

Quoted from "Faces of Evil" by Lois Gibson, *Guinness Book of World Records*' Most Successful Forensic Artist, and Deanie Francis Mills.

Chapter Fourteen:

Making the Case for Forensic Art: A Dozen Bodacious Myths That Keep Some Cops Away

On the morning of June 5, 2002, while getting ready for work, I and many others turned on our television sets to the horrible news that yet another beautiful, innocent young girl had been wrenched from her safe warm bed in the dark of night by a stranger and abducted.

Over the course of the next year, people the world over anguished over the loss of Elizabeth Ann Smart, a beloved fourteen-year-old girl with five brothers and sisters from Salt Lake City, Utah. We learned she played the harp and dreamed of attending Julliard. The media displayed images of her shy smile, her wholesome, blond-haired, blue-eyed looks – an appearance that was mirrored in the traumatized face of her little nine-year-old sister, Mary Katherine, who had lain in bed next to Elizabeth on the night Elizabeth was kidnapped.

Elizabeth's devastated parents, Ed and Lois Smart, and Elizabeth's large extended family, worked tirelessly to keep those images at the forefront of the people's minds in the progressively less promising hope that someone, somewhere, would know *something* that would bring Elizabeth home. With the eager assistance of John Walsh and the staff at *America's Most Wanted*, Elizabeth's case was featured repeatedly on their popular television broadcast, even after the police investigating the case had told Ed Smart that his daughter was most likely dead and that the man they believed to have taken her had died too, taking the secret of what had happened to Elizabeth with him to his grave.

The ups and downs of this long road are described in their book, *Bringing Elizabeth Home: A Journey of Faith and Hope*, written by the Smarts with Laura Morton (Doubleday, 2003).

Like the rest of the country, I too was spellbound watching Elizabeth's story unfold and like everyone else, I also shouted and wept tears of joy when she was actually found alive and returned – at long last – to her family.

But when high-profile cases like this garner public attention, it hits me differently than most, because of that old nagging burn, that drive that propels me forward in my life, that overwhelming urge to *do something* to help. Naturally, the first thing I would have wanted to do after hearing about Elizabeth's abduction was sit down with Mary Katherine as soon as possible and do a sketch of Elizabeth's abductor.

Unfortunately, not every law enforcement agency in this country is as sold on the use of compositry as the Houston Police Department and the Harris County Sheriff's Department. And as I've related, it took me quite a while to break down the barriers even at my home department and, in all fairness to them, it took me some time to get as good at compositry as I am now.

For instance, I can now do a complete composite sketch in an hour or less in most cases, but when I first started out, it sometimes took me as long as three hours. Like any other skill, compositry takes practice and I can only suggest to departments who are taking their first tentative stabs at the use of forensic sketches – the more an artist does it, the better and faster he or she will become.

It's not my intention to criticize other police investigators around the country for mistakes they may or may not have made in handling their own high-profile cases, but I do think it imperative to use what cases I think serve as illustrations of what I consider to be various myths about the use of compositry that stubbornly persist within the law enforcement community to this day.

Remember the Sarah Rinehart case in Newton, Kansas? How little Jordan Rinehart and her friend told police repeatedly that it was *not* Jordan's uncle who had murdered her mother? And yet the police kept doggedly pursuing the uncle as a prime suspect not just for months, but for years – even excluding leads that clearly pointed to a stranger who still lived within their jurisdiction.

But when Chester Higginbotham was finally fingered as a hard suspect by Detective Sergeant T. Walton – he looked almost identical to the forensic sketch I had done using the

descriptions provided by two little girls, ages five and six. If police had only listened to the children and paid attention to my sketch, it is possible that Higginbotham could have been taken into custody years before he was, which would have not only spared the Rineharts and Guzmans much pain and suffering, but very well may have saved the life of another victim, Jonetta McKown.

Police departments routinely dismiss the statements provided by young children, even when their stories remain constant. Yet I am proud to point out that the Houston Police Department took very seriously the testimony of little Annie Tyson as to the murderer of *her* mother, Cynthia, calling me up in the middle of the night to come and do a sketch with this nine-year-old. Consequently, Jeffrey Lynn Williams was arrested within twenty-four hours of my doing the sketch with Annie.

Sadly, this was not to be the case with the Salt Lake City Police Department. Just as the Newton, Kansas authorities had done before them, they refused to pay attention to Mary Katherine, who steadfastly insisted that it had not been a family member who had taken her sister. They wasted many valuable weeks chasing their belief that either Elizabeth's father or her uncle had faked the kidnapping.

Instead, once they finally accepted that a stranger had indeed kidnapped Elizabeth, they then concentrated on a man who had frequented her harp concerts – even though, once again, Mary Katherine insisted that this man, who was a complete stranger to the whole family – did not resemble the man who had taken Elizabeth.

It should be mentioned here that the police actually used a sketch artist to get the likeness of the harp-concert man, but they did not listen to Mary Katherine or anybody else in the family, when the guy was not recognized. Eventually the man was tracked down and completely cleared by police.

After wasting more weeks.

When the name of Richard Ricci surfaced as an ex-con who had done work on the Smart home and owned a vehicle that had once belonged to the Smarts, some Salt Lake investigators became obsessed with the notion that Ricci had kidnapped and probably killed Elizabeth, even though he had no history of sex abuse in his past and even though Mary Katherine – yet *again* – insisted that she remembered Richard Ricci, she knew Richard Ricci and it had not been Richard Ricci who had taken Elizabeth.

Five months after Elizabeth was kidnapped, Mary Katherine, suddenly remembered the name of a handyman who had been at the house for three hours one afternoon, months before and had worked on the Smart's roof with Ed Smart.

He called himself *Immanuel*.

In all fairness to the Salt Lake authorities, they did do a computer check on Immanuel, but unfortunately, they used only one spelling of the name in the computer base: *Emmanuel*, which turned up no hits. So they quit there.

According to his account in *Bringing Elizabeth Home*, when a sketch artist named Dalene Nielson walked into the Salt Lake Police Department and offered her services, Ed Smart not only had to beg for a sketching session with Dalene for more than a month, but when the sketch was finished, the police *refused to release it to the media!*

Smart claims that the investigators explained the Immanuel was “one of fifty” homeless handymen who had worked on the Smart home during that time and that to have released the sketch to the media would have brought in too many leads that would have only confused the investigation. Instead, they quietly showed it around to homeless shelters in the Salt Lake area, with no result.

But as I demonstrated in the drill team girl rape case and in the murder of Cynthia Tyson and in many, many other cases – what usually happens is that one name will pop up repeatedly in the leads that come in following the media release of a forensic sketch, thus giving detectives a powerful weapon to use in their investigation, helping them narrow down their efforts considerably and bring the investigation into sharp focus.

Yet after Dalene did the sketch of Immanuel for Ed Smart, months passed while the investigation languished.

Months.

It wasn't until John Walsh released the sketch on his television program, *America's Most Wanted*, that a lead came in from "Immanuel's" sister. She identified the man sketched as Brian David Mitchell, who had a history of sexual abuse of children and of abusing his ex-wife.

Still, investigators did not take the leads seriously. They seemed fixated on their own pet theories rather than a lead generated by a sketch. The police did not put out an all points bulletin on Mitchell, who happened to be in custody in California at the time. Had they done so, he might have been caught at that time. (Salt Lake authorities interviewed the ex-wife and decided that her claims of sexual abuse of the children were only those of a bitter divorce. Had they checked, they'd have found medical records that would have provided evidence.)

Instead, *more* months passed, months while that poor child was being starved, raped and brutalized by Mitchell and his wife Wanda Barzee.

John Walsh ran a repeat segment and this time, Mitchell's *sons* called in and ID'ed the sketch. The Smart family also uncovered evidence that revealed that Brian David Mitchell often hiked and camped in the mountain right behind their house.

And *still*, police did not follow up.

It wasn't until a *third* broadcast of the sketch and repeat offerings of reward money were publicized on John Walsh's *America's Most Wanted*, that enough tips came in from viewers of the broadcast which finally led to Mitchell's arrest.

By a different police department, though, Brian David Mitchell and his wife Wanda Barzee were arrested by the Sandy, Utah police department and Elizabeth Smart was finally rescued – *nine months* after her ordeal had begun.

Although it's very tempting for me to maintain, at this point, that if I'd done a sketch with Mary Katherine that first day, they would have found Elizabeth sooner...I just can't make a claim like that, nor would I want to. Any number of sketch artists could have worked with Mary Katherine. Perhaps there would not have been a good result at that time. It might have taken a few months for her memories to work their way past the trauma.

But I do think that had investigators considered her a solid eye-witness from the beginning, discounting family members and individuals she had never seen – or at the very least – if they had released Dalene's sketch that she'd done with Ed Smart to the nationwide media and put out an all-points bulletin on Mitchell when the sketch generated his name as a suspect...then yes, I believe Elizabeth Smart would have been brought home maybe as much as *four months* before she actually was.

She could have been home for Christmas with her family.

I'm not trying to beat up on the Salt Lake City police, believe me, I consider myself part of the brotherhood of law enforcement officers and I see for myself, every day, what investigators go through and how hard they work, under unimaginable pressure, especially in high-profile cases like this one.

All I want to do here is expose those myths that I think trip up many cops and keep them from making use of one of the most effective methods of investigation that exists today.

It's not about me.

It's about finding *justice* for as many crime victims as we possibly can.

There is only one reason I do what I do and that is to catch criminals.

The reason I wrote this book, the reason I teach courses in forensic art, the reason I give interviews to television and radio programs, newspaper and magazine reporters, the reason I get up each and every morning of my life is simple:

I want to catch bad guys.

But I'm only one person, one forensic artist with a full-time job at one police department in one city in the United States.

Over the years, I've kept count of the number of others out there who are like me: working full-time at a major metropolitan police department – that is, whose duties are totally forensic art – and so far, I've only been able to come up with *nineteen*.

According to the *National Directory of Law Enforcement Administrators*, which is put out by the National Public Safety Information Bureau, there are more than 39,320 law enforcement agencies in the United States.

That is, city and county *only*.

That doesn't include state or federal law enforcement agencies.

Nor does it take into account security providers or campus police agencies or any number of places in this country that employ people to enforce the law.

Out of almost 40,000 law enforcement agencies, (not counting the feds, remember), I have been able to track down less than *twenty* full-time forensic artists available – that is, not just called in a few times a year – to do composite drawings that will help enable law enforcement officers to track down criminals.

In my career many cops have told me they would most likely not have been able to solve their cases without forensic sketches. Multiply that by all the law enforcement agencies who do not have a forensic artist available and a conservative estimate would be...*thousands* of unsolved cases.

Which means, thousands of bad guys who can then go on to do more bad things before they are eventually caught, usually after having committed multiple crimes, crimes that often grow progressively more serious.

Most classes that teach forensic art – including the one provided by the F.B.I. - were not even begun until 1985. If you combine all the legitimate classes that are now available, including my own (at the Northwestern University Center for Public Safety) and you add up all the graduates of those classes over the years, there are at least 2,000 trained forensic sketch artists in the United States today.

So it's not that there aren't enough people out there trained to do what I do. It's that, even after all these years, there are still too many law enforcement officers and their agencies who *continue* to cling to their stubborn beliefs that the use of compositry isn't useful. I hope to bust such myths open once and for all in these pages.

Because the way I see it, for every cop who calls an artist anywhere in the country to do a sketch that helps to catch a bad guy – that's one less criminal out there on the streets.

One less guy like the monster who raped and tried to kill me.

So the more artists we get out there doing what I do and the more crooks who get caught, the better our entire society will be.

And the safer we all will be.

I beg all of you reading this book to make it available to any law enforcement officers you may know. Urge them to read it or at least, to flip through its pages and read this chapter.

Because if, as a result of this book, just *one* cop decides to reach out to *one* artist somewhere and have him or her provide a sketch that could help crack a case and catch a criminal...then, to me, it will be worth my efforts.

MYTH #1: *There is no need to use forensic artists because we've got computer software these days that's just as good.*

This myth is the most pervasive. There is a good reason. Computer software companies can count, as I have, how many law enforcement agencies exist in this country today (and that doesn't include the international market). If they can price their forensic sketching software so that they can make a profit of, say, fifty dollars a unit and if – through high-profile advertising in law enforcement journals and at law enforcement seminars and schools and conference – they can convince big-city departments to purchase several programs and smaller departments that they need at least one...then the companies stand to make millions.

Before you decide that I'm an artistic purist who fails to appreciate the finer points of computer-use, let me say that I sit on the board of directors for a company called *Faceprint Global Solutions*, which is trying to design a viable forensic sketching software. At my office at the Houston Police Department, I've got a computer on my desk. If I could find a program that worked as well at compositry as a human artist, I'd use it!

But although I've tried all of the programs out there, I've never been able to discover one that worked as well as a good forensic artist.

Unfortunately, thousands of law enforcement agencies have purchased composite sketching software, buying into the illusion that the present technology will allow any cop to sit down and *voila!* – create a composite sketch any time, anywhere.

An when agencies find that the software doesn't work, they often buy *upgraded* software, still searching for that magic-potion program that can create a forensic sketch from computer bytes.

However, any computer program is only as good as the person who is operating it. So first, there has to be a person skilled at interviewing traumatized victims to be able to pull from those victims a viable description of their attackers.

Remember the case of the serial rapists in Kansas, Robert Lambert and Scott Hain, who, at the end of their rampage went to Oklahoma, where they burned their last victims alive? By the time I was summoned to Kansas to work with the surviving victims, one woman was steadfastly refusing even to admit that she had been attacked, much less willing to describe her attackers.

This woman had been questioned repeatedly by all kinds of detectives and even by paramedics and doctors and she still refused to talk. An yet I was able to get from her not only a complete description of what had happened, but a highly usable sketch.

This is not because I am some kind of magician. In fact, in the next chapter we'll discuss my interviewing techniques – what I do can be learned – but as I said earlier, not every cop who sits down in front of a computer can get a victim to give them a good description.

Secondly, just because you are computer-savy does not mean you know how to draw. With computer compositry, you are still drawing – it's just that you are drawing with a computer. Drawing is a skill not everyone can do.

In Chicago, Joy Mann, a very talented forensic artist, once was called on to do a composite for a high-profile home invasion case in Warrenville, Illinois. The police had already been circulating a computer sketch with no luck. With Joy's outstanding hand-drawn sketch, they were able to nab the criminal within *hours*.

To the chagrin of the investigators, they found the suspect to be an almost identical likeness to Joy's sketch – but to bear no resemblance at all to the computer composite, which is what the victim had been saying all along.

Another problem with the computer software available for forensic sketching today is that it is cumbersome, time-consuming and user-unfriendly. It takes a tremendous amount of patience to work with these programs and it can still take hours to get a usable drawing. Overworked, underpaid detectives simply don't have the training – much less the time – to deal with it. Consequently, the expensive programs are seldom used.

So far, there have been more than 50,000 software programs purchased by law enforcement agencies in this country for use in forensic sketching. If only 1 percent of those programs had produced viable sketches that had resulted in the capture of hard suspects, 500 suspects would have been identified!

But so far, there has been no such recorded success rate by computer compositry programs. So I think we can safely assume that computer software compositry can't even claim to have solved 1 percent of its cases.

That's why not only I, but other forensic artists all over the United States are called in to do composite sketches in cases where the computer has already been used, to no avail.

And our success rate is much higher, not only vastly more than computer compositry, but in another area of criminal identification that just might surprise you:

Fingerprints.

MYTH #2: *Fingerprint identification is more accurate than compositry.*

Everyone who has watched a crime program or movie or read a news-magazine "true-crime" story has seen crime scene technicians painstakingly go over every surface with their soft brushes and their graphite powder, then carefully lift the fingerprints for identification.

There are so many untrue assumptions about fingerprint identification that have been perpetrated by fiction that I hardly know where to begin to lay them to rest. First, all fingerprints have to be used in *comparison* to other fingerprints that may be catalogued in the federal Automated Fingerprint Identification System – AFIS – or may be compared with a known suspect's prints. However, only individuals who have been charged with a crime and fingerprinted are kept in the database, as well as federal employees or military personnel who have to pass security checks.

So it's not as easy to find a match as it may seem on some popular TV shows in which the investigator-computer whiz taps into a federal database and *bibbity-bobbity-boo!* – they've got a match! In truth, the search can go on for hours, if not days, and turn up nothing. That's if investigators check. You'd be surprised how many cases are simply not checked through AFIS.

Secondly, it's surprisingly difficult to get a good fingerprint from someone. Officers have to be trained how to do it when booking a person who has been arrested and even then, it's tricky. With crime scenes, few fingerprints show up with clearly-demarcated ridges and planes that make up the loops for comparison identification. Most of them are partial prints or are too smudged to identify.

If the fingerprints are gotten from a crime scene.

More and more criminals are wearing gloves of some kind to hide their fingerprints. In addition, some cold climates yield few usable prints anyway, because the sweat glands are not as active in cold weather. Furthermore, fingerprints fade over time, sometimes as quickly as a few days. And finally, though crime scene techs may lift hundreds of prints from a crime scene, most of them can usually be eliminated as having been left by people who either lived there or had good reason to be there, including the victim.

And I'm not even going to get in to the whole debate about how many points of comparison make a match.

I have talked with fingerprint technicians from all over the country and I can say that they are relieved that I'm finally shedding some light on this subject, because they're sick of hearing defense attorneys claim in court that, because there were no good prints from the defendant left at the scene, then it proves the defendant wasn't there.

It's simply not true. A person can be at a crime scene and not leave a usable print, for a variety of reasons.

So what is the success rate for fingerprint identification of viable suspects from crime scenes nationwide?

Not as good as you might think.

The most generous estimate I've been able to find, quoted in professional forensic journals, is barely 10 percent.

That's the generous estimate.

Break it down by city and the statistics actually drop. The percentage of scenes with usable fingerprint identifications can go as low as 2.2 percent. Other percentages hover at around 5 percent.

The statistical average comes from the fact that smaller departments often have higher success rates with fingerprints, but overall, about the best you can hope for with fingerprint identification is 10 percent.

Now, take that statistic in mind and couple it with the fact that since the nineteenth century, fingerprints have been the universally acknowledged method of criminal identification. Every large department has its own fingerprint division.

And now...(drumroll please)...let me give the statistics for identification of viable suspects from the use of forensic composite sketches: *30 percent*.

According to a study done by Terry Westbrook in 1987, the success rate of forensic sketches in identifying suspects can run as high as 80 percent.

This means in cases in which composite sketches are used to aid in identification of criminals, at least one out of three perpetrators can be identified through the use of a forensic sketch. The sketch leads to photo or live line-up and the suspect is nabbed.

And that's the bottom-line average. In the year 2000, I was given a commendation by the Houston Police Department's chief of police for having cleared more than 43 *percent* of my cases. For those cases I've worked in Kansas, so far, I have achieved 100 percent. I've also had 100 percent success rate in cases in which an infant has been kidnapped by a stranger, 100 percent in cop-killer and cop-assaulted cases and 100 percent success rate in the small towns in which I have helped out.

I estimate that full-time forensic artists tend to divide their time evenly between homicides, robberies and rapes.

My research adds up this way: every police department in this country considers fingerprint evidence to be dependable and reliable, when only – at best – 10 percent of cases are

actually cleared to fingerprint evidence. An yet, the clearance rate from compositry is greater than 30 percent. And there are at least 2,000 trained forensic sketch artists in this country and many more who want to learn. Yet, out of almost 40,000 departments (not including federal or state agencies), there are *less than twenty* full-time forensic sketch artists working today.

So the crucial question becomes, why aren't more law enforcement agencies using compositry?

At the very least, why can't compositry be used *along with* fingerprint evidence for maximum effectiveness in fighting crime?

What's the hold-up?

MYTH #3: *There's no money in the budget to hire a forensic artist.*

This is what I heard from my own department for seven straight years while I toiled to prove myself and get a job there as a forensic artist. No money. Budget cuts. We're broke.

It's usually just not true.

Even the most cash-strapped departments can google-search online and find a plethora of law enforcement-related state and federal grants that are available for everything from a high-tech crime-scene camera to bullet-proof vests to other things needed in law enforcement.

You may recall, when I first started, detectives paid for my services from their coffee-fund jar. Later, the Houston city hall provided a "line of funds" to pay me and that line of funds was a state-related grant that had been made available to the city of Houston. When I was hired full-time, the chief of police at the time paid for my salary out of a grant with which he also hired a lieutenant, a sergeant and several detectives, along with several thousand dollars' worth of audio-visual equipment.

That's right. He signed me up with the VCRs.

The money's out there. It's just a matter of finding it.

It's not just money, keeping police departments from employing forensic artists, though. In some cases, that's just the excuse. Police departments are slow to embrace change. The Houston Police Department did not use photographs of known criminals in their files until thirty-fives years after the method was in use in other departments.

But once a method has proven to be worthy, departments can come on board with breathtaking swiftness. I 1989, Joseph Wambaugh wrote a book called, *The Bleeding* (William Morrow), in which he described the very first ever mass use of DNA blood evidence to eliminate suspects and close in on a serial sexual killer. Since that time, DNA evidence has come to be relied on almost as universally as fingerprint evidence. What I'm trying to say is that, once a method is proven to law enforcement agencies as being effective in criminal investigation...the money for it will be found.

It would behoove aspiring forensic artists who are having trouble finding work – especially if they're being told there's no money in the budget – to track down their own sources of grant money that they can then use to approach law enforcement agencies.

There are ways to pay for forensic artists. For a thirty percent success rate, isn't it worth it to at least try?

MYTH #4: *Every single police department has to employ a forensic artist in order to have them available to help solve crimes.*

This is not true. For instance, the Harris County Sheriff's Department does not have a forensic sketch artist on staff, but they call me to help them with cases.

It's the same way with my friend Joy Mann in Chicago. Although Chicago is the third-largest city in the country, they do not have a full-time forensic artist, but Joy freelances for them as well as for other departments. She drives to many places and does sketches in suburban Chicago as well as for the metropolitan Chicago police force.

Some states, such as South Carolina and New Jersey, have two artists who work the entire state. I'm not setting up this situation as a model, because I want as many artists working in this field as we can get, but what I'm saying is that one artist can easily work multiple jurisdictions.

In Texas, Shirley Timmons, a very fine artist, works for the Texas Rangers. They fly her all over the state in a helicopter and plane to do forensic sketches. One of Shirley's sketches

identified one of this nation's worst serial killers. The victim was a twelve-year-old girl whose throat had been cut so badly that she couldn't talk. (Her best friend had been killed in front of her eyes.)

Shirley Timmons managed to pull a sketch from that child that was immediately recognized by her friend's father, which led to the arrest of Terry Lynn Sells. Sells confessed that he'd murdered so many people he couldn't even remember them all.

In Georgia, Marla Lawson, another talented artist, works for the Georgia Bureau of Investigations.

In Klamath Falls, Oregon, I knew a gifted artist, Yvonne Schmid, who has never had one hour of formal training, just numerous telephone conversations with me. The third case of her career, on September 1, 2002, she helped identify Maximillano Cintero Esparza, a psychopath who had brutally raped and strangled two nuns, killing one – Sister Helen Chaska. Within hours of her sketch, the perpetrator was in custody.

So far, Yvonne's earliest sketches have produced a 33 percent success rate. She could easily sketch for the Medford, Merrill, Grant's Pass and Bonanza, Oregon area (maybe even half the state) and she could clear three times more cases for law enforcement there than fingerprint evidence.

The states of New York, Florida and California each have three full-time forensic artists. These are the most populous states in the union, home to cities with some of the nation's highest crime rates. How many more artists should be working in them, sharing the load, catching more bad guys?

MYTH #5: *We can't trust "outsiders" (like artists) with sensitive information on open, ongoing cases still under investigation.*

In major metropolitan areas, there are literally *dozens* of "outsiders" who help investigators piece together cases, from laboratory technicians to medical examiners to DNA analysts to psychologists to doctors to people from the district attorney's office and sometimes investigators from the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

That's not counting crime reporters from newspapers and television personalities who are sometimes used to "leak" information for various motives.

I believe a good investigator will not hesitate to use *any* resource available to solve a case and put a brutal criminal in jail or on death row.

Remember, sometimes a sensitive artist who has been trained in forensic interviewing techniques can draw information from a traumatized victim or witness that the person either did not or would not tell detectives. That's what my friend, Deputy Charles McClelland of the HPD meant when he referred to me as an "adjunct detective." Whenever we worked cases together, he always came in after the sketching session was complete and talked to me about my impressions and what the witness had said. Together, we often came up with just the key piece of information needed to crack the case.

I don't mean to imply that I consider myself a cop. I've always tried very hard to demonstrate that I consider myself part of an investigative *team* – another tool that an astute detective can pull out of his or her toolbox.

It's not about my ego or the detective's career or anything else.

As I've said before, it's about getting justice.

MYTH #6: *All forensic artists need to BE "outsiders".*

A few years ago, I was approached by Adrian White, a very fine HPD officer. Adrian confessed that, in his spare time, he was an artist, too, and that he had always longed to learn how to do composite sketches.

I was thrilled. This was good news for me, because it meant that I would no longer be the only forensic artist in the area. It meant I could go on vacation, for instance, without fretting about cases I would not be working in my absence.

So I started working with Adrian. He took my class and the *very first case* he worked, he helped bring down a serial killer!

Whenever his initial sketch aired on television programs, the killer's wife later told reporters, her husband would get very nervous. I made a video recording of the news broadcast in which she said this and gave it to Adrian for encouragement.

Sadly, in many places there are talented artists who also happen to be cops and who would love nothing better than to be allowed to do compositry full-time for the departments. Instead, they're forced to fill mundane paperwork jobs or perform other tasks that hundreds of other officers – who are *not* uniquely talented artists – could do.

As I said before, money can be found to create full-time forensic art positions for these cop-artists and with a 30 percent success rate (at least), there is justification for the expense. Partnered with fingerprint identification, DNA analysis and other investigative tools, many more cases could be successfully closed each year. Isn't that law enforcement's true goal?

MYTH #7: *Witness descriptions are often too sketchy or otherwise poor to enable an artist to get a workable sketch.*

By this time, having read about the cases in this book, you will know that almost all crime victims and/or witnesses believe that they did not see the perpetrator well enough to provide good descriptions. The bus driver in "Blind Justice" swore she'd only caught a glimpse of the bad guy out of the corner of her eye while she was busy with passengers. She was so sure of it that she actually wanted me to throw my sketch in the trash. But the detective, Manny Zamora, ignored her protests and trusted me; consequently, he caught a monster who raped a blind pregnant woman.

Nine-year-old Annie Tyson thought my sketch looked "too much like a girl," but the investigator, Billy Belk, trusted me anyway and they caught her mother's killer within twenty-four hours.

One witness, an elderly man who wore thick glasses, had only caught a glimpse of a cop-killer as the man drove past the witness in his car going forty miles per hour, at night – yet the sketch was instrumental in bringing down the murderer of a young sheriff's deputy.

I've done sketches with witnesses who couldn't talk, because their throats were cut or who were drugged-up in hospitals, witnesses who were very young children, witnesses who swore they only saw the suspect from the side, witnesses who had been victimized weeks, months, sometimes even *years* before I was asked to sketch the perpetrator. None of them believed that working with a sketch artist would do any good.

If police detectives take the word of crime witnesses and victims who swear they did not get very good looks at perpetrators, then detectives would never call in forensic sketch artists.

But the truth is that reasonably talented, fairly well-trained forensic artists will be able, in most cases, to elicit witness descriptions to produce composite sketches that have at least a one-in-three chance of being effective.

What most people don't realize is that the most important aspect of compositry is not the artwork – it's the interview. In the next chapter, I will outline proven interviewing techniques I've developed through the years, that can enable an aspiring forensic artist to get a head start in obtaining an excellent likeness from even the most reluctant witness.

Bottom line: Cops – please just trust your artist. No matter what the witness says about not adequately seeing the criminal, give the artist a chance.

Perhaps the sketch will not help to solve the case.

But more likely...one more criminal creep can be stopped before he or she hurts anyone else.

MYTH #8: *If the sketch does not look exactly like the perpetrator, it will have been a waste of time and money.*

This mind-set equates compositry to a math problem: it's either wrong or it's right.

However, the aim of forensic compositry can not be evaluated in simplistic terms. No forensic artist is ever going to get a rendition from a witness description that is going to be a photographic likeness – although we can sometimes come pretty darn close.

What is needed for the purposes of identification is a resemblance between the sketch and the suspect. A *likeness*. Not a *sameness*.

I can't emphasize enough that I have done and I have seen others do some really poor likenesses that have led, directly, *immediately* to the identification of suspects. Remember my first "hit?" The case where the witness made me spend three hours trying to recreate the evil snarl he'd seen on the suspect's face? It was only the third composite I had ever done and I was so convinced I had failed that I decided, then and there, that I was through with forensic art.

But as soon as the sketch was aired on TV, the suspect's roommate called Detective Osterberg, who was handling the case, and told him that although the sketch looked just like *him*, the culprit was his roommate, to whom he bore a resemblance.

I look back now at my early, primitive effort and I am stunned that we got a hit on that composite at all. I was just starting out; I had no training as a forensic artist; I knew nothing about interviewing techniques. And yet the composite I did broke the case, literally, overnight.

When I did the facial reconstruction in the Angel Doe case, the recreation turned out not to look exactly like LaShondra did, but I recreated enough of her smile, using what I knew of the dental placement of teeth, that her grandmother spotted her instantly while channel-surfing TV one evening months after LaShondra had disappeared. The grandmother said that the portrait was not an exact likeness of LaShondra, but it was *close enough* to prompt her to call Sgt. Douglas and to insist on meeting with him that very night.

Usually, poorly-done sketches have been made by artists who have been under-utilized by police – they simply have not had enough practice. When I first started out, most of my sketches were clumsy. I didn't start getting really good until I was allowed to do at least three sketches in a week.

However, even those early, poor sketches successfully identified about one out of every three criminals sought.

As I said, compositry is a tool for investigators to use. It can be the most valuable tool in the box or it can turn out to be not as necessary as DNA analysis or a confession, depending upon the case.

The way I see it, every carpenter has a toolbox he takes everywhere with him. He never leaves out the hammer or the screwdriver because he thinks they may not be as useful as the saw. He keeps his tools together, because he never knows when one of them might be the right one to use.

As Lt. Zamora said, there is nothing to lose and everything to gain by using compositry to catch elusive criminals.

MYTH #9: *If the composite isn't done right after the crime occurred, it will be too late to get a workable sketch from the witness.*

Remember, for instance, the Sara Rinehart case, in which investigators didn't even call me until months after her murder? Or for that matter, the Elizabeth Smart case, in which her father worked with Dalene Nielson five months after Elizabeth was taken – remembering the face of a homeless man with whom he had worked for less than an afternoon *a year before*.

I can say this from the experience of being attacked. You don't ever forget a face like that.

And to prove it, I have done a composite sketch of the man who raped and tried to kill me years ago. We're including it in this book. Who knows? We might get a hit.

MYTH #10: *It's impossible to get good composite sketches from witnesses under the age of twelve.*

Again, I hope I've laid that myth to its final rest in this book. Three of the cases covered here involved my getting incredible likenesses from young children. I could have included hundreds more. In fact, today, I work at least twenty-five cases a year from the juvenile sex crimes division of the HPD.

Some investigators worry that it might be too traumatic to ask a child witness to provide a description for a composite, but I have found just the opposite to be true. They've not only suffered through the assault, but they have also already been questioned by a variety of law enforcement, social services and medical personnel, not to mention parents or other well-meaning adults.

At no time, during all this questioning, have they been able to feel as if they can do something to help. But time and again, when children are offered the opportunity to contribute to investigations, they are eager to do so. Remember nine-year-old Annie Tyson who thought to tell investigators that the man who had raped and murdered her mother and set fire to her body, then raped Annie – had parted the blinds to look outside? Investigators were able to get an excellent set of fingerprints from those blinds.

I have worked with many victims of sexual assault who were young children and have gotten such good composites from them that one perpetrator, James Daniel Raiford, actually called the police and turned himself in, quote, “because I saw myself on TV”.

I’ve had kindergartners who were so excited by the likeness of the composite that they ran outside and grabbed their mothers’ hands, wanting to show them the pictures.

Just like Mary Katherine Smart and Jordan Rinehart, children know what they saw.

It’s appalling to me when I think of the forensic art talent out there that is being wasted in this most powerful and important area.

In the eleven years my friend Joy Mann has been sketching for the Chicago area, she has been asked to do a composite sketch for a juvenile sex crimes victim only five times. Two of her five sketches helped solve those crimes. In a city that size, as many as 5,000 stranger-on-stranger child rapes have been worked by police since Joy started freelancing there.

And yet, a talented forensic sketch artist who is readily available to police in that area has only done five composites – two of which led to solving the case.

When I think of how many cases she could have helped to break and how many child sexual predators out there could have been stopped because of her work – and others like her – because law enforcement still clings to this antiquated myth about working with children...it makes me sick.

MYTH #11: *Releasing a composite sketch to the media will bring in too many leads for stretched-too-thin investigators to track down.*

Just as in the Elizabeth Smart case, many, many pessimistic investigators all over this country don’t call in composite artists or don’t release composite sketches to the media from fear that dozens of leads will pour in, forcing them to dedicate hundreds of man-hours chasing them all down.

What they are unable – or unwilling – to realize is that, in many cases, the leads that come in will mostly point to one perpetrator.

Once I worked a particularly horrible case in which two little girls, ages seven and eight, had been raped. The damage done to their small bodies was so severe that I had to do the drawing at their hospital bedsides. HPD detectives released the sketch without delay.

Almost immediately, the investigators began getting calls saying things like, “That’s Al, who works at Thompson’s,” or, “That guy looks like Al Darden,” or, “He sure looks like a guy I work with by the name of Al.”

One detective had been up two nights in a row, working this case, and when the calls started to come in, he made little hash marks on the side of his notepad. After a dozen or so hash marks, he said, “I guess the guy’s name is Al. I’m going to Thompson’s.”

He walked into the store, holding a copy of my sketch in front of him, and the night manager said, “What are you doing with a picture of Al?”

The detective not only got his man, but he got an iron-clad confession as well and Houston now has one less predator pervert out there on the streets as a result.

I like the way one of my detective buddies put it. He said, “Hell, give me a lead. I’ll take *any* lead – I don’t care if there are too many!”

MYTH #12: *Only the police have the authority to order a forensic sketch and to release it to the media.*

This is a dirty little secret and one I wish I did not have to reveal here, but as I’ve stated before, I am – first and foremost – a victim’s advocate.

After twenty-three years working with and for the Houston Police Department and outlying departments in Harris County, as well as other departments in Kansas and other states

and the FBI, I can state without hesitation that I love my law enforcement friends like brothers and sisters. I am so proud to be considered a part of them and the work they do.

Over the years, I believe the cops I work with, by and large, have come to love me too and I know that many of them trust me and my gifts unhesitatingly. Each and every day of my life, I thank God for them.

But as I mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, not all law enforcement investigators have the same kind of respect for forensic art as my colleagues do. As we have seen, detectives will often either not use compositry at all in the investigation of a case, or they will order a composite drawing but refuse to release the sketch to the media.

Sometimes as we saw John Walsh and *America's Most Wanted* do in the Elizabeth Smart case, it becomes necessary to step right over the heads of stubborn detectives and release the sketch yourself.

If police refuse to make the sketch available to a family, then all the family has to do is hire one of 2,000 trained forensic artists in America who might be willing to do it freelance and in some cases, for no charge or for only the most modest of fees. (In fact, I would be highly suspicious of forensic artists who may command fees in the thousands. Hire someone you can afford or someone willing to do it for free in order to draw attention to the abilities through the resulting publicity.) In fact, in the case of Elizabeth Smart, the composite drawing which actually led to the arrest of Brian David Mitchell and the release of Elizabeth Smart was done for free by Dalene Nielson, who just wanted to prove to the Salt Lake authorities that her work could help find the perpetrator.

Sometimes, even when authorities agree to use a forensic artist, they refuse to budge when new details come in. I know of one artist who would rather I not use his name (he doesn't want to anger the police he's trying to convince to hire him more often.) But this fine artist did a good composite of the infamous Angel Resendiz serial killer. Resendiz was known as the "railroad killer," for his habit of riding rail cars from state to state, then jumping off whenever he came across homes close to the tracks and brutally, horribly murdering its occupants. Then he'd just leap back onto the train and disappear into the night.

The first sketch done by my talented friend was completed in a hospital; the witness was so badly injured that she could not talk and the resulting sketch was rough. Later, when the witness had recovered a bit, she contacted my friend and told him that the killer had worn a pair of glasses, the frames of which were tinted a peculiar light color. She absolutely insisted upon doing the drawing again, this time in color, and my friend faithfully recreated the light-framed glasses.

But the investigators handling the woman's case had already printed up posters using the original sketch. And they stuck with their posters. When *America's Most Wanted* profiled the case, my friend's second sketch was not released.

Angel Resendiz had relatives living in the area where my friend had done the sketch. Had the sketch been released to the media, Resendiz could have been identified years before he finally was. (I can say this with assurance, because newspaper photos of Resendiz look almost identical to my friend's color sketch.)

So although I would love more than anything to be a cheerleader for everything law enforcement investigators do, I am only too painfully aware that, like everyone else, detectives are human too. They make mistakes just like the rest of us.

If you are victimized and the police department in your area does not have a forensic artist, hire your own artist, get your own sketch and release it yourself to the media.

You just might find yourself becoming your own hero.

It is my passionate hope that if the cases you've read about in this book have not laid to rest these persistent myths about compositry, then at least this chapter will do so.

If you are a law enforcement officer who has hesitated to use the skills of a forensic artist because of one or all of the myths I've discussed, I hope with all my heart that, at the very least, you might consider trying this technique.

In fact, I hope you give it a try not just once, but three times.

I guarantee that at least one of those times you'll succeed in identifying a criminal who might - without the sketch - be allowed to roam free.