

Summary of the interview of former Special Agent of the FBI
Gerard F. Downes

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Special Agent Downes served in the FBI from 1984 to 2009. This interview took place on October 6, 2009.

Mr. Downes started in law enforcement in his local Pennsylvania town while he attended college, and went to the Pennsylvania State Police after graduation. He joined the FBI in 1984 and was assigned to Elizabeth City NC for his first office. His next assignment was Boston MA working bank robberies, violent crimes and as liaison for Logan Airport.

SA Downes was transferred to the Springfield MA RA where he worked an interstate child serial killer case, which the task force solved. Because of his experience he was selected for a new unit at Quantico called the Child Abduction Serial Killer Unit. (The name was changed to the National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crimes and then to the Behavioral Analysis Unit.)

SA Downes talks about the training he and the other members of the unit received, both academic and hands-on, and the variety of resources they used. Downes gives a complete picture of the well-known case in Spotsylvania VA beginning with the disappearance and murder of Sofia Silva and then Katie and Kristen Lisk. A Task Force was formed and worked from 1996 to 2003, when the killer was caught. He describes the ups and downs of the investigation and the impact on the local community.

After eleven years of this intense, travel heavy work, SA Downes asked for a transfer and was assigned as Assistant Legal Attaché to Vancouver, Canada. He retired in 2009.

**Interview of Former Special Agent of the FBI
Gerard F. Downes (1984 – 2009)
Interviewed by Susan Wynkoop
On October 6, 2009**

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Susan Wynkoop: Hi. This is Susan Wynkoop and today, October 6, 2009, I'm interviewing Gerry Downes, who was a former FBI Agent from 1984 until July of 2009. And we are talking telephonically, of course. He is in Delaware at this time and had just an amazing career. And I want to talk with him about that. But first I'm going to read into the tape the Copyright Release form that we have both signed, which states:

We, the undersigned, convey the rights to the intellectual content of our interview, on this date, October 6, 2009, to the Society of Former Special Agents of the FBI. This transfer is in exchange for the Society's efforts to preserve the historical legacy of the FBI and its members. We understand that portions of this interview may be deleted for security purposes. Unless otherwise restricted, we agree that acceptable sections can be published on the Worldwide Web and the recordings transferred to an established repository for preservation and research.

So, again Gerry, I thank you so much for your time today. How are you?

Gerard F. Downes: I'm fine, thank you.

Wynkoop: Good. Great. I just want to talk a little about your background before we get into specific cases and things of that sort. I see that you were in law enforcement prior to the FBI. Tell me just a little about your life prior to the FBI, being an Agent.

Downes: Alright. Well, in 1976, I joined the Wayne County, Pennsylvania, Sheriff's Department, while I was going to college in Scranton, Pennsylvania. The Wayne County Sheriff's Department is in Honesdale, Pennsylvania, about thirty miles from Scranton. I did that for a couple of years and then moved over to the police of the Town of Honesdale, Pennsylvania, which was a twelve-man police department, and basically whatever happened on your shift, you owned it.

Wynkoop: Wow.

Downes: If somebody got killed, you worked it. For the most part though, it was a pretty peaceful place, and, you know, it was mostly traffic enforcement and minor break-ins, things like that.

Wynkoop: Uhm-hmm.

Downes: Then I graduated from the University of Scranton and I was lucky enough to be selected for the Pennsylvania State Police in 1980.

Wynkoop: Was that real competitive at that time?

Downes: Very competitive. Yeah.

Wynkoop: Oh really. Okay.

Downes: Very competitive, and I went into the academy in 1980 and then from '81 through '84, I was a trooper in, started in Philadelphia, on the Schuylkill Expressway; patrolled twelve miles of road, back and forth, all day long.

Wynkoop: Wow!

Downes: And then got transferred to Honesdale, Pennsylvania, which was basically home for me at that time. I did that for, until early '84, and then I was transferred down to Stockertown, Pennsylvania, which is outside of Bethlehem. I worked there until I was notified that the FBI had a job for me.

Wynkoop: So now how did you go about applying for the FBI?

Downes: As a Trooper, you know, I was always looking to improve things. And, you know, everybody always told me the FBI was the best you could get in to. So, I looked into it. I was impressed, and made the application and that. And as I said, I was lucky enough to get called.

Wynkoop: Well, that's great. So that was 1984, of course.

Downes: Yes, went to Quantico and then wound up in Elizabeth City, North Carolina.

Wynkoop: And that, I guess, was quite different from Pennsylvania, although not as, it could be more different, I suppose, but I would think would be different.

Downes: Yeah, it was quite different. It was a small southern town in northeastern North Carolina, kind of like a step back in time, back to the 1950s.

Wynkoop: Wow. Yeah.

Downes: It was a great place to live and we thoroughly enjoyed our time there. We were there for about three and a half years. Back then, when you came in, you were told that you were going to go to a small office for a couple of years and then the big office.

Wynkoop: Oh, so that's how it was in 1988, in the, well, this was 1987?

Downes: Yeah, it was '88.

Wynkoop: Oh, so you went from small to big. Okay.

Downes: Yes. And I had grown up in Brooklyn, New York, prior to moving to Pennsylvania. That's where my early childhood was, and grade school and high school. So, you know, everybody was being transferred to New York at the time. It didn't bother me to go to New York. So, in all of their infinite wisdom, the Bureau decided to send me to Boston.

Wynkoop: (Chuckling) Right. And that was what year?

Downes: That was in '88.

Wynkoop: Okay.

Downes: I went to Boston and worked on the Bank Robbery Task Force.

Wynkoop: Uhm-hmm.

Downes: And the Violent Crimes Squad and then I became the liaison to Logan Airport and I handled all the federal violations involving Logan Airport.

Wynkoop: I saw that. And that would, I would think, keep you fairly busy.

Downes: Yes. As an aside, I think it was in '91 when Desert Storm first started, they reviewed the security of all the airports in the United States and determined that Boston was probably the safest airport in the United States. And, unfortunately, what, ten years later ...

Wynkoop: That did not hold true. Wow!

Downes: Didn't hold true. No.

Wynkoop: So in '91 they stated that?

Downes: Yes.

Wynkoop: That's interesting. It really is. And then it seems that, while you were in Boston, that this was sort of the beginning of your training for investigating serial killer cases? Is that the case or not?

Downes: I was in Boston and then I had an opportunity to go out to the RA in Springfield, Massachusetts.

Wynkoop: Uhm-hmm.

Downes: So I did that in '91. Then, while I was in Springfield, I ended up working the case of a guy named Lewis Lent. Lewis Lent, as a child serial killer, is responsible for abducting and murdering at least five pre-pubescent children between, I'm trying to think of the years, in probably '89 till '94, when we arrested him. We worked on that case for probably about two years. Had a huge task force up with Mass State Police, New York State Police, FBI, and I was the Case Agent for the FBI. And we arrested him; we convicted him, and he's doing life in prison right now ...

Wynkoop: Wow.

Downes: ... for two homicides. He was not charged for the other two. We, after that wound down, the FBI created a whole new unit called the Child Abduction Serial Killer Unit at Quantico.

Wynkoop: Uhm-hmm. 'Cause that had never been formed. I mean, that wasn't something that had been looked at that much. Is that correct?

Downes: Correct. Yeah. The Director at the time, Louis Freeh, was a big proponent of children and wanted the FBI to be as thoroughly involved as they could be.

So I applied for that. And talk about being in the right place at the right time, just coming off of the Lent case, I was selected for the unit in 1995.

Wynkoop: Wow!

Downes: And I went to Quantico and began my child abduction and serial killer career.

Wynkoop: Which is extensive as, you know, as all of the training that you've received is amazing.

Downes: Yeah.

Wynkoop: It's really quite amazing. And it must all, all of the training that you received, it all must fit together so well.

Downes: Right. Right. It was a great opportunity. It was a great time in my life. I spent eleven years in that Unit. The Unit changed its name several times from Child Abduction Serial Killer Unit to the National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crimes, to the Behavioral Analysis Unit, which it is now.

Wynkoop: Right.

Downes: It's the one you see on TV on Criminal Minds.

Wynkoop: Uhm-hmm.

Downes: Except they have Lear jets and everything. We didn't have any of that (chuckling).

Wynkoop: Right. Exactly. (Chuckling) But just going back just for a moment before we continue, tell me more about the Lewis Lent case, and how that evolved and how you solved it. And just a summary of it if that's possible.

Downes: What happened was back in the early '90s, I guess it was, late '80s, early '90s, we had a number of children disappear in Upstate New York and Western Massachusetts.

Wynkoop: Uhm-hmm.

Downes: And nobody really connected the cases too much. We had Jimmy Bernardo; was a young boy; I think he was about 12; last seen riding his bicycle around a little strip mall in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, disappeared. And his body was found several months later, 200 miles away in Newfield, New York.

Wynkoop: Hmmm.

Downes: After that, we had another boy in Westfield, Massachusetts. A boy named Jamie Lusher disappeared. And Jamie's body has never been found.

Wynkoop: Wow.

Downes: And then we had Holly Pirainen in Sturbridge, somewhere around the middle of Massachusetts, her body was found in Brimfield, Massachusetts. And then we had Sara Anne Wood of New York State, in Herkimer County in New York. And, again, she disappeared from a, last seen leaving a little general store in a very rural area. Her bicycle was found; her groceries that she was carrying were found; and she was never found.

Wynkoop: Wow.

Downes: And then in January of 1994, we had an attempted abduction in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. During the attempt the 12-year-old girl kept her wits about her and managed to get away from him. And, ultimately, [she] was key in identifying Lewis Lent as the person who tried to abduct her.

Wynkoop: Uhm-hmm.

Downes: So we, we located Lent in Lanesboro, Massachusetts, which is adjacent to Pittsfield, Massachusetts. He was interviewed and made some admissions and ended up giving a full confession to the abduction and murder of Jimmy Bernardo and Sara Anne Wood. We then ran out of time and he got his lawyer and we never got the rest of the story on the other children.

Wynkoop: That's amazing. So he was indiscriminately killing girls and boys. I mean, it didn't seem to ...?

Downes: Right. And what the psychologist told us at the time was he was into pre-pubescent children and gender didn't matter to him.

Wynkoop: I see.

Downes: So that's what got him going.

Wynkoop: I'm sorry, you say he's serving life in prison. Right?

Downes: He was convicted and sentenced to life in prison, both in New York and Massachusetts.

Wynkoop: Wow.

Downes: And it was interesting, at his sentencing in New York State, it was shortly after New York State had reinstituted the death penalty.

Wynkoop: Uhm-hmm.

Downes: And the judge, at the time, up in rural Herkimer County, New York, made the comment that he thought long and hard when they passed the law, if he would ever be able to sentence somebody to death. And he looked Lent in the eye and he said, "If anyone comes before me with the crimes you've committed," he said, "I would have no hesitation ..."

Wynkoop: Wow!

Downes: ... "in sentencing that, placing that sentence on them."

Wynkoop: How old was Lent?

Downes: He was, I think he was about 46 when we arrested him.

Wynkoop: Hmmm! That must bring so much satisfaction to have, you know, solved that case.

Downes: Yeah, it really did.

Wynkoop: I would think.

Downes: And it was a great effort. It wasn't, you know, it wasn't me by any means. It was a team effort. It was like 60 people involved in the task force from four different agencies. And we worked long and hard together and it all worked out.

Wynkoop: That's great. That's great. So, as you said, timing was wonderful and this unit at Quantico was evolving.

Downes: Right.

Wynkoop: So you went, as you said, down there, I guess, in '95, is that correct?

Downes: Yeah. April of '95 I started with, with CASKU, we called it ... Child Abduction Serial Killer Unit.

Wynkoop: Now, tell me some about, you know, the evolution of this whole concept and what was going on down there.

Downes: Well, there was a number, every time a child gets abducted, it's very high profile, obviously. And it seemed like the early '90s there was a lot of those going on. The media was all over it. And, like I said, Louis Freeh became the Director of the FBI and he wanted the FBI to be more involved in these types of cases. They've always been involved in them for years and years, but he wanted a more concerted effort to work them. So he decided to create the Child Abduction Serial Killer Unit and that's what we did.

And we were trained from the day we arrived. I think we had thirteen weeks solid training on all kinds of behavioral science courses; on crime scene investigations; how to interview, interrogation. Anything you could bring to the table on those kinds of cases, we had extra training in. At the same time we were still working cases as they came in. So between the training and the experience you were gaining from every case, you know, you were getting better at what you were doing.

Wynkoop: Uhm-hmm. Right. Were they all Agents who were training you? Or were we reaching out to other fields to bring in people?

Downes: No, we went out to the world's experts and ...

Wynkoop: That's what, okay.

Downes: ... we had the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology; all of their pathologists were involved in our training where we did death investigation training. And, you know, attended autopsies and just manner of death, cause of death, all of those issues. We went to all kinds of crime scene courses around the country ...

Wynkoop: I see.

Downes: ... not just in-house but, you know, there's a lot of bigger departments who have very good crime scene personnel.

Wynkoop: Uhm-hmm.

Downes: We went to Washington, DC, Baltimore, Philadelphia, to work with their homicide units. You know, for weeks at a time. And just go out and respond to homicides and, you know, learn how to handle a scene and handle the media; handle the neighborhood canvases. All those things that come into play.

Wynkoop: And, I'm sure, that is something you had to train yourself to handle. I have never, well, I had one bank robbery, a customer was killed. But to do that every day and, ohhh, I just can't imagine.

Downes: That was, it was, you know, extremely interesting and extremely satisfying because a lot of times you had a hand in putting some of these people away.

Wynkoop: Yes. So, again, as we had talked [about] before we started taping this conversation, so you're learning; you're receiving all this training. You're, you're helping, I guess, all the field offices in investigations that are going on in their area of, in their field office, right?

Downes: Right.

Wynkoop: I mean, you're constantly in touch. I guess, in the early '90s, there are all of these killings that are going, or serial killings occurring in Virginia?

Downes: Uhm-hmm.

Wynkoop: I'm sorry, or 1995 to 1996?

Downes: Right.

Wynkoop: So you'd been in the Unit for a couple of years now.

Downes: Yes.

Wynkoop: So who reached out to you from Spotsylvania, Virginia?

Downes: Well, the interesting thing was most of us that were in the Unit, lived in Spotsylvania, Virginia, because it's close. Because of its proximity to Quantico.

Wynkoop: Okay. So you were very aware of things anyway?

Downes: Yeah. My boss was a guy named Bill Hagmaier.

Wynkoop: Oh, I worked with him on the Bank Robbery Squad!

Downes: Bill was very well thought of by the sheriff's department and, you know, he was, at that time, more known to the sheriff's department than most of us since we were fairly new to the area.

Wynkoop: Uhm-hmm.

Downes: So anyway, in September of '95, Sofia Silva disappeared from Spotsylvania, Virginia.

Wynkoop: Right. She disappeared. Okay.

Downes: It was in September of '95, and she was last seen sitting on the front step of her house. She came home from school; it had been the first week of school. She was a high school junior, I believe. And she went in the house. Her sister Pam, her older sister, was in the house. She told Pam she was going to go out and sit on the step and do her homework.

Wynkoop: Uhm-hmm.

Downes: So Pam was on the phone with friends and didn't pay any attention to her younger sister. Mom and dad were both at work, which was the routine. And Sofia was last seen by Pam, stepping out in, outside the house. Mom comes home about six o'clock; says to Pam, "Where's Sofia?" Pam says, "She said she was going to sit on the step and do her homework." So Dad comes home about six-thirty; he's a mason. And they start making phone calls to friends.

By 9:00 p.m. that evening, it's pretty obvious that something's happened; she called the sheriff's department. And they notified Bill Hagmaier knowing that a big new Unit was right there in their backyard.

Wynkoop: Uhm-hmm.

Downes: So Bill called me and a couple of the other Agents in the Unit and we went down and started helping out. One of the things we learned over the years was that one of the most important parts of the early, of the child abduction investigation, the early parts, is the neighborhood canvas. If a good, thorough neighborhood canvas is done, the odds are much better of catching the offender. Somebody in that neighborhood saw something even if they don't realize it, you know.

Wynkoop: Uhm-hmm. I see.

Downes: You have, you have to go out and, and drag it out of them sometimes. So we kept pushing that we needed a good neighborhood canvas. As a result, they ended up having a neighbor come by, about a week later, saying that he had a basement apartment rented to a tenant and the tenant abruptly had left the area. I'm sorry, it wasn't a few weeks. What happened was Sofia disappears and the whole investigation goes on and her body is found about six weeks later in a swampy area about fifteen or sixteen miles from where she was abducted.

Wynkoop: Uhm-hmm.

Downes: So when the news broke, a crime scene was done by a different county. King George County Sheriff's Department did the crime scene. The body was ultimately identified ... had some massive decomposition, so they had to use dental X-rays to identify the body.

Shortly after the news broke, though, a neighbor came forward who had been contacted earlier during the neighborhood canvas and basically told the sheriff's department that his tenant abruptly left the area. Said he had to leave and had a job somewhere else and took off. So, anyway, the owner of the house gave consent to search the tenant's former apartment.

Wynkoop: Uhm-hmm.

Downes: And they went in and did a forensic search for trace evidence ... hair, fibers, things like that. Because, when the body was found, it was wrapped in a blue moving blanket and then tied repeatedly with a number of ropes. And the crime scene folks were able, the lab folks were able to recover significant amounts of trace evidence from both the ropes and the blanket; and from Sofia's remains.

Sofia was found with some of her clothes on. She was missing some of her clothes. Her underwear and her shoes, but she was redressed with the rest of her clothes, which is kind of unusual.

So, anyway, the lab people did their thing and recovered a tremendous amount of trace evidence. When they did the search of the basement apartment, where this guy left, that evidence was sent to the Virginia State Police Lab in Richmond for comparison. And the analyst down there called one day and told the sheriff's department, "Hey, you've got your man! Go get a warrant. We've got positive matches on the trace evidence from the basement apartment with trace evidence on Sofia's body."

Wynkoop: That is great!

Downes: We were very happy, you know.

Wynkoop: Yeah.

Downes: Okay, we go out. It turned out the guy that had moved out of the apartment had been arrested shortly after moving out and was serving time in the, in Fredericksburg jail, I believe. Which is right next to Spotsylvania.

Wynkoop: Uhm-hmm.

Downes: So they got a warrant for his arrest; served it on him, in jail, and he remained in jail. Everybody was pretty happy. You know. Small town, USA, Spotsylvania, Virginia, where nothing bad ever happens; we have a girl abducted and murdered. So, you know, everybody kind of set up and took notice of that. But within a few days after her body was found, we have somebody in custody in jail. And it looks like a good case against him. So we continued, you know, to get ready for trial and all of that, but everybody was pretty happy that we got our guy. The following May, May first of '97; Sofia was in '96, not '95.

Wynkoop: Okay.

Downes: And then nine months later, May 1 of '97, two sisters, Kristen and Katie Lisk ... Kristen was 15, Katie was 11 ... came home from school, on different school buses, to a more rural area of Spotsylvania. It's probably about three miles from where Sofia Silva lived.

Wynkoop: Uhm-hmm.

Downes: And we know they got home. They were seen getting off the school buses by the other kids, by the school bus driver. We know they got to the house because their books were in the house. They each had a glass of chocolate milk, which was in the sink. Their father had told them to start filling their in-ground swimming pool May first; and the hose was turned on to the, to the pool.

Wynkoop: Hmmm.

Downes: But one of the next door neighbors was sitting out in front of her house, a young girl, it was a classmate of Kristin's, and told us that she heard the girls laughing and carrying on and everything seemed fine. Well, the mother was a nursing instructor at a local community college and the father's a retired Government worker who had his own photographic studio. And their routine would be Dad would call the girls everyday about three o'clock just to make sure they got home.

Wynkoop: Uh-huh.

Downes: So he called about three, 3:15, and by 3:30 he's not getting any answer, so he closes up his shop and heads home. He gets home and he finds the front door is ajar. Kristin's books are outside on the front lawn; which, again, is not that unusual.

Wynkoop: Uhm-hmm. Right.

Downes: The waters running into the pool. One of the girls had changed her clothes, and the two empty glasses in the sink. And the girls are nowhere to be found. So, again, he calls his wife; she comes home. They call all the friends and that. And, you know, by seven o'clock that night the sheriff's department is notified again, and we're notified again.

Wynkoop: Uhm-hmm.

Downes: And the whole thing starts all over again. We start with the basic investigation; crime scene search of the room, and neighborhood canvas and all of that. And what happens next was, after a couple of days ... going back ... the family, a very nice family, there are only two children and, after Sofia Silva had been abducted, they went out and bought an alarm system for the house; basically told the girls not to open the door to anyone. They would have a FedEx guy come occasionally to drop off supplies for the business. And they were even told "don't open the door to the FedEx people."

Wynkoop: Uhm-hmm.

Downes: So, you know, increased security but, again, you're dealing with a 15-year-old and an 11-year-old. Something that we, we were looking at in the back of our minds, as to how could somebody get up this driveway. It was a rural area. The driveway, when you looked up from the road, you couldn't see what was up there.

Wynkoop: Uh-huh.

Downes: So we're looking, thinking, you know, this guy's been up here before. He knows the area. Maybe he's ... you know, you always look at the family first; you get them eliminated. You look at the people who are surrounding the family. Start to work through them and that's what we did. I mean, and we eliminate everybody.

Five days later, May 6, the two girls bodies are found floating in the South Anna River down near Richmond, Virginia, forty miles from their home. And both of them, again, had clothes on and that. They were right in this river which had very little, if any, current. And they're right below a bridge. What happened was two highway workers stopped for lunch right near this bridge. It was on a country road with no traffic. And they're sitting there eating their lunch and one looked down and he said, "Hey, look at that, there's a couple of mannequins in the water."

Wynkoop: Hmmm.

Downes: And the other guy looked down and he says, "Mannequins?!" He says, "There's two kids missing in Spotsylvania." So they go down and took a closer look, and sure enough it was our girls. So they called the Hanover County Sheriff's Office, we're in a different county. And they called Spotsylvania. We all went down and assisted with the body recovery and that. And we did a crime scene investigation down there, on that bridge, for probably six days.

Wynkoop: Wow!

Downes: We just vacuumed the bridge.

Wynkoop: Wow. That's amazing.

Downes: I mean, you know, we walked from the bridge all the way out to Route 1, which was about eight miles and we had Agents on both sides of the road, like six abreast, just looking for anything.

The reason we did that is because we've had cases in the past where bodies are dumped in rural areas and then as they're driving away, they're throwing evidence out the window.

Wynkoop: Uhm-hmm. I see.

Downes: So, as I say, every case we work, you learn something and you bring that to the next case. So, that's what we did. Unfortunately, we didn't come up with any, anything with that. But we did come up with trace evidence again on the bodies. The bodies, as it turned out, had their clothes on, were missing their underwear; were missing their sneakers. So we're sitting back in, in Quantico when all, going over all of this, and we're thinking this is too much of a coincidence.

Wynkoop: Right. You're killing me. Well, I'm just sitting here on the edge of my seat.

Downes: So anyways, we bring that to the attention of the sheriff's department. They're on board with us. They feel the same way. All of the evidence had been handled by the, the laboratory in the State of Virginia, in Richmond. We talked to the FBI Lab. Doug Deedrick is our guru of trace evidence, Hair and Fibers. And we explained things to him and, you know, told him, "Hey look, something's not right here." So the last thing any lab wants to do is, you know, second guess another lab or take a second look.

The good thing is we had a very good relationship with the Virginia State Lab and their director, at the time, was a good friend of, of several people in our Unit. So we basically called them up and said "hey," laid it out for them and told them what we were thinking. He said, "Have your guy come down and take a look." He said, "Because if we made a mistake we gotta know about it and set it right." You know. So, sure enough, Deedrick went down and took a look at everything. And I'll never forget that day. He called me up and he said, "I don't know what they're seeing here, but I ain't seeing no matches."

He said, "Not only that, but I am seeing matches on Kristin, Katie, and Sofia. All three of these girls were in the exact same environment." Which tells us right away, you have the same guy killed them and we have a serial killer in Spotsylvania.

Wynkoop: And it's not the person you thought?

Downes: 'Cause that guys sitting in jail.

Wynkoop: Right! I was just like, you know, how did he get out of jail?!

Downes: Yes.

Wynkoop: I'm like what is going on?

Downes: Yes.

Wynkoop: Okay.

Downes: So that was the next thing. We basically had to break the news to the family.

Wynkoop: Right.

Downes: Break the news to the public, and go to the court and have the charges dropped against this other guy. Which we did. And from that day, the posters went up and 150 thousand dollar reward; and basically started a serial killer task forces in Spotsylvania, Virginia, which involved, all of the regional departments were involved in that. The Spotsylvania Sheriff's Department, the Virginia State Police, Fredericksburg Police had folks on board; Stafford County, Caroline County, Hanover County ... we had a body down there ... King George County, FBI. Again, a huge task force. It really worked well, though. I mean, everybody got along just fine. And, you know, it was one of those cases. This happened, began in 1996 and wasn't resolved until 2003.

What happened, we worked from '96 to 2003; basically running down suspects, going over evidence, and everything else. One of the things that was identified during the autopsy of Katie Lisk was some foreign debris under one of her fingernails. And, again, the two labs couldn't agree. The Virginia State Lab said it was DNA from an African-American; and the FBI Lab said they couldn't even say if it was DNA; if it was human, or what it was.

Wynkoop: Hmmm!

Downes: So, initially everybody on the task force was saying, "Well, if it's an African-American male, obviously, we need to, basically just focus on them." And everything from our training, our experience was telling us that it was probably a white guy that did it.

Wynkoop: I'm sorry; probably what?

Downes: Probably a white guy.

Wynkoop: Uh-huh. Okay, I thought that's what you said.

Downes: We did a full-blown profile on this case. We laid out everything. His, you know, age, sex, race, the whole, the whole thing and the type of work he probably did. We, we found a lot of building material debris on the three girls.

Wynkoop: Hmmm.

Downes: There was brick dust. There was sheet rock dust. Stuff like that. So it would lead you to believe he's in some sort of a construction job.

Wynkoop: Uh-huh.

Downes: And he, he's not accountable to anybody on those days, during those times. You take all that stuff into consideration. You look at time factors and, you know, he's not a factory worker punching a clock.

Wynkoop: Uhm-hmm.

Downes: He's out and about every day at three o'clock in the afternoon grabbing these kids. And we didn't know how much time he had to spend with these girls. Like I said, Sofia was pretty well decomposed. But the Lisk sisters, they were in very good shape. They hadn't been dead that long.

Wynkoop: Hmmm.

Downes: So we were able to, you know, get their stomach contents; find out, you know, what they had eaten. And it didn't match anything that they had had at school. So it tells us that this guy had a place to keep these kids. He wasn't just grabbing them, killing them, and dumping them. He kept them for a few days.

Wynkoop: Oh, my ...

Downes: Which is very unusual; logistically it's a nightmare.

Wynkoop: Right.

Downes: So, again, it tells us a lot about this individual that we're looking for.

Wynkoop: Uhm-hmm. Right.

Downes: But from '97 until 2003, it was a roller-coaster ride. We, we must have reviewed a couple hundred good suspects. I mean, some of them we couldn't eliminate for two or three weeks. And you would look at them and you'd start thinking to yourself "man this could be the right guy." And then boom. He'd come up with an alibi, or somebody, you know, he was somewhere else.

Wynkoop: Uhm-hmm.

Downes: Iron-clad alibi. And it's like okay, like I say, you're up, you're down for the whole time. And the whole time it was a, it was a task force investigation that never became a cold case. It went from '97 till 2003, and the task force was active working cases every day. And I would go down like once a week to sit down to see where they were and try to help them stay focused and that. As the time went on ...

Wynkoop: The communities must have still been so frightened, I'm sure.

Downes: And that's it. I mean, we worked these cases all over the country; all over the world. And you always talk about how it impacts a community. Well, here it was happening right in our backyard and we're all working it; and these posters are up all over the place. You couldn't go to any store without seeing the three girls' picture.

Wynkoop: Right.

Downes: (Unintel) you know, 150 thousand dollar reward. And it was like, okay, now I understand what we've been teaching here about how it affects the community, you know.

Wynkoop: Uhm-hmm. Wow.

Downes: So we get a big break in 2003. A young girl in Columbia, South Carolina, is at her girlfriend's house. They're gonna go to see a movie, two 15-year-olds. And the one girl says, "Let me just jump in the shower quick. I'll be right out." So the other girl says, "Well, I'll go out and water your flowers, your mother's flowers outside." They were getting wilted. This is in June of '03. So while she's outside there, this guy comes up to her and asks if she wants to look at some magazines he's selling. So she takes the magazine and starts looking and he pulls a gun on her and tells her to get in the back of the car. And he walks her over to a little Pontiac Trans Am and tells her to get in the back seat. And in the back seat is this huge Tupperware container. He tells her to get in the Tupperware container.

Wynkoop: That's amazing!

Downes: And what happened was, the cases in Spotsylvania got a tremendous amount of media attention, obviously. Basically, all of the trace evidence was put out there to the media by, over the course of the investigation.

Wynkoop: Uhm-hmm.

Downes: That, you know, even though the bodies were found in the water, there was still a tremendous amount of trace evidence, a lot of hair and fiber evidence, and 99 percent of the time that's what solved these cases. So we kept saying, you know, we're very positive we're going to solve this case.

Anyway, she gets in the Tupperware thing. Oh, that's where I was going with that, was that we, we basically put it out to the investigators that, if we get another body, they're either going to be naked or they're going to be buried somewhere where you're not going to get any trace evidence.

Wynkoop: Uhm-hmm.

Downes: You're not going to find them.

Wynkoop: Uhm-hmm.

Downes: So it was interesting, he tells her to get in this Tupperware thing. And that was his whole idea was to control the trace evidence.

Wynkoop: Wow.

Downes: So she gets in, he snaps the lid on. He drives off. He stops; he tapes the top down; goes to his apartment complex in Columbia, South Carolina. Now, this is one o'clock in the afternoon. And basically stops in the parking lot, pulls out the Tupperware, drags it across the parking lot into his apartment. And then he strips her down and hog ties her to the bed and proceeds to assault her for the next eighteen hours.

Wynkoop: Yeah.

Downes: So when the initial missing report went out, we used to get notified in, in our Unit, basically, every time, an attempted child abduction or a child abduction occurred, and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children also gets notified.

Wynkoop: Uhm-hmm.

Downes: So when that one came in, someone was assigned to it, start taking a look at it; called down to Columbia. And in the meantime, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children began to work on it as well. And they've got numerous data bases to run things through, and that.

Anyway, we ended up identifying ... well, what happened, after 18 hours, this guy finally, basically, passes out and this fifteen-year-old girl keeps her wits about her and is able to ... he's got her tied to the bed with coat hangers.

Wynkoop: Oh wow!

Downes: Each leg and each arm. She manages to get ...

Wynkoop: And, again, I guess that's to control trace evidence. I'm thinking there wouldn't be much on a coat hanger.

Downes: Right. Right.

Wynkoop: Wow.

Downes: He falls asleep, finally passes out. She gets one foot undone and manages to get the hand, one hand undone, gets herself off the bed and she then starts making her way towards the door. And he's got a whole bunch of boxes piled up in front of the door. Meanwhile, he's snoring and snorting, and she doesn't know if he's going to wake up at any second.

Wynkoop: Exactly.

Downes: She ends up sliding the stuff away from the front door and runs outside. And it's midday and she's naked and runs out in the parking lot. Two guys in a car come by to see her, stop, cover her up and notify the sheriff's department right away. And they, actually, they drive her to the sheriff's department.

Downes: So in the meantime, this guy wakes up and realizes his, his prize is gone and he takes off.

Wynkoop: Uhm-hmm.

Downes: He's then identified and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children start running his prior history, his prior residences and that. And it pops out that he was from Spotsylvania, Virginia.

Wynkoop: Hmmm!

Downes: So we get notified and the next day, I think four of us, the current Sheriff of Spotsylvania, the Captain from King George, Doug Deedrick from the lab, and myself, flew down to Columbia to assist with the search warrant of the house and his vehicle.

Meanwhile, he's the subject of an all-points-bulletin. They started looking for him all over the east coast. And what he did ... this guy's name was Richard Mark Evonitz, E-v-o-n-i-t-z.

Wynkoop: Uhm-hmm.

Downes: And he was a heavy equipment salesman, into sales of machinery and things like that. And I guess he was a great salesperson for the people that he worked for. He actually made a training video for them.

Wynkoop: Hmmm!

Downes: Anyway, he's identified. And he, he gets in the wind. We realize he's got several siblings. He's got two sisters; he's got a mother in South Carolina. He's got a wife. And what he did was, shortly after the Silva abduction, he was living in Fredericksburg and he met an eighteen-year-old girl who was a waitress at a pancake house in Fredericksburg. And they fell in love and got married and were living happily-ever-after for a few years. And for all that time that we were looking for him, people were always asking us in the Behavioral Unit, well, where is he? Why hasn't he struck again? And, you know, standard answer is "hey, he's either dead, he's in jail, or he's got an outlet for his fantasies."

Wynkoop: Uhm-hmm.

Downes: And, in this case, it was the third option.

Wynkoop: Right.

Downes: His wife was fulfilling all of his fantasies for him. But by 2003, she was getting up in age. She was like twenty-four years old now. You know. So, he doesn't like them that old.

Wynkoop: Wow.

Downes: So he then tells his wife and his mother, who live in Columbia, South Carolina, that he got a bonus at work and thought it would be nice if he sent the two of them down to Disney World in Orlando for a few days. So that's what he did. He bought plane tickets for them, flew them down, and then he had all three vehicles. He had his mother's car, and his wife's car, and his own car during that time. So he uses his mother's Pontiac Trans Am to go out and grab the girl. And then when he takes off, he used his wife's little Ford Escort.

And he had two sisters. We, obviously, make contact with both of them. One was cooperative, one wasn't. One lived in South Carolina and, as we found out later, she was helping him. She had got him a room that night in Orangeburg, South Carolina.

And then the second one, in Sarasota, Florida, was cooperating with us. And she basically called and said he's heading to my house.

Wynkoop: Wow.

Downes: So they end up in a high-speed chase with him in one part of Florida and then they broke it off. But then when he hit the City of Sarasota, they got into another chase with him, they put out the spikes. He ran, you know, blew all four tires out and kept going until the car wouldn't go anymore. And then the police surrounded him and he put a gun to his throat and said he was going to kill himself. But they negotiated with him for awhile. And then, for some reason, they sent a dog in on him and the dog started biting him.

Wynkoop: Oh, wow.

Downes: And he shot himself. Put the gun in his mouth and blew his brains out.

Wynkoop: Wow.

Downes: But good news, bad news. You know, because that's the kind of guy you want to talk to, obviously.

Wynkoop: Exactly.

Downes: But, you know, we still didn't know if he's the guy from Spotsylvania at that point. So, all of this happened while we were in South Carolina doing the search of his apartment. And the interesting thing with that was Doug Deedrick kept saying from day one, he says, "When I get in the right environment, I'm going to know it." You know. "I know these hairs and fibers."

Wynkoop: Uhm-hmm.

Downes: That's his whole world, is hair and fiber. So, anyway, he comes down with us and one of the things that stood out in his mind, and was kind of portable, was the pink bathroom fibers, like a pink bathmat. And he told us, he said, "Look for that." He says, you know, "he may have brought it down here with him." And this guy had, I mean, just the house was a pigpen, obviously. And, as most of these places are, they're all collectors. But he had all kinds of sex things and magazines and ...

Wynkoop: Uhm-hmm.

Downes: But we finally get into his closet in the master bedroom and Howard Smith, the sheriff in Spotsylvania now, he was a major at the time, pulls out a pink bathmat and Deedrick lit up. He said, "Yeah." He says, "Take that. I like that."

Wynkoop: Wow.

Downes: But we knew he wasn't in that apartment when the Spotsylvania cases occurred. So, in the meantime, the rest of our guys are doing a background on him. We find out later ...

Wynkoop: Gerry, I'm going to ask to pause just a minute. I'm going to turn this over.

Downes: Okay.

Wynkoop: Okay, Gerry, I got that turned over. Thank you. And so you said you found the pink bathmat in the closet.

Downes: Right. Meanwhile, our folks were doing the background on where he lived in Fredericksburg and that.

Wynkoop: Uhm-hmm.

Downes: So we end up completing the search down there in South Carolina. We go to the Police Impound Lot where his vehicle was being held. He had a green Ford Taurus. And we start, you know, we search that whole car and collected all the trace evidence out of it. And we opened the trunk, and on the inside of the trunk lid was a perfect palm print you could see with the naked eye. And we're looking at each other, like "no, that would be too easy."

Wynkoop: That's amazing.

Downes: But anyway, we took the whole trunk lid, sent it to the FBI Lab and, in the end, well, then we got back to Fredericksburg. We had identified the house and the house had been sold. The Evonitz' had lost the house. The bank took it back; and sold the house back in the late '90s. And interestingly enough, the house was purchased by a young couple who worked for the FBI at Quantico.

Wynkoop: Huh?

Downes: Both husband and wife.

Wynkoop: Uh-huh.

Downes: So we called them up and they more than willing to help us out and ...

Wynkoop: That's great! Wow!

Downes: ... we went down and did a search of the house and as soon as Doug Deedrick walked in the house he lit up like a Christmas Tree.

Wynkoop: Isn't that something?

Downes: Yeah! And, basically, told the Evidence Response Team to vacuum well under all the baseboards because the dirt, over time, migrates to the walls. And stops. And once it was all said and done, we put a whole case together; basically to prove to the County of Spotsylvania that, you know, we had this guy and we would be able to convict him in court. There's no doubt that this is the serial killer. And we had all kinds of trace evidence from the three girls that matched that house. And then we had the palm print on the inside of the trunk was Kristin's, Kristin Lisk's.

Wynkoop: Right. That's something.

Downes: But a great case. You know, it's very unfortunate, I mean, but work-wise with the law enforcement, it was, it was handled in a, you know, you couldn't ask for a better group to work with.

Wynkoop: That's great. And then that work is still evolving and, and going on. Which is, is so great.

Downes: Yeah. It's still going to this day and, you know, guys are still working, working them all. The travel gets to be a lot on the family and that. So I did it for eleven years and then in 2006 figured [and] they had us on the road about three weeks out of the month, so, my wife was like "yeah, maybe you oughta find something else to do."

Wynkoop: (Laugh) Now that, that's hard.

Downes: I applied for and ended up getting a job as the ALAT (Assistant Legal Attaché) in Vancouver, Canada.

Wynkoop: Exactly. And you were Legal Attaché there?

Downes: Yep.

Wynkoop: And didn't have that much trouble getting that position, I guess.

Downes: Well, yeah, it was competitive. But I think the experience I had really helped out.

Wynkoop: And you were able to do a lot of training there, I'm sure.

Downes: I did. Yes.

Wynkoop: Yep. That's great.

Downes: I spent a lot of time throughout Canada training.

Wynkoop: Oh yeah. With the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

Downes: Yes.

Wynkoop: Well, about how many people are in that Unit?

Downes: When, when we started in CASKU, there were nine of us.

Wynkoop: Uhm-hmm.

Downes: And over the time it expanded. Now it's called the Behavioral Analysis Unit. And there are three units actually. There's one for Terrorism; one for Crimes Against Adults, and one for Crimes Against Children.

Wynkoop: Right.

Downes: And, after 9-11, it became very clear to us that if we weren't involved in terrorism in some manner, then, you know, it could be the end of our unit. So that's when we created the, the terrorism aspect. And they do a lot of threat analysis, things like that, weapons of mass destruction and all of those types of cases, terrorism-related cases. And we went out and got experts in those fields and staffed that position with them.

Wynkoop: I see. Uh-huh.

Downes: And the adult, Crimes Against Adults, they helped out with all kinds of serial murders involving adults; serial rapes and other types of cases, too, like product tampering. We worked Public Corruption matters, even; how to interview potential witnesses on Public Corruption cases. And we provide media strategies. All kinds of things.

Wynkoop: That's amazing.

Downes: Yes. And the Child Abduction, the Crimes Against Children, any time a kid gets abducted under 18 it's, it's that Units responsibility. Plus they do all the internet stuff and things like that.

Wynkoop: And I think Dru Wells (another former unit member) had, Dru had mentioned, when we talked, that it's not on the Quantico grounds, is that correct? It moved off of the Quantico campus, sort of?

Downes: Yeah. It's, it's part of the Critical Incident Response Group. Which is now based in Stafford, Virginia.

Wynkoop: Okay. But, again, as you said, I'm sure that just all of the training that you received helped so much in each case. Because you know each case is going to be so very different. I'm sure you saw that.

Downes: Well, that's it. And, a lot of times, like I say, you learn something new from every case, which is great. A lot of times you're able to apply things you learned previously.

Downes: And, you know, we have all kinds of power-point presentations of a lot of these cases where, you know, just you point out things that ... "Lessons Learned" is one of the power-point presentations I have. And we show different cases and what needs to be done; and if it's not done, what can happen.

Wynkoop: Wow! That's amazing.

Downes: But, yes. It was some case. And in the end, of the Silva-Lisk case, a couple of things: One was that the young girl that got away, we ended up giving her the 150 thousand dollar reward.

Wynkoop: Oh, wow!

Downes: And she has probably graduated now. But she went to the College of Criminal Justice and she was an intern with the Richland County, South Carolina, Sheriff's Department.

Wynkoop: That's super.

Downes: Those are the guys that basically worked the case down in South Carolina. And she's doing pretty well for all she went through.

The other thing was that ... another lesson learned ... the debris that was found under Katie Lisk's fingernails that ...

Wynkoop: Uhm-hmm.

Downes: ... we thought was African-American.

Wynkoop: Right.

Downes: That turned out to be contamination during the autopsy process.

Wynkoop: Ohhh.

Downes: And during the autopsy, they did not use a sterile clipper. It turns out that the person that was autopsied before Katie, it was his DNA and he was an African-American. But he was dead.

Wynkoop: That's amazing! Now how long did it take to figure that out?

Downes: After Evonitz came to light, that was one of the things we had to resolve before we could go forward in the case.

Wynkoop: Okay. You had to ...

Downes: And that was years, but ...

Wynkoop: ... nullify.

Downes: Luckily, [they] had a good record of who was autopsied that day and they went back and looked at ...

Wynkoop: (Gasp)

Downes: ... the DNA on file for that person and sure enough, that's whose it was.

Wynkoop: That's something.

Downes: Yep.

Wynkoop: Well, I sure thank you so much for your time. And I'm sure, boy, the State of Virginia was happy when all of that was resolved.

Downes: Yeah. Yeah, they were.

Wynkoop: It's just very difficult. And then you think of those, those shooting sprees that occurred in Northern Virginia.

Downes: Oh yeah.

Wynkoop: What was that, five or eight years ago?

Downes: Yeah.

Wynkoop: Now, I guess, were you, did you get involved in that at all?

Downes: The Unit did. I didn't.

Wynkoop: Okay.

Downes: I was in Africa at the time working on a serial murder case in Africa.

Wynkoop: Wow!

Downes: My wife was, I was talking to my wife at night and she'd say, "You wouldn't believe it here! They're telling you how to run a zigzag pattern to go to the grocery store!"

Wynkoop: Oh, I know!

Downes: Yeah.

Wynkoop: That was amazing! What year was that?

Downes: That's gotta be around 2000.

Wynkoop: Okay.

Downes: They're getting ready to execute him in Virginia now.

Wynkoop: They are, now?

Downes: Mohammed, yeah. I think he's being executed in early November.

Wynkoop: Oh, wow. I had not heard that.

Downes: Like I tell during our training things, I tell a lot of people, you get sentenced to death in Florida, Virginia, or Texas, you're going to die.

Wynkoop: Yes. Now how many people did they end up killing? I've just totally forgotten.

Downes: I forget now. Seven or eight, anyway.

Wynkoop: Yeah. Okay. I know it was a high number.

Downes: Yeah.

Wynkoop: And being from Virginia and knowing Northern Virginia and how many white-paneled trucks there are and, oh my. I just thought "oh, my gosh, this is ..."

Downes: You know, that was the thing that came up with the Lisk case, too. You get information that maybe a white truck is involved and there's a big debate always with should we put it out there (**unintel**).

Wynkoop: Exactly.

Downes: And they said, "We got to put it out there." And then you get buried with ten thousand leads.

Wynkoop: Yes.

Downes: Same thing happened in the Spotsylvania case. Somebody said they saw a white pickup truck at the Lisk house, one of the kids on the school bus. So we took a school bus down there in front of the place, sat on it, you cannot see up in the driveway. But the powers-that-be said, "No, we've got to put it out there."

Wynkoop: Hmmm.

Downes: So we just got buried with white pickup truck leads.

Wynkoop: Ohhh, I'll bet.

Downes: And the other thing I didn't mention on that was that, as I said, Louis Freeh was the Director at the time, and the proximity to DC when that case happened. I mean, he basically called down and he said, "I don't care what it takes but you guys get this thing resolved. And just let me know what you need."

Wynkoop: Wow! Yep.

Downes: And then he told the Lab, "This case takes priority over everything." So every time we would send DNA evidence to the Lab or something, we'd get results back in three days. Just like on TV, you know.

Wynkoop: That's something. Yeah. That's amazing. Right. Well, I am glad it got resolved and, of course, very sorry it had to even happen to begin with.

Downes: Right. Right.

Wynkoop: And then unfortunate that he took his life and you couldn't learn more.

Downes: Right. Right. But that's what we do; we interview a lot of these people. Not that they tell you the truth.

Wynkoop: Right.

Downes: But every once in a while, you get a little nugget out of them.

Wynkoop: Exactly. Yeah. Okay. Well, I will turn this off, Gerry, and I thank you so much for your time today. Thank you.

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