

BOOK REVIEW

Brian Hunter,¹ M.D.

Review of: *Murder in the Heartland*

REFERENCE: Dix J, Moseley J, Ahsens, R. *Murder in the Heartland*: Academic Information Systems, Columbia, Missouri, 2000, 151 pp., \$14.95

“. . . it takes teamwork to put the puzzle pieces together to solve the problem of who committed a crime.”

The above is a quote from the preface of the book *Murder in the Heartland* and it is the central theme of this book. *Murder in the Heartland* is an account of four unrelated homicides that occurred in mid-Missouri during the 1980s and 90s. Each case was chosen to illustrate the importance of teamwork between the various branches of law enforcement and the forensic sciences in solving a case of homicide, but also to illustrate the strengths of each discipline. Each case starts from the time that the body or bodies are reported missing and carries the case all the way through the end of the court trial.

Case 1, for example, is the case of a woman who was killed by her estranged husband while sitting in her car. The husband then hid the car and the body, making it appear as though his wife simply disappeared. Through the investigative work of the sheriff's department the car was located but no body was ever found. Crime scene investigators found bone fragments, shotgun pellets, blood, and tissue in the car. Forensic anthropologists confirmed that the bone fragments were human in origin and were most likely facial

bones. DNA fingerprinting using the bloodstains found in the car, the blood from the children of the decedent, and her husband's blood (also the biological father of the children) proved that it was her blood in the car. The forensic pathologist offered the opinion that “a shotgun blast to the face which resulted in the amount of blood seen in the car would have caused death,” and that someone died in the car. This teamwork resulted in a conviction.

Cases 2 concerns the death of a child and again illustrates the importance of DNA testing in solving the crime, but clearly highlights the importance of good old fashioned police work consisting of extensive scene investigation and cooperation between different branches of law enforcement. Case 3 chronicles the investigation of a convenience store robbery/murder and demonstrates the role of the forensic pathologist in clarifying the nature of the lethal injuries. In this case, Dr. Dix demonstrates that none of the victims were killed with a shotgun as law enforcement officials had stated in a press release. Case 4 details the murder of a family, and like Case 2, illustrates the importance of cooperation between branches of law enforcement, this time between agencies in different states.

I found this book to be enjoyable reading. It uses interesting cases and does a nice job tying them together without going into excessive tangential detail. Although written by a forensic pathologist, I think the level of technical detail is appropriate for the layman as well as the forensic scientist. The author avoids the chauvinistic pitfall of placing excessive emphasis on his own discipline and does a nice job of illustrating the importance of teamwork.

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