

SAMPLE

"ADDICTIVELY READABLE."

—Scott Turow, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author

KILLING TIME

WITH

JOHN WAYNE GACY

DEFENDING AMERICA'S MOST EVIL SERIAL KILLER ON DEATH ROW



KAREN CONTI

"A FASCINATING GLIMPSE."

—Attorney Robert Shapiro

THE NIGHT BEFORE THE EXECUTION

May 9, 1994.

11:04 p.m.

The guards stand in the small waiting room with Gacy, shifting from foot to foot, whispering among themselves. The atmosphere is thick with tension. This is not a normal part of their jobs and they are not comfortable with this task. The Department of Corrections had chosen the biggest and most senior staff to accompany Gacy during his final moments but gave them the option not to participate if they were opposed. Some wanted the assignment, knowing this was a historic event they could talk about long after their careers were over.

Gacy was not expected to resist. He was never a tough guy, nor was he athletic or coordinated. His father and schoolmates made fun of him throughout his childhood for being a wimp. He sure showed them. He sure became a tough guy when he slapped handcuffs on his victims, doused them with chloroform, held their heads underwater, and sodomized them while he ended their lives, with pain and terror being their last experiences on Earth. This time, the cuffs were on him, and the chemicals that would soon course through his veins were much stronger than anything in his arsenal of torture devices.

Several minutes go by. Then, suddenly, all conversation stops, and the room goes silent. From the hallway comes the echo of footsteps and the jangling of keys. The heavy pock-marked door opens. It is the prison warden come to pay his respects. The civility of it all.

Gacy straightens himself, tilts his chin up slightly, immersed in his own importance. Tonight he is the VIP (Very Important Prisoner). In one hour, he will once again make history by being the most prolific murderer in history to be executed.

He stands, all five feet nine inches of him. His paunchy body and pasty white skin remind anyone who sees him where he has been for the past fourteen years: in a cage with the other people whom society has decided must pay for the deaths they caused with the currency of their own lives.

The prison warden addresses Gacy like a business associate, shakes his hand firmly. "How ya doin' John? Feeling okay today?"

"Sure thing, Mr. Warden." He appears respectful, unflappable, rule-abiding. No indication of the man who conducted his life as if the basic laws of humanity did not apply to him.

The warden takes out two cigars from his suit coat pocket and hands one to Gacy. "Care for a last smoke, John?"

"Shit no. That stuff'll kill you."

He takes the cigar anyway, and the warden lights them both.

After a few puffs, the warden looks at Gacy, all kidding aside. There is a purpose for his visit. "Now I want to tell you what is going to happen, John. So there are no surprises. We're gonna take you from here, walk you down the hall to the chamber. We'll strap you on the gurney. You can say your final words if you want. The witnesses will be in the room in front of you. About twenty-five of 'em... You probably won't see them 'cause there's gonna be lights shining in your face. You'll get the first shot and you should be asleep in seconds."

"Got it, Mr. Warden. Let's get this done. You probably got better things to do today."

With that, the head honcho of this hell-hole shakes hands with Gacy, God-blesses, him and nods to the guards who are huddled in the corner.

DEATH ROW ON ARRIVAL

At the end of the yard, we entered a building that was identical to the others. I realized that we had arrived at Death Row.

Entering a small room set up as an office, several officers were seated behind desks looking out over the visitors' area. They had the look of bouncers surveying a nightmarish nightclub. I don't frighten easily, but these men were scary. My impression was they enjoyed exerting force and would gladly exercise their power over anyone they could. Their expressions were of amusement, particularly directed at me. Who is this woman and why is she visiting John Gacy? I immediately understood that he had probably never had a female attorney visitor; all of his attorneys over fourteen years had been male.

The guards' attention was largely focused on scanning the visitors' area. I expected when visiting a death row inmate, Greg and I would be in an enclosed stall sitting across from an inmate behind thick plexiglass, just like in the movies. As I peered through the smeared glass into the visiting area, I saw this was not at all the case. The visiting room consisted of several small-windowed, doorless cubicles on either side of a central walkway. Prisoners were seated next to or across a table from their visitors with no barriers between or among inmates or visitors. Inmates roamed free-range, chatting with others.

I spotted our guy in the third cubicle on the right. When he saw us through the window, he stood up eagerly, clearly anxious for us to join him. One of the guards unlocked the door with a loud buzzer and manually opened the heavy door for us with a wave of his hand to where Gacy was standing.

"Thank you," I whispered, and we stepped across the threshold. The door slammed behind us with a clank and a buzz. As most lawyers who do criminal work, I was familiar

with who was on death row and I immediately recognized several high-profile inmates. I quickly calculated that the number of victims murdered at the hands of the men in this room would field at least five baseball teams, Gacy alone being responsible for more than three of them.

As we approached Gacy, I looked around, noting the cinder block walls were painted a sickly beige. Each cubicle had either an old metal desk or a wood laminate round table with metal folding chairs on either side. The inmates were dressed in prison blue and were hosting a varied crew of visitors, including what appeared to be lawyers, ministers, and family members. It struck me that we were locked in a bullpen with the worst criminals in the state with no way to alert the authorities if someone were to attack us. I firmly believed the guards would be of no use even if they did care enough to come to the rescue. They just wouldn't be able to act quickly enough. While I trusted the world's most prolific serial killer not to attack me...the others, not so much.

DISCUSSIONS AND DINING ON DEATH ROW

There is nothing from your upbringing, education, or life experiences that prepares you for having a conversation with a serial killer. What to say and what not to say? You cannot act horrified that you are talking to someone who you know is guilty of heinous acts, but at the same time, you cannot get them out of your mind. Interacting with Gacy that day and throughout was very confusing. The simple human exchanges felt strange knowing that, despite his outward normalcy, this man was simply not wired like any other human being I had ever met. And while I had experience dealing with many a narcissist and sociopath in my personal and legal life, this level of disordered personality was in a category of its own. If John Gacy didn't think like a normal person but acted like one, which one of those people was I dealing with?

Having finished our conversation about the civil lawsuit, we chatted socially for some time, asking Gacy questions about life on death row and gossiping about fellow inmates. He told us that there were certain guys "you just stayed the fuck away from." He nodded his head towards the entrance to the room "Like that guy over there. He stabbed me about ten years ago."

Wondering who was deemed to be dangerous by a man with 33 murders under his belt, I turned to see a prisoner of small stature entered the bullpen. He was a light-skinned black man with thick eyeglasses.

"Henry Brisbon. That guy's nuts."

Considering the source of this assessment, a chill went down my spine. I looked over at the I-57 Murderer, standing there in the flesh. I was very familiar with the case. In 1973, a woman was forced off the interstate not far from Chicago by a car carrying four men including Brisbon, a convicted rapist.

He pointed a shotgun at her, ordered her to strip, and, as she begged for her life, thrust the barrel of his gun into her vagina and fired. After watching her agonize for several minutes, he finished her off.

Less than an hour later, he stopped another car, this time with a young couple in it. They begged for mercy because they were engaged to be married in six months. Brisbon made them kiss and then shot them in the back of their heads.

He was sentenced to 1,000 to 3,000 years. Not being able to resist his murderous tendencies while in prison, Brisbon resourcefully sharpened a soup ladle and stabbed a fellow inmate to death. For that, he earned the right to join the elite killers here on death row. If those acts didn't make good old Henry a walking testimonial for capital punishment, he stayed busy by starting a prison riot, trying to escape by strangling a guard, trashing a courtroom during a hearing, hitting a warden with a broom handle, and attacking 15 inmates. Gacy was one of them. Ten years earlier, Brisbon had stabbed him in the arm for no apparent reason.

And there he was, all five feet nine inches of him, walking over to introduce himself. I didn't expect to meet any Boy Scouts on this visit, but I did not bank on meeting one of the most terrifying Illinois criminals of all time. Compared to Brisbon whose life was one continuous wild crime spree, Gacy seemed gentlemanly and tame.

"Hey, Henry. Meet my lawyers, Karen and Greg."

Brisbon did not make eye contact with any of us.

"Better be some good ones, John. You gonna need some real Perry Masons." He chuckled and strutted away toward an older man in a wrinkled suit who appeared to be a lawyer. The man looked up and nodded to us as if to say, "Good luck with that case." Back at you, I thought.

About an hour later, a loud voice announced that lunch was served. Gacy jumped to his feet and returned with three trays balanced precariously on his arms and cuffed hands. He proudly set two of them down in front of us. I had a blue-collar upbringing and was not fancy about my food, but what was on

this tray looked like something my cat would cover. A gelatinous glob of some kind of ground meat covered with unnaturally white mashed potatoes dominated the plate. There were lima beans, three pieces of white bread, and two pints of “orange drink.” The best I could say about the lunch was that it appeared to be “hearty.”

Gacy lost no time and dug right in like there was no tomorrow, which for him was pretty much true. I was wondering if I should push the food around my plate and make it look like I was eating it or just offer it to Gacy right from the beginning telling him I was on a diet.

“John,” Greg said, politely forking his lima beans, the least offensive of the food array, “this is amazing. I had no idea we would be served lunch. Who pays for this?”

He explained that prison etiquette dictated that when one inmate had guests, other inmates would volunteer to give up their lunches and when the other inmates had guests, the courtesy would be reciprocated. Pretty nice and cooperative, I thought. Honor among murderers. Who said there’s no such thing as a free lunch?

“Just curious, John, who gave up his lunch for me? I oughta thank him.”

Without missing a beat, he answered, “Charles Albanese.”

Greg and I looked at each other and then at Gacy. Charles Albanese was on death row for poisoning three of his family members and attempting to poison another—with two pounds of arsenic.

Gacy suddenly burst out laughing causing food to project out of his mouth. In a second, we were all doubled over laughing. Despite the seriousness of this man’s crimes and the dire legal position he was in, John Wayne Gacy had a killer sense of humor.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Karen Conti is one of Chicago's most prominent lawyers and legal analysts. She is a dynamic speaker, writer, and media personality with over 30 years of experience in national and local radio and television.

Karen has produced and hosted award-winning radio shows, entertaining, edifying and empowering people for almost three decades. Her dynamic talk show, "Legally Speaking" won several Achievement in Radio awards, including

Best Public Affairs Show and Best Afternoon Drive Time. Karen has the unique skill to simplify complex legal issues as well as make them engaging, while being unbiased and factual.

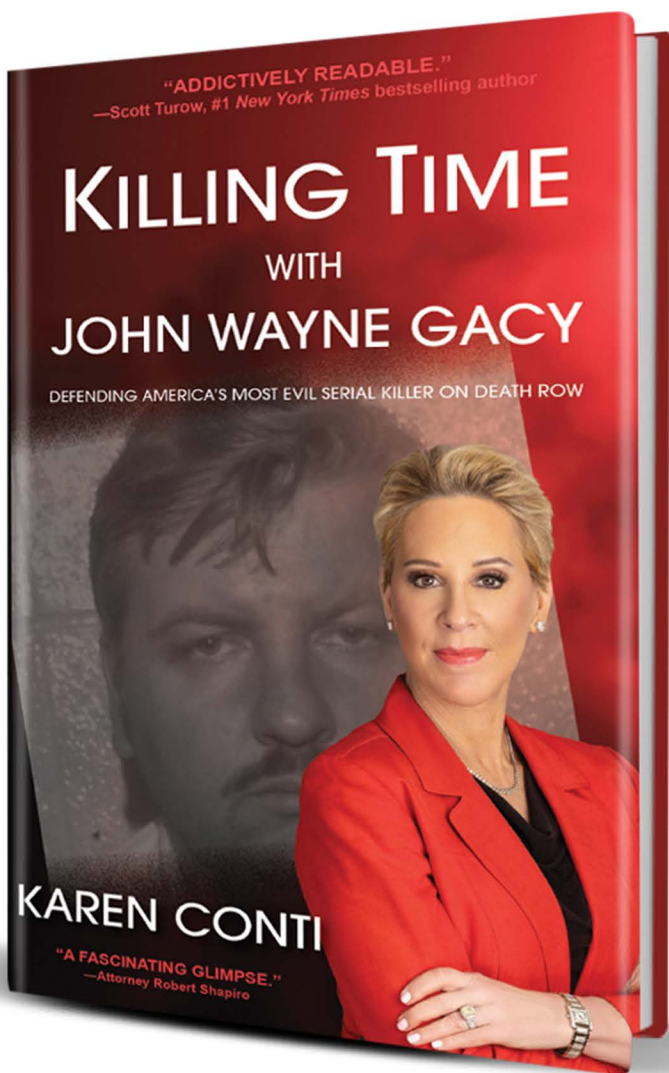
She is currently the host of "The Karen Conti Show" on Chicago's 50,000-watt station, WGN, where she comments on current events, social issues as well as the law. For over twenty-five years, she has served as the designated legal analyst on the local Fox affiliate where she not only appears on-air to give legal commentary, but pitches show topics and writes the interview text. She has appeared regularly on national media programs such as MSNBC, CNN News, Fox News, The Today Show, Good Morning America, Nancy Grace, The O'Reilly Factor, Court TV, the Montel Williams Show, and the Leeza Gibbons Show. Topics range from high-profile criminal cases, police brutality, the death penalty, family law, business issues, consumer lawsuits, and Supreme Court happenings. She writes and lectures on many issues including the death penalty, women in business, law and the media. She is frequently published in

the Chicagoland newspapers, and for seven years has written a column “This Day in Legal History” for the *Chicago Daily Law Bulletin*, which is circulated throughout the State of Illinois.

As an aggressive and driven litigator and trial lawyer for 36 years, Karen has handled numerous high-profile and noteworthy cases across the country including a U.S. Supreme Court appeal and several well-known Chicago-area criminal cases including the death row appeals for serial killer John Wayne Gacy. Her experience spans almost all areas of law including criminal, appellate, family law, and business litigation. She is licensed to practice law in Illinois and California. She is a certified mediator and collaborative lawyer.

Karen has a rich academic background lending further credibility to her reputation. She has served as a law professor for over 25 years at DePaul University and University of Illinois law schools.

Karen has won numerous recognitions such as One of the 100 Women Making a Difference in Chicago and Leading Lawyer, selected as one of the top lawyers in nation. Besides producing and writing radio and television show segments, Karen’s creative talents include writing humorous speeches and musical parodies for political figures and other media personalities. She is an avid athlete, having run marathons, taking 2nd place in a state body building competition, and winning the “Most Fit Lawyer” competition in Chicago. She is a world traveler, voracious reader and news junky.



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