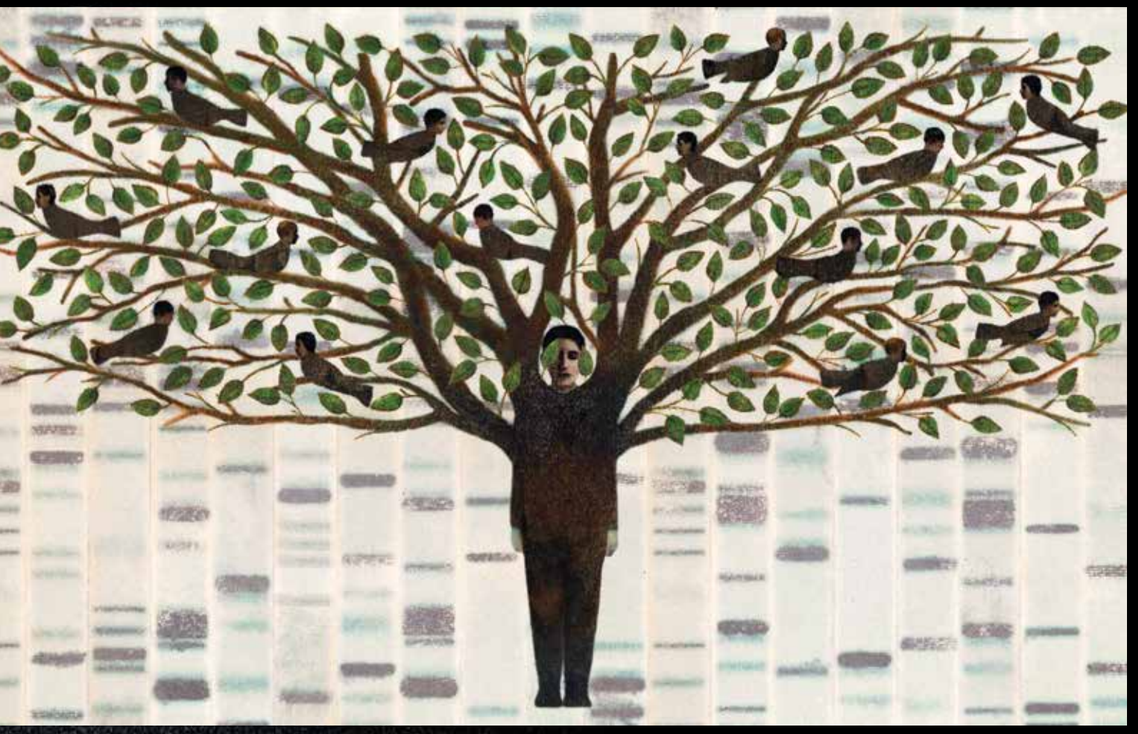
STR files comprise DNA sequences called short tandem repeats. Because these sequences repeat a variable number of times for different individuals, STRs are essentially unique identifiers that work well for one-to-one identity matching. But STRs are too simple and don't contain the type of genetic information compatible for genealogical research.

So, Kramer contacted companies that create SNP files from consumers' saliva or cheek swabs, hoping one could produce a SNP from the rape kit. Most declined the unusual request, but FamilyTreeDNA agreed. It's founder, Bennett Greenspan, told *The Wall Street Journal* in 2019, "In this case, it was easy. We were talking about horrendous crimes. So I made the decision" to help the investigation.

After Greenspan's lab created the SNP, it was uploaded to profiles on FamilyTreeDNA and GEDmatch, genealogy websites consumers use to search for biological relatives. Thousands of matches appeared, each from a person who shared some DNA with the killer.

Barbara Rae-Venter in Pebble Beach, California on Feb. 20, 2026.

portrait by LAUREN SEGAL



Identity is reconstructed not from the act, but from the branches it leaves behind.

REVERSE GENEALOGY. Facing mountains of data, Rae-Venter taught the investigators a methodology she learned at DNAAdoption, so they could divide the workload and help her build separate branches of the killer's family trees. Their goal was to identify two people who shared the highest percentage of DNA with the killer. Children inherit about half their DNA from each parent. Siblings share about a quarter. First cousins share about 12.5 percent, and so on.

The team found several third and fourth cousins, but building trees from distant relatives is time-consuming. Hoping for closer matches, Rae-Venter uploaded the SNP to MyHeritage, where she discovered a second cousin — a significant break.

On average, a person might have more than 100 third cousins. For second cousins, the average drops to around 20. Second cousins also share a set of great-grandparents, in this case, the killer's most recent common ancestor investigators needed.

Working back in time, the team traced the family lines as if drawing a triangle. The cousins were at points on the base, and the set of great-grandparents at the top. From there, Rae-Venter and the team reversed course, building out the killer's family trees from those great-grandparents toward recent generations: children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, etc. They added names only after confirming identities with primary sources, including birth and death certificates, marriage licenses, and census records.

Gradually, they whittled thousands of distant relatives down to a suspect list of six men. Each had lived near the crimes, was in the killer's assumed age range, and was either a close genetic relative or was the killer himself.

While investigators researched the suspects' backgrounds, Rae-Venter used tools that analyze DNA sequences for physical traits. The analysis predicted the killer likely had blue eyes. When Rae-Venter scanned the spreadsheet investigators created with intel on the suspects, she paused for a moment, taking in a striking fact. Of the six suspects, only one had blue eyes.

Joseph James DeAngelo not only had blue eyes, but investigators learned the former police officer had been fired from the force in 1979. He had also lived and purchased weapons in Northern and Southern California near the Golden State Killer's crimes.

The team was confident he was their man. But these findings were still just leads — they would need physical evidence tying him to the crimes.

Outside DeAngelo's Sacramento home, detectives patiently awaited the right moments to collect his DNA. One day, while he was inside a store, they swabbed his car handle. Another day, they collected a tissue he discarded.

Detectives sent DeAngelo's samples to a lab — both matched the crime scene DNA. "It was a gazillion to one that it could be anybody else," says Rae-Venter.

On April 25, 2018, Sacramento officials announced DeAngelo as the suspected GOLDEN STATE KILLER. The case made international headlines, thrusting IGG into the mainstream.

In 2019, Rae-Venter was named one of *TIME*'s 100 most influential people. Holes penned the intro, celebrating Rae-Venter for providing law enforcement with "its most revolutionary tool since the advent of forensic DNA testing in the 1980s."

A CURIOUS MIND. Rae-Venter, originally from New Zealand, came to the U.S. in the late 1960s to study science. She earned a PhD in biology from University of California San Diego, completed a postdoc, and began a tenure-track research faculty position at The University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston. Her research focused on creating a breast cancer drug. Over time, she began considering medical ethics and a career in law instead.

In 1982, Rae-Venter arrived at Texas Law as a single parent, tackling her studies with a determination and grit that still informs her work. Upon graduating, she and her young son settled in California. With her PhD in biology and her law degree, Rae-Venter became a leading patent attorney — eventually opening her own firm — representing biotech inventors.

Recently, she wrote *I Know Who You Are*, a memoir that reads like a true-crime thriller, taking readers deep into the nitty-gritty details of IGG and the cases she's helped solve. The book explores her multifaceted career and serves as an historical record on the emerging field, of which she is protective.

THE PROMISE. Nearly 300,000 murders remain unsolved in the U.S., and IGG might finally make a dent in that backlog. According to former FBI attorney Steve Kramer, tracking down the Golden State Killer with traditional investigative methods required vast resources: 15 agencies, 650 detectives and special agents, 200,000 hours, 300 DNA swabs, and 8,000 people surveilled.

The 43-year-old investigation cost about $10 million, he reckons, and a single suspect was never identified.

With IGG, the team of six spent $217 on consensual DNA kits and a genealogy website subscription. After acquiring the Golden State Killer's DNA, they began building family trees and solved the case in 63 days.

Since then, IGG has helped clear more than 1,600 cases, according to the Forensic Genetic Genealogy Project. But 1.4 million forensic profiles — DNA from various crime scenes — remain unidentified in the national DNA database. Without robust support for IGG, including earmarked funding, it's hard to imagine law enforcement catching up.

After the Golden State Killer case, many direct-to-consumer genealogy websites updated their privacy policies. Today, consumers on FamilyTreeDNA and GEDmatch can opt in or out, choosing whether law enforcement may access their profiles for violent crime cases. MyHeritage is now off limits to law enforcement. The two largest — Ancestry and 23andMe — have never permitted law enforcement to use its databases for criminal investigations.

USING A UNIQUE SKILLSET, SHE HELPED IDENTIFY CRIMINALS AND RESHAPE FORENSIC SCIENCE

PRIVACY. IGG is a numbers game — the more profiles available on genealogy websites, the more likely law enforcement will find leads. Maintaining public trust is essential, so they can continue this work. Yet some privacy advocates, wary of governmental intrusion, have questioned whether law enforcement's access to genealogy profiles are unlawful searches. Texas Law Distinguished Senior Lecturer Graham Strong, who has worked as a federal prosecutor and a criminal defense attorney, doesn't think so.

"Here, you wouldn't have a Fourth Amendment problem ordinarily," says Strong, "because consumers are voluntarily turning over their DNA to these third-party databases." Under the Fourth Amendment, courts have determined that a person doesn't have an expectation of privacy for information they have voluntarily shared with a third party.

But the third-party doctrine isn't without exception. In *Carpenter v. United States* (2018), the Supreme Court held that law enforcement needed a search warrant for cell site location information retained by a third party. "A person might go to a political gathering, a church, or a medical provider, so you can put together a mosaic of their life," says Strong. "The Court said people aren't giving that information

CONTINUED ON PAGE 53

recess

TEN THINGS TEXAS LAWYERS ARE ENJOYING OUT OF OFFICE

GAMES

1 Family Feud

Thomas P. Nguyen '01 appeared on "Family Feud" in November 2025, duking it out for bragging rights on host Steve Harvey's popular primetime show. Not his first game show rodeo, Nguyen also competed in "Squid Game: The Challenge" in 2023. No one's surprised that lawyers love game shows. They are used to having the answers. And in this case, survey says: he nailed it!

BOOK

2 *Catch the Devil* by Pamela Colloff

Pamela Colloff's forthcoming book, due out in July, offers a harrowing indictment of our criminal justice system that weaponized a con artist to send dozens of innocent people to prison, including a man on Florida's death row. The plot twist in this true-crime thriller is just how easy it is turn the guilty loose and imprison the innocent.

PODCAST

3 *Buried Bones* with Kate Winkler Dawson

A master of true crime, Kate Winkler Dawson brings a journalist's precision and a storyteller's pace to every tale she unearths. In *Buried Bones*, she and former detective Paul Holes dig into historical whodunits. A professor of practice at Moody College of Communication, she's also the daughter of longtime Texas Law professor Bob Dawson.

PLACE

4 Murder by the Book Houston, Texas

This Houston bookstore hosts both legends and rising stars. Its shelves—packed tighter than a prosecutor's closing argument—include everything from classic detective stories to experimental noir. Strolling through feels like entering a world where motives abound and alibis are optional. Stop by, stay awhile, and let the mysteries choose you.

BOOK

5 *She Kills* by Skip Hollandsworth

Few writers convey the riveting nature of Texas crime like Skip Hollandsworth. In *She Kills*—a collection of his true-crime stories of women who kill—readers are immersed in a blend of empathy and forensic detail. A connoisseur of both motive and myth, Hollandsworth proves that behind every murderous headline lies a far more human story.

FILM

6 *The Sheep Detectives*

This woolly whodunit follows a flock of sharp-eyed sheep investigating a murder with more grit than a West Texas dust storm. As they out-sleuth the local authorities, the sheep put their fleece on the line to discover who killed their shepherd, George. A true cozy with a wink of rural satire results in perfect baaaa-lend of humor.

BOOK

7 *The Scientist and the Serial Killer*

by Lise Olsen

One man killed 27 teenage boys in Houston. But for decades, police didn't know the names of all of his victims. Olsen traces the work of forensic anthropologist Dr. Sharon Derrick, a scientist determined to restore the identity an dignity to those Lost Boys.

TV

8 *Prime Crime*

"Prime Crime" is a high-intensity watch of 911 calls, body cams, courtroom footage, and legal analysis. Adding to its courtroom drama, the Law & Crime Network, a YouTube first and digital-first media company, is buying Court TV from the E.W. Scripps. Guilty of keeping you lowkey glued to the screen.

BOOK

9 *Extreme Cruelty* by Steven Dankof '76

Ohio judge Steven Dankof's assessment of wrongful convictions in America is an unsparing look at how justice can falter. Writing to other judges, his appeal is urgent, strident, and personal. Trial judges, he asserts, are the greatest cause of wrongful convictions — and the only real solution. Not for the faint of heart.

EVENT

10 Jailbreak Beach Escape

Tackle the Jailbreak Course, a 5K obstacle course race that takes place each May on the sun-drenched beaches of South Padre Island. With hand-crafted obstacles, the course will push you to your limits. Practicing law may be an adventure of the mind. Running the Jailbreak is an off-grid adventure for body and soul.

THE UNDEADLIEST PROTEST

PAGE 34

HOW A GROUP OF LAW STUDENTS' LEGAL HEROISM SAVED LIVES

Written by JOHN SCHWARTZ '84

RICHARD MITHOFF '71 HAD A PROBLEM. He and a group of fellow law students had just pulled an all-nighter hammering out a request for a court order that could avert a bloody riot. Now he wanted to attend the hearing. Mithoff, born in Lufkin but raised in El Paso, was just a scrappy law student and not the now-famous trial lawyer. He didn't own a jacket. "I had to borrow a coat to get in," he recalls. It was a little big, but it fit well enough. And so, he got to experience a court win that still thrills him 56 years later.

At the tumultuous beginning of May 1970, UT Austin students were planning a march to protest the invasion of Cambodia and the killings at Kent State University just days before. But the Austin city council refused to issue a parade permit, which meant thousands of students would be confined to marching on the sidewalks. The situation was likely to become unmanageable. There had already been tear gas, billy clubs, and bloodshed from a smaller march just days before.

"If you ask when in Austin was ever the capacity for serious violence at its highest, to my mind it was that moment right there," says Glen Wilkerson '71.

On Friday, May 8, as the march was forming, a federal judge held a remarkable hearing to consider the law students' arguments defending the marchers' First Amendment rights. He ordered the city to allow the march. Twenty-thousand people took to the streets, the largest protest in the city's history at the time. Peacefully.

It was an act of legal heroism by the law students, particular to the profession and a hallmark of the educational tradition of Texas Law: To be calm in a crisis and not get pulled into the fray, but to use whatever resources you can muster to get things done.

Few know about their achievement today, and at the time it garnered no national publicity — precisely because the law students won. There's a cynical saying in journalism: "If it bleeds, it leads." Violence is newsworthy. By comparison, peace doesn't get much ink. But 56 years later, it's time to revisit their near miraculous efforts.

This is a story about what went right.

TINDERBOX

Protests had roiled the nation's campuses in those days over Vietnam, civil rights, the environment, and more local issues; UT had its share, too. The previous October, thousands of students had taken part in the national moratorium against the war; later that month, in the Battle of Waller Creek, students climbed into majestic live oaks, pecan, and maples to prevent the school from tearing them down to make way for a stadium expansion; police pulled the students out and the trees came down. In November of that year, a confrontation with police over whether nonstudents were allowed in the Texas Union snack bar called the Chuck Wagon became known as the Chuck Wagon Riot.

In 1970, as the spring semester ended, tensions flared with President Richard Nixon's expansion of the war into Cambodia, announced on April 30. Campuses erupted in protest once again, with tragic results: On Monday, May 4, National Guardsmen at Kent State University opened fire on demonstrators, killing four students.

The next day, a spontaneous 4,000-person march from the campus to the Texas capitol building ended in chaos. Some of the marchers threw bottles and rocks at police, injuring a half dozen of them; the police bloodied and arrested five students, according to a contemporaneous account by former UT Austin Psychology professors Ira Iscoe and Philip Mann. While there were no serious injuries, tensions rose even higher — and students planned another, bigger march for Friday, May 8.

The city refused to allow it, citing a provision of the city code requiring more than two weeks' notice for a parade permit. (City council minutes said 15 days; the student brief would say it was 20 days.) Without a parade permit, the students would have to keep to the sidewalks. With some 20,000 protesters expected, Mithoff and others realized the city's sidewalk rule would likely become a mob scene.

"There was no way the police, even doing the best they could," he says, "could contain that number of students. And there was certainly no way a march on the sidewalks could work."

Dan Hyde '71 agreed, "All of this energy and anger, you're going to cram into these little sidewalks? You could just see a disaster in the making." Governor Preston Smith increased the pressure saying if violence occurred, "I will not hesitate to use whatever force is necessary to put it down."

PRACTICING LAW

As Mithoff and fellow law students discussed the march and their fears, they decided to use the tools they were learning in law school to persuade the city to allow the march. Hyde remembers it as a shoestring effort. "We had no law licenses; we had no clients; nobody was admitted to practice" in federal court.

They knew they couldn't apply for an injunction until they had exhausted state remedies. So, on May 7, the day before the march, Mithoff and Jack Strickland '71 went to the city council to formally ask the city to waive its notice rule. Predictably, the council turned the students down and they took their case to federal court.

After that city hall meeting, Mithoff made one more stop: He walked into the Austin Police Department and asked to see the chief of police. To his astonishment, the chief, Bob Miles, agreed to sit down with him. Mithoff asked Miles, "If we can get the relief we're asking for, would that help relieve some of the pressure on y'all? He said, 'absolutely.'"

Mithoff raced back to campus with the news, where things were gearing up at the law review. They had the cream of the school's legal talent, and had gotten pledges of assistance from Texas Law professor George Schatzki, an expert in labor law, and civil rights attorney David Richards '57. Schatzki's role would be essential: he could appear in federal court.

The students — accounts number them between 14 and 20, with a core from the law review — did the research, made calls, and figured out their arguments. Two members of the *Texas Law Review*, Tommy Jacks '71 and Hugh Lowe '71, took the lead composing two documents: a request for the injunction and the memorandum brief.

Sam Simon '70, managing editor of the law review, had valuable assets: An I.B.M. Selectric typewriter and fast fingers. "I typed other kids' papers for money," he says.

"His typing skills were incredible," recalls Wilkerson.

The complaint was a perfect match for Simon's skills. "I could edit in the process, and I knew the law," and he quickly retyped pages after proofreading.

The documents argued that the waiting period was unconstitutionally restrictive. They drew some of their argument from a law review article by legendary Texas Law faculty member Charles Alan Wright, an expert on federal courts. His essay "The Constitution on the Campus" had appeared the year before in the *Vanderbilt Law Review*, and included relevant cases, as well as a passage that could have been written expressly for their purposes. Requirements of notice for demonstrations "can validly be required," Wright wrote, but those restrictions "can be abused, and the notice rule ought to have enough flexibility to accommodate the truly spontaneous demonstration in response to such tragic events" as the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968.

The "complaint and motion for temporary relief" filed on behalf of the "Ad Hoc Strike Committee of the University of Texas," listed six student plaintiffs: Lowe, Jacks, Robert Walls '71, Joe Tom Easley '71, Simon, and Claudette Lowe BA '63. (Hyde notes that he didn't sign the document because he was afraid if he did, he would "get kicked out of the ROTC and get drafted.") The plaintiffs argued that the city's ordinance violated an essential element of First Amendment protection: that restrictions on speech must not crush the spontaneity of expression.

The memorandum called the notice period "not only unreasonable, but impossible." The students couldn't file for the permit 20 days before the event because the invasion of Cambodia and the Kent State massacre had occurred only a few days before, the filing noted. And besides, the city had granted quick permits in the past for "such parades as a football spirit rally," making the city's refusal in their case arbitrary, capricious, and discriminatory.

"Speech is an evanescent thing. To be effective it must be timely," the plaintiffs argued. "In 20 days, the students of this school will all have ended the semester, and there will be no way for them to gather the group they now have. The events will have faded into headlines of a month ago."

THE WRIGHT EFFECT

Once the document was complete, the students looked to Professor Wright. "We knew it would be a real coup if we could get him to read and sign the brief," Jacks

University of Texas students march in Austin, TX, during a Vietnam War protest, carrying a flag-draped coffin in a peaceful demonstration, May 1970.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID HOPKINSON, PH.D., AUSTIN AMERICAN-STATESMAN, AND DAILY TEXAN

OPENING SPREAD: SCOTT NEWTON

says. They deputized Walls to carry the document to Wright's office at 7 a.m., when the professor typically appeared on campus.

Wright was intimidating, and "it certainly would have scared the hell out of me to approach him," Jacks recalls. "I'm sure Bob Walls was a-tremble!" Even with their reliance on Wright's law review article, his support would be no sure thing. But "I'll be damned if [Walls] didn't come back with Charlie's signature on it!" Hyde remembers with a chuckle.

Wright had gone through the document page by page, making small changes in pen, and then signed it.

"Against what we thought were all the odds, everything fell into place," says Jacks.

It was time to go to see the judge: Jack Roberts '33, a WWII veteran and appointee of President Lyndon Johnson. Roberts, four years into the position, had never issued an injunction involving adversarial parties.

He read the filing all the way to the signatures. Schatzki delivered their argument and Glenn Cortez argued for the city. The judge invited the attorneys for a discussion in his chambers. When they emerged, the judge granted the request for a temporary restraining order enjoining the city from enforcing its "so-called parade ordinance," Roberts said, according to the transcript. "The guaranteed right of free speech will be irreparably harmed if the requested parade permit is denied."

Judge Roberts added his own worries about the march: "I can't anticipate or foresee that there will be violence when this parade takes place. God knows, I hope and pray to the Good Lord above that there won't be."

The judge's decision was still a bit unclear to the city attorney, who appeared to think it might still prohibit a march. Schatzki asked the judge to restate it. "The effect of the order is this," he said: "That if you have a parade, they walk in the streets."

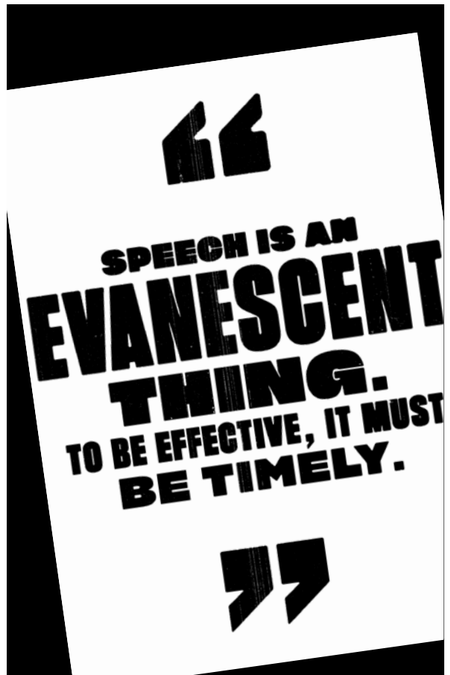
JUST LIKE THAT

They had won. But the march had already begun, with students packing the sidewalks near the campus. Mithoff had the court clerk print the judge's order, ran out of the courthouse and up to the head of the march, where "I went to the first policeman I could see." He handed over the order. "The guy, to his credit, said, 'fine'" — and the police immediately began waving the crowd into the street.

Edward Prado '72, who later would become a federal judge, ran toward campus to find the student leaders of the march. "I crossed red traffic lights and ran in front of cars trying to get to the marchers," he recalled. "When I got there it took me a while to catch my breath." The startled students "had no idea who I was, and if the information I was giving them was correct," he recalled, but "a policeman standing by informed the leaders that he had just heard the same thing on the radio."

And with that, the tension, built over days drained away, Jacks recalls. "It was momentous, and it was orderly, and it was just a fabulous event," he said.

The Daily Texan account of the march in the next day's special edition captured the jubilance. "Red, white, and blue were the dominant colors of the day" wrote the reporter, Cliff Avery BJ '73. "One laughing child, barely a year old, bounced on the back of his father, and carried a flag sewn onto his shirt... Police were in evidence only to control traffic at busy Austin intersections and were generally cooperative. Three demonstrators rode on the back of police motorcycles which headed the parade and often waved the two-finger peace symbol along with the protesters. At the end of the march, demonstrators chanted 'More pay for Austin police' as a gesture of thanks."



The next week, on May 15 in Jackson, Mississippi, state highway patrolmen and city police officers fired into a group of students at Jackson State College (now Jackson State University), killing two students and injuring twelve — a sobering reminder of what might have happened in Austin.

Later that month, Mithoff and the others received a congratulatory letter for their "outstanding service" from Page Keeton, the dean of the law school. Keeton wrote that he had to be out of town on the day of the march, "but I learned on my return of the tremendously successful work that you did in order to induce my old handball partner, Jack Roberts, to declare the action of the City Council unconstitutional as regards to the street marching. All in all, this probably averted violence and trouble and permitted the use of the streets for expressing the magnitude of the opposition to the expansion of the war in Cambodia."

Easley wrote a note to Professor Wright, as well, thanking him for signing on. "We are in unanimous agreement that your signature on our pleading was of incalculable assistance to our cause."

For some, the experience helped shape their legal careers. Easley and Simon would work for consumer advocate Ralph Nader, becoming part of the first group of Nader's Raiders. Easley would go on to be a major figure in the fight for gay rights. Simon, walking home and seeing the students pouring into the streets, says he experienced one of those "moments in our lives" when "your work is no longer theoretical. All of a sudden, it's real." In a book he edited about the early Nader years, *Choosing the Public Interest*, he wrote that "I knew then that I had a different future ahead of me than I had anticipated." He wanted, he wrote, "to be an agent for change."

Mithoff, who got a clerkship with Judge William Wayne Justice '42, a civil rights champion, says the experience deepened his passion for the law and for "the thrill of winning. And winning for a good cause."

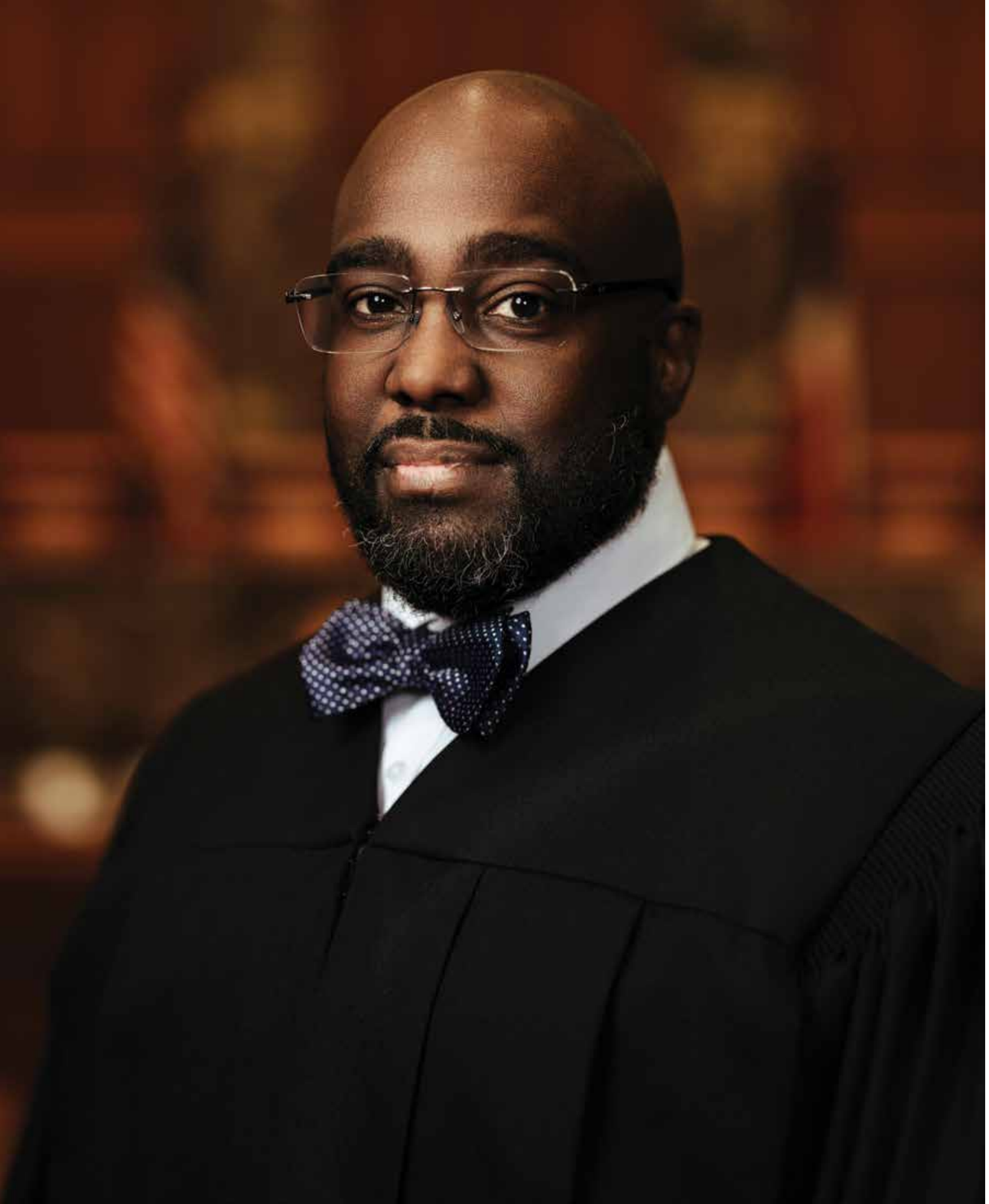
When the dust settled, it was Texas Law professor Bernard Ward — a giant of civil procedure scholarship — who captured the essence of what the group of law students had accomplished. "Most of you will go on to practice law, and have many, many cases," Ward told them. "But you'll never have a moment like this again."

Mithoff, looking back over a long and successful career, agrees. "The law is generally deliberate and can take years to develop even before the first day of trial," he notes. But the scramble to allow the Austin march was quick and decisive. "This kind of rush doesn't happen very often, but it's a thrill when it does," adding, "Bernie Ward was right."

Betsy Rodgers '99 Law, camera, action.

Oscar voter, Emmy voter, BAFTA voter. Red carpets are one thing. But behind all that glitz and glamour is a massive enterprise. As Global Senior VP of Business & Legal Affairs, Content Distribution at Paramount, New York–based Betsy Rodgers '99 works in the fast lane of media law, balancing business demands with the entertainment industry's ever evolving landscape. With over 1,000 deals, launching streaming services, and starting film festivals, Rodgers is proof that a Texas Law degree can lead to roles with interesting plot twists!

art by NIGEL BUCHANAN



Judge Jesse F. McClure III ’99

“Don’t take freedom for granted.”

When Judge Jesse F. McClure III ’99 walked the halls of Texas Law, his classmates didn’t picture him in appellate robes. In an informal vote, they tagged him as a future politician or FBI agent, anything but a judge parsing records and precedents. They were wrong. Today, McClure sits on the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals, the state’s highest court for criminal matters, where he helps decide the fate of thousands of cases each year. We asked him about a path that was anything but linear.

Your undergraduate degree was in philosophy. It taught me that everything’s a trade-off. There’s no system of thinking that’s foolproof. For example, if you focus on procedure, you can get lost in the weeds and forget that real human beings are involved. If you focus only on results, you may burn down the whole forest just to catch the grasshopper. Procedure has its place. The result has its place. But if you go too far in one direction, you wind up doing a kind of violence to the system.

By the end of your 1L summer, your interest in prosecution took shape? My dream was to be an FBI agent. But I saw the work federal prosecutors were doing. They really seemed to enjoy their jobs. My dream shifted from being the one investigating the case to being the one trying to prosecute it. Same mission, just a different goal. I always felt I was trustworthy enough because I’m a fair person. It’s obviously important as a judge to be fair. But I think it’s more important to be fair as a prosecutor because you can really ruin somebody’s day, or even their entire life.

What makes a prosecutor’s office unique? Very few professional environments are like a public defender’s office or a district attorney’s office. It’s like being on a sports team: There’s a camaraderie, and everyone pitches in to help and is rooting for each other. There’s a shared unity of purpose. When I left the DA’s office to go do civil work for the federal government, within a few months I really missed the environment and the way things are done. I then had an opportunity to come to Houston to work as a prosecutor handling white collar crime, and I took it.

How did your decades as a prosecutor shape how you approach justice today? I was prosecuting a case, a jury trial. This was back in the days when you used poster board exhibits. I had a board that the defendant couldn’t see. The judge kept saying, “Mr. McClure, you need to move your exhibit so everyone can see it.” She said it four or five times. On break, she called me to the bench and said: “This isn’t your trial. See that person sitting over there you want to put in prison? It’s their trial. They need to be able to see what you’re doing.” It’s probably been more than 20 years at this point, and that has always stuck with me. Because, at the end of the day, everyone in that courtroom is going home, except perhaps the defendant.

What do you wish more people understood about serving on the highest criminal court in Texas? Intellectually, it’s very challenging. It makes you look inside yourself and ask, “can I be factually convinced somebody is guilty of a crime, and yet also find their lawyer was ineffective and they should have a new trial?” When people say life and liberty are at stake in criminal cases, it’s not a euphemism or throwaway statement. The older I’ve gotten, and the more experienced I’ve become, the more I reflect on how I think we take freedom for granted.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

AS TOLD TO DEBORAH LYNN BLUMBERG

portrait by JOSH HUSKIN

Reel to Real

Long before *Serial*, there was the original true-crime documentary.

BY LIZ ANDERSON HILTON

The movie set from the filming of *The Thin Blue Line*. The filmmaker blended recreations like this traffic stop with documentary interviews, a novel film technique at the time.

PICTURELUX/ALAMY

Randy Schaffer '73 walked out of the Dallas County jail building two steps behind his 13-year-old son. Next to his son on that Tuesday in March 1989 was Randall Dale Adams, a man who had just served 12 years on death row for a 1976 murder he didn't commit. The young Josh Schaffer '02, on spring break watching his dad argue for Adams's freedom, looked like the lawyer he would become. Proud. Confident. Successful.

Father, son, and newly freed client soon boarded a Southwest Airlines flight to Houston. When the pilot announced he had the honor of flying an exonerated innocent man, the elder Schaffer writes in his new book, *Tales As Old As Crime*, "the passengers cheered, and the pilot sent drinks to celebrate."

With that flight, the unusual trio wrapped up one of the more unusual chapters of true crime in America. Just seven months earlier, the documentary film by Errol Morris, *The Thin Blue Line* – a reference to the prosecution's closing argument in Adams's case that police are the only thing standing between chaos and civilization – revealed in painstakingly eerie detail Adams's innocence, along with the scope of prosecutorial misconduct leading to the wrongful conviction. The film proved instrumental to Adams's release.

Schaffer knew Adams was innocent before he took the case. The United State Supreme Court had reversed and vacated Adams's death sentence in 1980. But Adams never got a new trial. Prosecutors asked Texas Governor Bill Clements to commute Adams's death sentence – the one just reversed and vacated – to life in prison. "There wasn't anything to commute," contends Schaffer. The prosecution argued otherwise. Once commuted to life, the state argued, Adams had no basis for a new trial. Any error, they said, related only to the death sentence and Adams no longer had a death sentence. The Texas Court of Criminal Appeals agreed.

In prison for life, Adams's only option was a writ of habeas corpus.

At the urging of Mildred Adams, Randall's mother, Schaffer took the case for $300 down and $300 per month, which she'd pay from her Social Security check. It was a start, but Schaffer knew he'd need more money and good bit of luck to free Adams.

He got both when detective-turned-filmmaker Errol Morris contacted Schaffer about a film project on Texas' death row, specifically hoping to focus on a notorious psychiatric witness for the State known as Dr. Death. Schaffer pitched him Adams's story instead. Morris signed on.

Morris's decision to focus on Adams's case proved pivotal. Morris had a $1-million grant for his project. And, critically, the Dallas district attorney's office agreed to give Morris full access to Adams's case file. Those files, a federal court later ruled, must be turned over to Adams's lawyer. Schaffer now had access to all the state's evidence, including evidence pointing to Adams's innocence.

The *Thin Blue Line* had a limited release in theaters in August 1988. In a genre-bending move for documentaries, the film blended actor recreations with head-on interviews of police, prosecutors, the trial judge, witnesses, Adams, and the actual killer, David Harris. Movie viewers are invited sit as jury, sometimes uncomfortably so. The film became, in effect, the new trial Adams never had.

Of course, a movie didn't free Adams. Republican Judge Larry Baraka, a former prosecutor, heard Adams's second state habeas petition, this time with Schaffer presenting the previously withheld exculpatory evidence. Baraka recommended a new trial and ordered Adams released on his own personal recognizance. After some last-minute jockeying to recuse Judge Baraka, set a higher bail, and keep Adams behind bars, the state soon declined to retry him. Adams was free.

It only took a trial, an appeal to the United States Supreme Court, federal and state habeas proceedings, appeals to the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals, a $1-million full-length documentary film, and a mother's commitment to get to the truth.

David Harris, 16 years old at the time he killed Dallas Police Officer Robert Wood, was never charged.

"BUT I THOUGHT RANDALL'S CASE AND THE MOVIE WOULD LEAD TO CHANGES IN THE SYSTEM. I WAS WRONG."

Harris would kill again. He was executed in 2004 for murdering a man in 1985 during an attempted kidnapping.

"I'm a cynic," says Schaffer. "I didn't feel celebratory even walking out with Randall. I've seen enough to know even when something good happens, there are a hundred things waiting to go bad that day." He adds, "but I thought Randall's case and the movie would lead to changes in the system. I was wrong," he concludes. "They [referring to prosecutors and judges] have simply doubled down." It's harder now for the truth to win out than it was in 1989, he believes.

He's still at it, though, with no plans to retire. Josh Schaffer joined his father at The Schaffer Firm over 20 years ago. It's hard to imagine that 13-year-old who walked out with Randall Dale Adams doing anything else.

BY TEXAS LAW MAGAZINE STAFF

The Butler Did It

WITH MORE PLOT TWISTS THAN AN AGATHA CHRISTIE THRILLER, THE MYSTERY OF WILLIAM MARSH RICE'S DEATH 126 YEARS AGO REMAINS AS INTRIGUING AS EVER.

"Hearsay" tells stories, yarns, and legends from The University of Texas School of Law's long and colorful history.

art by RUBY FRESSON

Defending Their Future

Juvenile Justice clinic at 50.

More than 1,000 Texas Law students have acted as Travis County Juvenile Public Defenders since the school's Juvenile Justice Clinic launched in 1975. Popular with students, the clinic offers hands-on training and an inside look at juvenile justice.

Each spring, a dozen 2L and 3L students represent indigent children and teens facing criminal charges. Over the clinic's 50 years, students have handled more than 8,500 cases.

Students represent 8 to 10 clients each, starting with misdemeanor cases like shoplifting before progressing to more serious property crimes. They are responsible for every aspect of representation—from initial interviews at the Gardner Betts Juvenile Justice Center to researching charges, preparing arguments, negotiating pleas, and helping clients access services such as schooling or foster care.

"I love that I got to see them in the early stages of their legal education and the beginning of their legal careers, and to see how they've thrived," says Pamela Sigman, the clinic's director.

"It was the step-by-step to everything I do now," says Sandra Ritz '93, a criminal defense attorney recalling her time in the clinic. "The beauty of the clinic is you're not sitting in a classroom listening to a professor. You're right there in the detention center or the jail, talking to your client."

Students often have only one or two hours between meeting a client and appearing in court, a pace that builds confidence and quickens analytical thinking. Role-playing exercises for appearances like suppression hearings or docket calls help prepare them for the courtroom. And because the students often represent clients who have experienced trauma, the clinic also helps students acknowledge the emotional demands and understand the role of self-care for lawyers.

Alumni say the clinic shaped their careers in profound ways. Judge Aurora Martinez Jones '07, now presiding over the 126th District Court, says, "It has truly helped me be a better juvenile court judge today. I would have never imagined I would one day preside in the very courts I began in as a student attorney."

For many, the passion sparked in the clinic endures. "I still go over to Gardner Betts and interview juveniles and represent them in detention hearings," Ritz says. "The passion I had 30 years ago in this clinic, I still have it."

Juvenile Justice Clinic students McKenzie Green '23 and Sarah Eberhardt '23 offer educational outreach to local schools, pictured at an Austin, TX, middle school.

BY SALLY PARKER

Class Notes

EDITED BY
TEXAS LAW MAGAZINE STAFF

'65

A downtown plaza in Austin will be named to honor the late **Pike Powers**, former state representative and longtime contributor to Austin's technology sector. The "Old" Red River Street will become a pedestrian-oriented space named Pike Powers Plaza.

'67

Robert P. Parker has written the book *Derecognition*, which recounts how his testimony to Congress in 1979 helped shape the Taiwan Relations Act and the federal legislation at the heart of U.S. relations with Taiwan and China today. An international lawyer, pilot, and venture capitalist, he served as the former president of Taiwan's American Chamber of Commerce and is the only American in the private sector to receive Taiwan's highest civilian honor, the Order of the Brilliant Star.

'67

The fifth edition of *Egan on Entities: Corporations, Partnerships and Limited Liability Companies in Texas*, written by **Byron Egan,** was published in January 2026. Egan is partner at Jackson Walker in Dallas.

Samuel A. SIMON '70

An author, actor, and former public interest lawyer who worked with Ralph Nader, who has written and performs *Dementia Man, An Existential Journey*, a one-act play based on Simon's experience of living a meaningful life with Alzheimer's disease. In an interview with *The Washington Post*, Simon reflects on the journey he has been on with Alzheimer's: "If I'm going to die from this, why waste the trip? Our life has been as good as it can be. I just want to do the best I can until I can't — and be a net positive for the world."

'72

The new documentary, *Calming the Waters*, follows **Jim Blackburn** through decades of legal and conservation fights that brought Texas' environmental stakes into public view. Blackburn is a professor of environmental law and co-director of the Severe Storm Prevention, Education and Evacuation from Disaster Center at Rice University.

'73

Randy Schaffer has written a memoir, *Tales As Old As Crime,* about his experience of corruption in the criminal justice system. Schaffer is a criminal defense attorney with The Schaffer Firm in Houston.

'76

Chris Scruggs, writing under the pen name of Alystair West, recently published *Leviathan & the Lambs*, the final book in the Arthur Stone series—which also includes *Marshland* and *Peace at Battle Mountain*. Scruggs practiced law for more than 14 years before entering full-time ministry, from which he retired in 2019.

'77

Jane Beard was selected to receive an honorary doctor of laws degree at the winter commencement ceremony at Hardin-Simmons University in recognition of her humanitarian and philanthropic contributions. Beard has served as grants administrator for the Dian Graves Owen Foundation for more than 20 years.

The Hon. Hilda Tagle Knebel, the first Hispanic woman in Texas to become a federal judge, was honored by Texas Woman's University with the official opening of the "Judge Hilda Tagle Collection" on Oct. 1, 2025. This archive includes a comprehensive collection of documents and other materials that chronicle her historic judicial career, community engagement, and civic leadership.

'82

Craig Ball has been announced as a 2025 finalist for the Gayle O'Connor Spirit Award presented by the Electronic Discovery Reference Model (EDRM). He serves as an adjunct professor at Texas Law and general counsel of EDRM. The award celebrates members of the e-discovery and legal technology communities based on "singular energy, enthusiasm, and verve."

George M. Jirotka has retired after almost 20 years as a circuit court judge in Florida's 6th Judicial Circuit. Previously, Jirotka practiced law for nearly 20 years as a shareholder at the firm Fowler White Boggs Banker.

'83

Brian D. Miller has been appointed by the U.S. District Court as the interim United States Attorney for the Middle District of Pennsylvania. He previously served as special inspector general for pandemic recovery. Miller's interim appointment will continue until the vacancy is filled by the President.

'84

David Hayden, a retired U.S. Army colonel, has been appointed by North Carolina Governor Josh Stein to serve a two-year term as chair of the North Carolina Military Affairs Commission. He's currently an attorney at Smith Anderson and was previously general counsel and board secretary for USfalcon.

Hon. Wallace B. JEFFERSON '88

The Hon. Wallace B. Jefferson has been elected as the next president of the American Law Institute, effective at the conclusion of the Institute's 2026 Annual Meeting in May. Jefferson served on the Supreme Court of Texas from 2001 to 2013, including as Chief Justice from 2004 through the end of his tenure. He also previously served as president of the Conference of Chief Justices, representing chief justices from all 50 states and U.S. territories.

'85

Nancy Carlson, trustee emeritus for The University of Texas Law School Foundation, has been named a 2026 TACA Silver Cup Award honoree. She serves as a partner at the investment firm Carlson Capital and is deeply involved in the Dallas art community.

'86

Tom Melsheimer has joined King & Spalding's Dallas office to serve as the global head of trial and managing partner. He previously served as co-chair of Winston & Strawn's Global Litigation Department and managing partner in Dallas.

The Hon. Velva Price was honored in February at the Austin Black Lawyers Association Foundation's 2026 Andrea Pair Bryant Legacy Luncheon. She has served as the Travis County district clerk since 2015—the first African American to hold this position—after practicing law for 25 years.

'87

The Hon. Patricia O'Connell Alvarez (Ret.) was inducted into the National Academy of Distinguished Neutrals, an invitation-only organization of the nation's most respected and accomplished alternative dispute resolution professionals. Alvarez served 12 years as a judge on Texas' 4th Court of Appeals and spent 26 years as a trial attorney before launching Alvarez Dispute Resolutions.

Steven Stodghill has joined King & Spalding's Dallas office as a new litigation partner, specializing in trial and global disputes as well as intellectual property. He previously was a partner at Winston & Strawn.

'90

Baron Eliason has been selected as the interim inspector general at the Office of the City Attorney for Dallas. He was previously the city's chief integrity officer and an assistant attorney.

Class Notes

'91

David Bolduc has been appointed to Texas' Public Sector Artificial Intelligence Systems Advisory Board. Bolduc currently serves as the agency head and public counsel at the Office of the Public Insurance Counsel and has over 49 years of legal experience in government and private practice.

Samuel G. Encarnacion has been chosen to receive the A. Leon Higginbotham Jr. Lifetime Achievement Award from the Pennsylvania Bar Association's Minority Bar Committee, recognizing his outstanding contributions to justice, leadership, and service throughout his career. Encarnacion is senior trial counsel at Haggerty Silverman & Justice in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

Veronica Gonzales has been named the 2025 Woman of the Year by the Edinburg Chamber of Commerce. Gonzales, who is the senior vice president for governmental and community relations at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, also serves on Texas Law School Alumni Association Executive Committee.

'92

Kim McMath was named president of the Eanes ISD Board of Trustees in May 2025. McMath, who was first elected to the school board in 2020 and spent two years as vice president, is general counsel for Madison Industries.

Donna Gooden Payne has announced her plans to retire as senior vice president and general counsel at the University of Rochester. She previously served as university counsel and vice chancellor for legal affairs at East Carolina University before joining URochester in 2019.

T.L. CUBBAGE '92

T.L. Cubbage (right), who won the "Jeopardy! Tournament of Champions" as a first-year law student in 1989, returned to the popular quiz show in January 2026 as a competitor in the"Jeopardy! Invitational Tournament." With this appearance, he became only the second person to compete in tournaments on the show in five different decades. Cubbage is the president of The Center for American and International Law, a nonprofit based in Plano, TX, dedicated to advancing justice and promoting the rule of law through the professional development of legal and law enforcement practitioners worldwide.

Sam Waldon has been promoted to deputy director for the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission Division of Enforcement. He previously served as chief counsel in this division.

'93

Ronald Rodriguez has begun to teach a course on personal injury trial practice here at Texas Law. Rodriguez's book, *Texas Personal Injury Trial Law Handbook*, acts as a trial practice guide in Texas.

'94

Russ Hollenbeck, a member of the firm for over 23 years, has been promoted to managing partner of Wright Close Barger & Guzman.

'95

William (Bill) Hopkins has joined Stinson as a partner in the firm's health care and insurance practice division, counseling clients across the full spectrum of the health care industry. He was previously an office managing partner at Spencer Fane.

Kathy Richardson was honored in February at the Austin Black Lawyers Association Foundation's 2026 Andrea Pair Bryant Legacy Luncheon. The CEO and founder of HR Legal Search, Richardson spent several years as the assistant dean of career services at Texas Law.

Susan Welker Turley retired from L3Harris Technologies in 2024, where she was the corporate director of enterprise contracts and compliance. Previously, she worked for U.S. Air Force JAG Corps and Raytheon Technologies.

'96

Kim Altsuler has been named to the executive committee of Peckar & Abramson. She serves as the Houston partner-in-charge, chairs the firm's residential and multifamily construction practice, and co-chairs the Culture, Career Development, and Inclusion Committee.

'97

Jay Dewald has been named head of litigation and disputes at Norton Rose Fulbright's San Antonio office. Focusing on white-collar criminal defense, crisis management, internal investigations, and government investigations involving whistleblower claims, Dewald also leads the firm's U.S. healthcare investigations division.

Jennifer Matis has retired from the federal government following 24 years of public service. After more than a decade at the National Labor Relations Board, Matis spent 11 years with the U.S. Office of Government Ethics and most recently served as associate counsel in its legal, external affairs, and performance branch.

Anjana Patel has a new position as managing shareholder of Baker Donelson's New Jersey offices. Patel specializes in health care law focusing on transactional, regulatory, and compliance matters.

'98

Andrea Hyatt has been appointed as an Assistant U.S. Attorney for the District of Rhode Island. She previously served as an Assistant U.S. Attorney in the Northern District of Texas.

Carlos Martinez has been promoted to chief of staff for the Office of the President at The University of Texas at San Antonio. Previously, Martinez served as a senior vice president at the institution, overseeing strategic planning, compliance risk management, and office operations.

Heather (Fleniken) McFarlane has joined JAMS—a private provider of alternative dispute resolution services—as a mediator and arbitrator. She works out of the Houston Resolution Center.

Honor Among Teams
Alumni named to Hall of Honor.

Dean GREENWOOD '71

Dean Greenwood has been inducted into The University of Texas at Austin Recreational Sports Hall of Honor for 2025. One of four individuals to earn All-Intramural Team honors in four sports within a single academic year, he served in the U.S. Army for four years before law school, where he continued his intramural career playing flag football with the Legal Eagles.

Milam NEWBY '03

Milam Newby has been inducted into The University of Texas at Austin Recreational Sports Hall of Honor for 2025. He served on the ad hoc committee that developed the initial design concepts for the Gregory Gym Aquatic Complex. The inaugural chair of Party on the Plaza, now a 26-year RecSports back-to-school tradition, Newby is a partner at Vinson & Elkins in Austin and heads the firm's technology practice.

Annie HOLAND MILLER '04

Annie Holand Miller has been inducted into The University of Texas at Austin Recreational Sports Hall of Honor for 2025. A strong advocate for student wellness, she championed the Gregory Gym Aquatic Complex referendum, working across campus constituencies to support the project. She is chief business and operations manager of Holand Investments and remains involved with RecSports as a member of the department's leadership team.

Brian HALEY '09

Brian Haley has been inducted into The University of Texas at Austin Recreational Sports Hall of Honor for 2025.The co-founder of CB Capital, he served as the student government president during the 2003–04 academic year and was appointed the first student on The University of Texas System Board of Regents in 2006. A strong supporter of RecSports, Haley played a key role in the final stages of planning that led to breaking ground on the Gregory Gym Aquatic Complex.

Class Notes

'01

Amy Hinzmann has joined the Seattle-based e-discovery company Lighthouse Document Technologies as head of information governance. She previously worked as an executive vice president of corporate and commercial services at legal services company UnitedLex.

Thomas Nguyen, a real estate professional and restaurant practice leader at the Houston office of CBRE, competed with his family on the TV show "Family Feud" in November 2025.

'04

Scott Young was recognized in January by the Association of Corporate Counsel's DFW Chapter and The Texas Lawbook with the 2025 Corporate Counsel Award for Achievement in Pro Bono and Public Service. He currently serves as managing counsel for Toyota North America.

'05

Chad Walker has joined King & Spalding's Dallas office handling patent cases and complex commercial litigation disputes. He previously was a partner at Winston & Strawn in Dallas.

'06

Taylor Nichols, the principal of IDEA Parmer Park College Prep School in Austin, recently brought a group of his senior students competing in mock trial to visit Texas Law. Nichols has worked in education for 20 years and is in his 11th year as principal.

'07

Kayla Dreyer has joined Jones & Keller as a shareholder and leader of the firm's employment law practice. Dreyer provides strategic guidance, litigation defense, and transactional support to employers with expertise in employment compliance and workplace investigations.

Parisa Fatehi-Weeks has been appointed executive director of Every Texan, a nonprofit policy institute. Fatehi-Weeks' career has focused on advocacy across a variety of organizations, including Google, Indeed, the Workers Defense Project, and HousingWorks Austin.

Adam Zerbinopoulos has been promoted to principal deputy assistant secretary at the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration for the U.S. Department of State. He previously served as the acting assistant secretary for the bureau.

'08

Michael Bittner has joined King & Spalding's Dallas office as an intellectual property trial lawyer, specializing in patent litigation. He previously was as a partner at Winston & Strawn in Dallas.

Jonathan Eisenman has been appointed to serve as a judge in the Los Angeles County Superior Court. Eisenman previously served as assistant general counsel for the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power and worked as a deputy city attorney.

Erin Fonken has joined Kemp Smith in Austin as a partner. She specializes in air quality, water quality, endangered species, enforcement, permitting, administrative matters, and litigation for their public and environmental law department.

'09

Jason Blackmer has joined Latitude Legal, a global flexible legal staffing company, as leader and founding partner of the company's new regional corporate office in Houston. Blackmer previously served as associate general counsel of Sunnova.

Maine Goodfellow has joined Hilcorp in Houston as assistant general counsel. He previously served as managing counsel for business development and corporate transactions at Phillips 66.

Ashley
MORGAN '07

Ashley Morgan has been appointed to the Texas Water Development Board by Texas Governor Greg Abbott. She is an attorney at Erben & Yarbrough and previously worked for the Office of the Governor, the Office of the Attorney General, the Railroad Commission of Texas, and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

'10

Ben Bireley has joined Abraham, Watkins, Nichols, Agosto, Aziz & Stogner in Houston as of counsel. Bireley focuses on personal injury matters, including wrongful death, catastrophic injury, plant explosions, workplace injuries, product liability, and truck accidents.

Rex Mann has joined King & Spalding's Dallas office, where he will focus his practice on patent litigation and other complex commercial litigation matters. He previously was a partner at Winston & Strawn in Dallas.

'11

Sarah T. Glaser, chair of the firm's employment law practice group, has been elected managing director for Lloyd Gosselink Rochelle & Townsend.

Omar Ochoa has been elected mayor of Edinburg, TX. A civil litigation attorney, Ochoa is the founding attorney at Omar Ochoa Law Firm in McAllen, TX.

'14

Chen Zang PhD was elevated to the partnership at global intellectual property law firm Finnegan, Henderson, Farabow, Garrett & Dunner in Washington, D.C. Zang's patent practice includes inter partes review proceedings, district court litigation, International Trade Commission investigations, and patent prosecution and counseling.

'15

Chuck Pinney has been promoted to legal director at Texas' Office of the Secretary of State. He previously served as the office's senior staff attorney.

Alex Robertson has joined Kirkland & Ellis in Dallas as a partner in the corporate practice group, where he advises private equity firms and public and private companies on corporate matters across a range of industries, with a particular focus on energy and infrastructure.

Aimeé Vidaurri has been named administrative partner at Norton Rose Fulbright's San Antonio office. A trial lawyer, Vidaurri has been with the firm since 2018 and focuses her practice on complex commercial litigation in the financial services, energy, and grocery retail industries.

'16

Allison Allman has joined Jackson Walker's Fort Worth office as a partner, focusing on complex commercial matters at the trial and appellate levels. She previously served as a law clerk for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit.

Garrett Brawley, a trial attorney in high-stakes commercial litigation, has been elected partner at Beck Redden in Houston. Prior to joining the firm in 2018, he clerked for the Hon. Alfred Bennett '91 of the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Texas.

Jasmine
HARDING ADAMS '16

Jasmine Harding Adams has joined the global internet and technology company Match Group – with its portfolio of brands including Tinder, Hinge, Match, and OKCupid, among others – as the employee relations and ethics lead in the legal department. She previously worked with Mattel, the toy company, and Ogletree. Adams received the 2023 Emerging Alumnus Leader Award and was inducted into the Walk of Fame at her undergraduate institution, Houston Christian University.

Sean Gallagher, a trial lawyer in high-stakes disputes, has joined Jackson Walker's Austin office as a partner. He previously was a partner at Reese Marketos.

Grace Lentz has been elected to partner at Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe in the Energy and Infrastructure group at the firm's Houston office. A project development and M&A lawyer, Lentz helps developers, sponsors, strategic investors, and other energy companies navigate complex renewable and conventional power projects.

Daniella E. Martinez has been elected as a partner at BakerHostetler in Houston. Her practice focuses on complex commercial disputes, including business torts, energy, and trade secret litigation. Martinez previously clerked for the Hon. Rolando Olvera '89 of the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Texas.

Cody Martinez, with experience in internal investigations and high-profile litigation, has joined Jackson Walker's Dallas office as partner. He previously clerked for the U.S. Magistrate Judge Renee Toliver '84 of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Texas, working on cases related to intellectual property disputes, SEC

Class Notes

enforcement actions, OFAC penalties, and class actions.

Gilbert Perales has been promoted to general counsel of Siete Foods, a division of PepsiCo. He previously served as the brand's associate general counsel.

John Stavinoha has joined Latham & Watkins' Houston office as a partner in the firm's M&A and private equity practice. Stavinoha specializes in the energy and infrastructure industries.

Reeya Thakrar has been promoted to partner at Faegre Drinker in the firm's Chicago office. Thakrar is part of Faegre Drinker's intellectual property practice group and counsels clients on technology transactions, artificial intelligence (AI), and intellectual property matters.

'17

Tyson Ehlinger has joined Jackson Walker's Austin office as a partner, specializing in wealth preservation strategies and estate planning. He previously served as a tax attorney for Timothy J. Ehlinger.

Rony Kishinevsky has joined Jackson Walker's Austin office as a partner in the corporate and securities section. Kishinevsky focuses on M&A, private fund formations, joint ventures, and private placements of debt and equity securities.

Katy Zendeh has been elected as a member of Caplin & Drysdale in Washington, D.C. She is in the bankruptcy and complex litigation practice groups.

'18

Lauren Davis has joined Gutt Law as an attorney. She previously served as an in-house attorney for Big Machine Label Group and was part of Concord Music Publishing's legal team.

Leanne Flatter has been elevated to principal at Fish & Richardson in Austin, where her practice focuses on U.S. and international patent prosecution and patent portfolio management in the fields of automotive technologies, medical devices, carbon capture technologies, and robotics.

Bridget O'Hickey has a new position as senior counsel to the assistant attorney general at the U.S. Department of Justice's National Security Division. She previously served as deputy solicitor general at the Florida Office of the Attorney General.

Montana Ware has made partner at Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe in the Technology Companies group at the firm's Austin office. With experience in highly regulated industries such as defense, nuclear energy, and space, Ware represents startups and high-scale tech companies, venture capital funds, and strategic investors.

'20

Thomas Cooke has joined McFarland as a condemnation attorney in the firm's Houston office. He began his career as an associate attorney at a complex commercial litigation firm after serving as a law clerk for the Hon. Sim Lake '69 of the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Texas.

'21

Nathan Simmons has been promoted to senior associate at Tully Rinckey's Austin and Houston offices. Simmons focuses his practice on employment and labor law.

'22

Cory Fish LLM has been appointed policy director for the Office of the Texas Governor. Fish previously served as a budget and policy advisor to Governor Greg Abbott and was later promoted to deputy policy director. He was previously a fellow at the Cicero Institute in Austin.

Adam Goodrum has joined the Austin firm Botkin Chiarello Calaf as a litigation associate. Goodrum previously served as Assistant U.S. Attorney in the Northern District of Oklahoma, where he was the 2024 Gaye L. Tenoso Indian Country Fellow as part of the Attorney General's Honors Program. He also worked as a term clerk for U.S. Magistrate Judge Mark Lane of the Western District of Texas.

'23

Alyse Munrose has joined Bollier Ciccone Stinson as an attorney. She focuses her practice on family law, combining her legal experience with a strong foundation in social work and public service.

'24

Mason Grist has joined Wilkinson Stekloff as an associate in the firm's Washington, D.C., office. Grist, who served as editor-in-chief of the *Texas Law Review* during his time in law school, most recently clerked for Judge Royce C. Lamberth '67 of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia.

HOW TO SUBMIT

Share your good news, personal or professional, with classmates at law.utexas.edu/alumni/submit-a-class-note.

CONT'D

Mindy Montford '95

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

and never stop helping us ... [S]he never backed away from the fight and always gave us hope, not with her words, but with her actions."

Answers

Though the killer is long since dead, Sonora Thomas, Eliza's sister, made plain the value of an answer. "What I learned about myself in the past two days is that my brain was split into two. One part of my brain has been screaming, 'What happened to my sister?' And the other part kept repeating, 'I will never know, I will die not knowing and I have to be OK with that.' On Saturday, [with the news that Brashers was responsible] those two parts of my brain started melting into each other. I realized how much energy I had used to keep them separate and to convince myself that I was OK not knowing."

Yogurt Shop, Montford notes, was finally solved with good old-school detective skills laced with ballistics, DNA, genetic genealogy, rape kits, and law enforcement cooperation across states. Having worked together to start up two cold case units in Texas, Mindy Montford and the Ayers family are setting up a national nonprofit to address this country's 300,000 cold cases. "Open the cold case boxes, please. Put the evidence in the databases. Run the rape kits," Angie Ayers pleaded with law enforcement. With funding for cold cases largely dependent on grants, their new nonprofit aims at helping law enforcement do just that.

Yogurt Shop, and Montford, may just lead to answers for more families.

True Crime Numbers

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17

defendants who need more lawyers, and more judges, too.

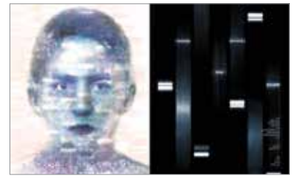
Congress has twice considered bipartisan legislation funding grants to help agencies clear violent crimes. It stalled both times. Here in Texas, the legislature passed a law in 2025 creating a grant program to help agencies increase clearance rates for violent crimes – then didn't fund it. The will to change is weak.

We could try another tack: reduce crime in the first place. Policing can help, but so can community investments. Unfortunately, we still don't have a very good understanding of what policies cause a large change in crime rates. We do know that a society can reduce crime by defining less conduct as criminal, but we haven't shown much appetite for that. Legislatures frequently pass more laws creating crimes, but they rarely repeal them.

Yet even when crime rates drop, as they sometimes do, we might still conclude too many criminals escape consequences. Crime victims are still victims when crime rates are low. And history shows that gaps in investigation can persist despite lower crime rates. Homicide rates have generally declined since the mid-1970s but so have clearance rates. Even with fewer murders, we still don't solve almost half of them.

Some might object that more prosecutions will mean more prisoners, and the United States already imprisons more people than any other country in the world. (We have around 4% of the world's population but something like 16% of its prisoners.) But if one side of the equation goes up, the other can go down: sentences don't need to be as long. For decades though, making sentences shorter has mostly proven to be a losing political strategy. Maybe attitudes would change if efforts at sentence reduction were joined with steps that make the shorter punishments more likely.

So, what percentage of criminals should get away with it? Maybe not zero, but should it really be more than 90% of rapists in Houston? 97% of fraudsters nationwide? Nearly half of all murderers? To answer these questions, what we could really use are unbiased politicians—and voters—who understand both sides of the equation and are willing to grapple with hard problems honestly and in good faith.



Tracking Down Invisible Killers

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31

voluntarily because of the necessity of using a cell phone in modern life."

Kramer, the former FBI attorney, views IGG as a tool that actually preserves privacy. During the decades investigators hunted the Golden State Killer, hundreds of people were interrogated and thousands were surveilled. When IGG was used to identify DeAngelo, he says not a single person was interrogated. "You tell me, which method is the least intrusive?" asks Kramer.

Hope for Survivors

Rae-Venter, no longer retired, often works 12 to 14 hours a day until a case is solved, motivated to make com-

CONT'D

THE CASE MADE INTERNATIONAL HEADLINES, BRINGING INVESTIGATIVE GENETIC GENEALOGY INTO THE MAINSTREAM.

munities safer and bring peace to victims and their families. Her nonprofit, Firebird Forensics, uses IGG to help solve violent crimes and to give a name to unidentified remains, the Jane and John Does of the world.

She knows how important the answers locked inside DNA can be.

After the Golden State Killer was sentenced to life in prison, Rae-Venter spoke with survivors who told her that for years after their assaults, DeAngelo would call and terrorize them. "One woman had remarried, and he tracked her down and told her that he was going to kill her. They had been living in fear for 30 to 40 years," Rae-Venter recalls.

In 2020, she partnered with the Cuyahoga County, OH, prosecutor's office to help identify rapists. Cuyahoga County has opted to test all rape kits — which, in some jurisdictions, can sit untested for decades — knowing the kits often unearth serial criminals.

"In a number of those cases it's particularly upsetting," says Rae-Venter. "If the first rape kit had been done, the downstream rapes and murders probably would never have happened."

Peter Headley, the former deputy working Lisa Jensen's case, is now retired, but he still keeps an ear to the ground. "I'd love to give Lisa a little more closure, and find her mom's remains."

With investigative genetic genealogy, that's now at least a real possibility.

IN MEMORIAM

Manuel Almaguer '63
James M. Alsup '64
Dennis Alvoid '67
Mark Beatty '80
Robert Bedgood '77
Vickie Benitez '85
James Bertrand '66
Frederic Bittner '65
Walt Bondies '58
William Bonham '54
Grant Buce '69
T. Paul Bulmahn '70
James Burk '69
Russell Burwell '67
Charles Cappel '69
Jerry Carlton '67
Keith Carter '50
Jerry Coleman '63
Frank Cooksey '62

Rrachelle Douglas '93
Timothy Dunn '05
Jack Eckels '72
Melvin Eichelbaum '67
Sidney Farrar '55
Taylor Gandy '62
James Giddings '69
Julius Glickman '66
Jeffrey Gordon '73
Charles Helms '92
Thomas Hight '74
Ted Hollembeak '87
Ted Hollen '03
John Holstead '62
Ron Holub '75
Barbara Horan '88
Fred Hull '61
Stephen Jenks '68
David Jones '77

Page Kanetzky '05
Mary Kate Kell '78
Millie Kerr '07
Lisa Kinzer '13
I. Richard Levy '86
Andrew Louis '87
Peter Low '80
Herbert Marsh '67
Amy Martin '03
Thomas McBath '89
Stan McCormick '71
Laurier McDonald '61
Muckleroy "Budge" McDonnold '56
Jeb McNew '72
Louis Miller '61
Stuart Morse '68
Gary Norton '63
James Puff '60

Greg Reilly '72
Nathaniel Rhodes '73
David Richeson '69
David Rodriguez '91
Donald Rorschach '64
Terry Scarborough '71
Thomas Scott '58
Thomas Sehon '70
Joan Sherwin '80
John Stover '71
Edmunds Travis '51
Gary Truman '92
Stephen Utz '79
Larry Wadler '60
Donald Weber '71
Creighton White '58
Linda Wiegman '81
Robert Wilson '68
Michael Wood '70

Names recorded during the production of the Spring 2026 issue of *Texas Law Magazine*.

Both a work of art and sanctuary, The Color Inside sits on top of the **William C. Powers Jr.** Student Activity Center — named for the former law dean and university president — on the main campus. Commissioned by Landmarks in 2008, UT Austin's public art program, the Skyspace installation by artist James Turrell frames the Texas sky through an oculus, transforming sunrise and sunset with light sequences that wash the chamber with shifting color. Designed as a quiet refuge, Skyspace remains a beloved contemplative space.

Photo by Jeff Wilson