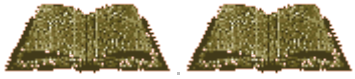
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Book Reviews: Popular Books Section



[Page 1 - Excerpts Section (*Cracking More Cases*)]



EXCERPTS

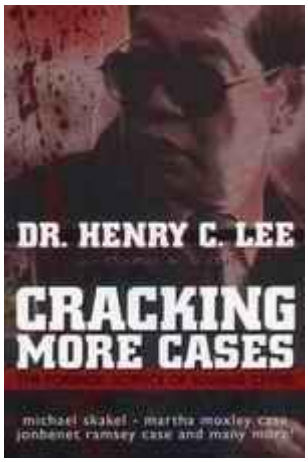
Cracking More Cases, The Forensic Science of Solving Crimes *by* Dr. Henry C. Lee with Thomas W.O'neil. Illustrations, Hard Cover, 6" x 9". Illustrations, Notes, Index.
Prometheus Books, 59 John Glenn Drive, Amherst, New York 14228-2197, USA. or . Publication Date 2004. 313 pages, Category: Popular Science, ISBN 1-59102-199-5. Price $26.00

Official site of this book: http://www.prometheusbooks.com/catalog/book_1529.html

Please the linked page (page001ex) to read excerpts from the companion volume *Cracking Cases*.

Please the linked page (page001) to read review of this book.

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This is the companion volume to *Cracking Cases* and is another high quality book on Forensic Science, that won critical acclaim from our expert reviewer. The board of editors decided to run some excerpts from this book too, so one could have a holistic idea about these companion volumes. It would be best to read both books together.

Dr. Lee continues with the trend of summarizing each case at the end of each chaper. But he is very frank in admitting mistakes too. In the famous *Skakel-Moxley case*, where the badly beaten body of Martha Moxley was found, the police committed some basic blunders right from the start. Lee - the true scientist that he is - is very frank in admitting these mistakes.

This is how he summarizes *The Skakel-Moxley case* (on page 118-9).

View this book on Amazon

THE SKAKEL-MOXLEY CASE (SUMMARY)

Pages 118-119

A sheet partially covers Martha Moxley's body found in the backyard. [This figure appears on plate 2]



It is my experience that most cases that are not solved quickly and that become "cold cases" are the ones in which investigators make critical mistakes from the very outset. Police are human beings and, as such, are as capable of making mistakes as doctors or lawyers or anyone else. The critical mistakes made in the Skakel case were almost all made in the first forty-eight hours following the discovery of Martha Moxley's badly beaten body. Police, however, cannot control or be held accountable for the actions of others, such as the state's chief medical examiner. The timing of the autopsy was one obvious error. Compounding this delay was the medical examiner's holding onto four-color photographs of the corpse, forever denying investigators any chance to determine lividity and other critical factors.

Bloodstains found on Martha Moxley's jacket. [This figure appears on plate 3]



The police department did not properly cordon off the potential crime scenes and otherwise preserve possible evidence on that hillside in Belle Haven where the murder occurred. Beyond that initial error, the department moved into a case it was unprepared to solve in a very defensive manner. Rather than reaching out for assistance from investigators more experienced in this kind of homicide, the department seemed to view the possibility of any outside assistance as a meddlesome and negative comment on their abilities. How would any suburban department inexperienced in homicides be expected to be ready to solve a crime or even properly investigate a murder such as this one? This attitude became a smokescreen behind which cynics could claim that the department had been paid off to go easy on this investigation. Thus the department's resentment of outside assistance only fed the cynical and unfounded conclusion that it was also corrupt. However, the failure to conduct a thorough search of the Skakel house's bathrooms, sinks, and drainpipes for blood evidence was also a mistake that should have been avoided.

The murder weapon in the Moxley-Skakel case - the head portion of a six iron gold club. [This figure appears on plate 3]



Finally, the investigation of the Martha Moxley murder presented a classic example of detectives prematurely narrowing their focus on certain theories of the crime and certain suspects. Michael Skakel escalated this process when he was quick to point out that his brother, Tom, was the last one to see Martha Moxley alive and that he had seen his brother place his hand on her knee, only to have it brushed aside. The police also wasted many valuable man-hours, shortly after the body was found, in tracking down the hundreds of leads they received from the public to their queries about vagrant, would-be killers wandering along the Connecticut Turnpike.

All in all, the Skakel case is full of tragedy. Martha Moxley, as young, vivacious, and delightful a person as she was, is not the only victim of this crime. Her father, David, died before he was sixty. Dorthy and John Moxley are forever scarred by what happened. Within the Skakel family, Tom's life is forever overshadowed by the killing. Tutor Bruce Atwell's career was ruined, and his life was shattered by all of the suspicion of guilt directed at him. And what of the other Skakel children and their father? The tabloids and cynics would have us think that Skakel money mixed with Kennedy power were what was behind the cover-up of the Martha Moxley murder on the night of October 30-31, 1975, and its going unsolved for twenty seven years. However, applying basic investigative, forensic pathology, and criminalistic skills should have solved this crime many years ago.

This is what Dr. Lee has to say about the famous *JonBenet Ramsey* case on pages 242-243. Here again he emphasizes on some of the shortcomings, which could have been avoided. Curiously there is mention of forensic DNA profiling.

THE JONBENET RAMSEY CASE (SUMMARY)

Pages 242-243

Outside view of Ramsey house. [This figure appears on plate 4]



This has been a very lengthy chapter and many of my observations, such as the contrived nature of the ransom note, have been presented as part of the case's investigation. I related this information since so many of the facts of the JonBenet Ramsey case were apparent to investigators at the time of their discovery. No one I've ever spoken with had ever seen or even heard about a ransom note like this one. The FBI experts who first looked at this text simply shook their heads in disbelief. I also do not want to belabor the obvious in my concluding comments on this case, but I must mention a few salient facts. From the very first moment a uniformed officer stepped into the Ramsey house nearly on the morning of December 26, the Boulder Police Department began making critical mistakes. A thorough search of those premises that dawn should have uncovered the little girl's corpse lying in the dark room off of the basement. Then no one would have been allowed to contaminate the crime scene by moving the body upstairs. Many more experienced homicide investigators and forensic scientists should have immediately been called to the case, instead of asking one detective to ride herd on a dozen or so distraught adults. The overtures of help from the FBI and other experienced investigative and forensic experts should not have been rebuffed by the Boulder detective commander. These are all very basic mistakes, the kind that doomed this investigation to failure.

A view of JonBenet Ramsey's bedroom. [This figure appears on plate 4]



As tensions mounted between the Boulder police and the district attorney's office, both organizations should have simultaneously recognized the disastrous consequences of this tribal warfare and brought it all to a quick end. Abraham Lincoln said it well: "A house divided against itself cannot stand." This blood feud, which distracted one and all from the task of solving this case, was only exacerbated by the overriding attention paid to the case by the media and the public. Leadership should have demanded and established a gag order ensuring no personnel talking to the media, except a designated official. This should have been for one and all. No special

treatment for anyone, and the professional release of information to the media and the public only when and if it was warranted. More water under the bridge. More irreparable mistakes.

Most recently, an attorney for John and Patsy Ramsey has come forward to criticize the lack of investigation on the source for the second DNA traces found in the underpants worn by JonBenet. This was, according to this attorney, an example of the tunnel vision that investigators applied in this case. The underpants worn by JonBenet were an adult size 7. Where this underwear came from is still a mystery. Boulder detectives were able to find that this type of underwear were sold only in Bloomingdale's and manufactured in Asia.

The ligature tied around JonBenet Ramsey's neck and right wrist. [This figure appears on plate 4]



Finally, what do I feel really happened to cause the death of JonBenet Ramsey? I do not know. I think that it is quite possible that some kind of horrific domestic accident may have occurred involving this extremely talented and attractive little girl. Perhaps she fell or was even pushed down that narrow staircase that led from her bedroom to the kitchen and struck her head against an object, such as a banister. Perhaps it was in some rough horseplay with someone. Perhaps this tragedy occurred in the course of an argument turned violent, or was the act of a sexual predator in Boulder. But who really knows? Unfortunately, the mishandling of the crime scene and the lack of physical evidence have severely impeded the chances of ever solving this case. Only one or two people really know the facts, and there is the strong probability that these individuals will never step forward and say what happened during the cold and dark hours after Christmas of 1996. I find this all very sad.

And finally this is how Dr. Lee summarizes *Lisa Peng* case.

THE LISA PENG CASE (SUMMARY)

Pages 264-266

In the quote that began this chapter (*Instead of telling you there are no problems in this country and painting a rosy picture... about our society and your future, I am going to tell you the reality and the facts.* - Dr. Henry C. Lee, Commencement Address at the University of New Haven, Mary 27, 1995) I spoke about the vital importance in telling the truth and not trying to paper over the problems in the justice system. Who can really be happy with the outcome of the Lisa Peng case? Certainly not Jennifer's family. Lisa was never found guilty of murder in the first degree in a trial that stood the test of a legal review. Her punishment, accordingly, did not begin to match the terrible loss Jennifer's family must have endured. And, of course, Lisa could not have been happy at feeling herself coerced into confessing to two crimes that she denies ever committing.

An apple peel was found in the kitchen garbage can at the crime scene in the Lisa Peng case. [This figure appears on plate 6]



If Lisa Peng did not stab Jennifer to death and then suffocate little Kevin, then who did? Who really knows? There was no forcible entry into the victim's apartment, so Jennifer must have known the assailant or assailants. Indeed, given earlier confrontations with Lisa, the victim would, in all likelihood, not have allowed her lover's wife into her home. Jimi, on the other hand, had visited there often. More important, Jimi had a motive for wanting his lover out of his life. Even for someone with a net worth of $200 million, Jennifer's demand for $1.1 million must have represented a staggering blow. Because Jimi had passed a polygraph test (as did Richard Crafts, the woodchipper killer) and was willing to cooperate with the authorities, the Orange County sheriffs office shifted their focus to Lisa Peng as their one and only suspect. Tunnel vision of this sort has caused problems with many investigations in the past. And let us think, for a moment, about the terrible nature of these crimes. Would a slender woman in her early fifties have the strength and sustained power to stab a much younger and more athletic victim nineteen times? Couldn't a much younger victim evade, for at least a time, such an attack? Then, could any normal person approach the crib of a sleeping infant and smother this baby to death? Could a third person, perhaps a hired assassin, murder both Jennifer and Kevin? If the hired assassin is a plausible theory, then who was behind all of this?

So why did Lisa Peng ever plead guilty to the voluntary manslaughter charges? She had been in jail for crimes she had not committed for almost seven and a half years. Her two sons had grown into manhood while she was in jail. Naturally enough, Lisa Peng wanted her life back, what was left of it. If you consider her experiences in this country, is it any wonder that she yearned to return to her homeland and to resume her life there as best she could? Jennifer Ji's sister was right. There are terrible problems with the jury system as it is applied in this country. But it is still the best system ever devised to protect the rights of the innocent while punishing the guilty.

Chinese news article describing the Lisa Peng case. [This figure appears on plate 7]



Here, please allow me to add a nota bene. In the past few decades, a new and destructive social phenomenon has occurred. Married and successful Taiwanese businessmen have been going to China to expand their corporations. Over there, they often meet a much younger, beautiful, and aggressive woman, tempting them to forget their oaths to their wives and families. These new relationships often go forward into a full-fledged affair, meaning the new couple lives together.

This phenomenon is now referred to as "having a second wife." Many types of family tragedies result from this social phenomenon. The Chinese government has passed a law to prohibit this type of temporary and unofficial extramarital arrangement. Scholars have held symposia and workshops to address this growing social problem. In the case of Jennifer's and Kevin's deaths, the tragedy is all too apparent. Lisa and Jimi Peng's family breakdown is just another example of the kind of tragedy that this social phenomenon can cause.

Nevertheless, the law, the jury system, trials, and forensic science will not be able to resolve these social issues. Every day we see new cases identical to what befell Jennifer, Kevin, Lisa, and Jimi. As a matter of fact, there are hundreds, even thousands, of Jennifers, Kevins, Lisas, and Jimis whose tragedies are waiting to happen in Taiwan, Hong Kong, China, the United States, and elsewhere around the world. Unless, of course, we, as husbands and fathers, learn to control our desires and temptations. And unless the women who are tempted to take on a wealthy businessman learn to respect other women's rights, their families, and their own lives. Unless this happens, history will repeat itself. I hope that this case serves as a wake-up call for not only the Chinese community, but also for our entire global society.

As I told the University of New Haven graduates on that commencement day, the world is full of pitfalls and injustices. We, as citizens, simply have to do our best to right the wrongs and to move forward to a better world for our children and their children.

Take my advice and read both these books. You would simply love them as much as I did.

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For review of *Henry Lee's Crime Scene Handbook* please the linked page (page009).

the linked page (page001ex) to read excerpts from *Cracking Cases*.

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