

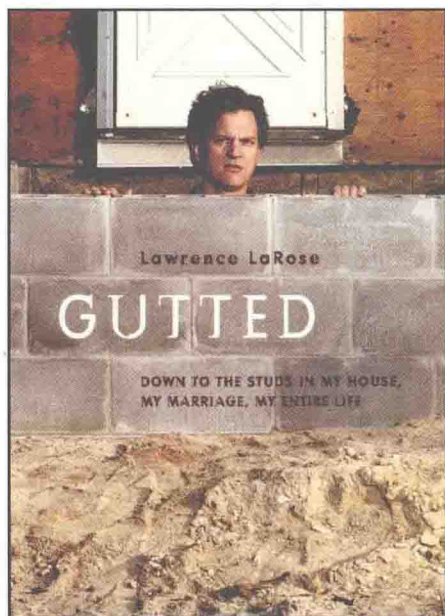
TODAY'S BEST  
NONFICTION

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *HEART FULL OF LIES*

# ANN RULE

THE REAL STORY  
OF THE  
GREEN RIVER KILLER—  
AMERICA'S DEADLIEST  
SERIAL MURDERER

## GREEN RIVER, RUNNING RED



Lawrence LaRose

## GUTTED

DOWN TO THE STUDS IN MY HOUSE,  
MY MARRIAGE, MY ENTIRE LIFE

# INTO *the Blue*

"Beautiful, funny, uplifting."  
—MARTHA BECK, author of *Expecting Adam*

A FATHER'S FLIGHT and A DAUGHTER'S RETURN



SUSAN EDSALL

# MARY MATALIN

— COAUTHOR OF *ALL'S FAIR* —



— LETTERS TO —  
*MY DAUGHTERS*

**TODAY'S BEST**  
**NONFICTION**

SELECTED AND EDITED BY  
READER'S DIGEST





## TODAY'S BEST NONFICTION

### EDITORIAL

*Global Editor-in-Chief:* Laura E. Kelly

*Deputy Editor:* James J. Menick

*Managing Editors:* Paula Marchese, Joseph P. McGrath

*Senior Editors:* Barbara K. Clark, Thomas S. Clemmons, Amy M. Reilly

*Editorial Administrator:* Ann Marie Belluscio

### EDITORIAL OPERATIONS

*Senior Production Manager:* Dianne Robinson

*Art Director:* Robin Arzt

*Assistant Art Director:* Gretchen Schuler-Dandridge

*Senior Staff Copy Editor:* Marilyn J. Knowlton

*Production Editor:* Lorraine Burton

*Production Assistant:* Lisa A. Crockett

### RIGHTS AND PERMISSIONS

*Director:* Lisa Garrett-Smith

*Manager:* Carol Weiss Staudter

*Administrative Assistant:* Arlene Pasciolla

### INTERNATIONAL EDITIONS

*Executive Editor:* Gary Q. Arpin

*Senior Editor:* Bonnie Grande

---

The condensations in this volume have been created by The Reader's Digest Association, Inc., by special arrangement with the publishers, authors, or holders of copyrights. Letters, documents, court testimony, etc., may have been edited for space.

The credits that appear on page 576 are hereby made part of this copyright page.

© 2005 by The Reader's Digest Association, Inc.

© 2005 by The Reader's Digest Association (Canada) Ltd.

FIRST EDITION: Volume 82

*All rights reserved. Unauthorized reproduction, in any manner, is prohibited.  
Printed in the United States of America*

ISSN 0893-9373

Reader's Digest, the Pegasus logo, and Today's Best Nonfiction are registered trademarks of The Reader's Digest Association, Inc.

# CONTENTS

## **GREEN RIVER, RUNNING RED**

**The Real Story of the Green River Killer**

ANN RULE

**4**

## **INTO THE BLUE**

**A Father's Flight and a Daughter's Return**

SUSAN EDSALL

**188**

## **GUTTED**

**Down to the Studs in My House,  
My Marriage, My Entire Life**

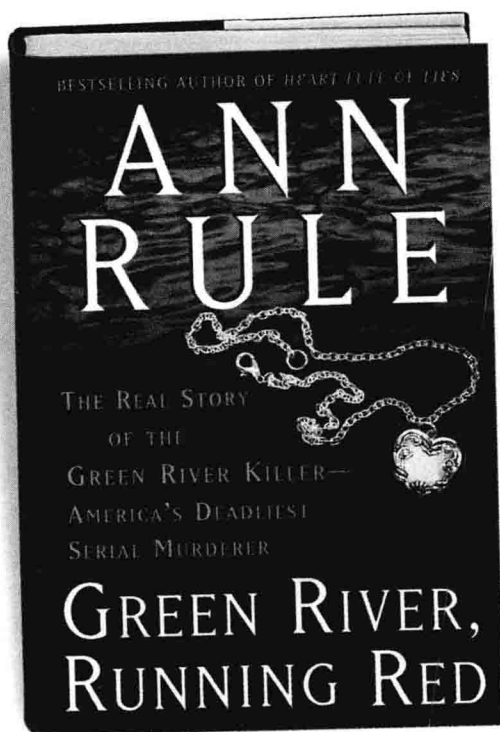
LAWRENCE LAROSE

**342**

## **LETTERS TO MY DAUGHTERS**

MARY MATALIN

**482**



# ANN RULE



## GREEN RIVER, RUNNING RED

The Real Story of the Green River Killer—  
America's Deadliest Serial Murderer

His mug shot was on the front page of every newspaper from Vancouver, British Columbia, to San Francisco by morning.

I looked at the picture in the Seattle papers on December 1, 2001, and I cannot say that I recognized it. But my daughter did. Leslie called me and said in a hushed voice, “Mom, remember how I told you about that man who came to your book signings—the one who leaned against the wall and just watched you? The one who never said anything and never bought any books?”

“Yes,” I said.

“It was him.”

—*Green River, Running Red*

DEDICATION:

*In memory of all the lost and murdered young women  
who fell victim to the Green River Killer,  
with my profound regret that they never had the chance  
to make the new start so many of them hoped to achieve.*

# Introduction



As I began this most horrifying of all books in my long career as a true-crime writer, I found myself faced with the same dilemma I encountered some twenty-five years ago. In the early 1970s I worked as a volunteer at the crisis clinic in Seattle. Two nights a week I worked an all-night shift with a young male psychology student at the University of Washington as my partner.

I hadn't published a book yet, but I had a contract to write one if the nameless killer of several young coeds was ever caught. As many readers know, that murderer turned out to be my partner: Ted Bundy. By the time I learned that, however, he had left the Northwest and continued his murderous rampage in Utah, Idaho, and Colorado.

Initially I tried to write the Ted Bundy saga as if I were only an observer. It didn't work, so after two hundred pages I started over on *The Stranger Beside Me*. There were times when I had to drop in memories and connections that seemed relevant. *Stranger* was my first book. And this is my twenty-third. Once again, I have found myself part of the story. Many of the investigators are longtime friends, and I have worked beside others on various task forces, although I am no longer a police officer.

Was I privy to secret information? Only rarely. What I did learn I kept to myself until it could be revealed without negatively impacting the investigation.

So the twenty-two-year quest to find, arrest, convict, and sentence the man who is, perhaps, the most prolific serial killer in history has been



## 8 / *Green River, Running Red*

part of my life, too. It all happened so close to where I lived and brought up my children. This time I didn't know the killer, but he, apparently, knew *me*, read my books about true homicide cases. There were moments over the years when I was convinced that this unknown personification of evil had to appear so normal, so bland, that he could have stood behind me in the supermarket checkout line or eaten dinner in the restaurant booth next to mine.

And he did. And he had.

LOOKING back now, I wonder why I cut a particular brief article out of the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. I was under contract to do a novel and wasn't even looking for true-crime cases to write about. But the short item was very sad: Two boys had found the body of a young woman snagged on pilings under the Peck Bridge on Meeker Street in Kent, Washington. She had floated in the shallows of the Green River, her arms and legs entangled in a rope or some similar bonds.

Police in Kent suspected that she had been strangled. Although she had been in the river for several days, no one had come forward to identify her.

The woman was white, estimated to be about twenty-five years old, five feet four, about 140 pounds. She had no identification on her body, and she wore unhemmed jeans, a lace-trimmed blue-and-white-striped blouse, and white leather tennis shoes. King County medical examiner Dr. Don Reay noted that she had five tattoos on her body, including two tiny butterflies above her breasts. She had been found on Thursday, July 15, 1982. She hadn't drowned; she had been dead when she was placed in the river.

When a description of her tattoos was published, a tattoo artist recognized his work. He knew her as Wendy Lee Coffield. "I think she lives in Puyallup with her mother," he added. "She's only sixteen."

Detectives located her mother, Virginia Coffield. Although she appeared to be in shock, the woman murmured, "I kind of expected it." She explained that she suspected Wendy had been working as a prostitute and might have been attacked and killed by a john.

"I know that was the kind of life she chose for herself," Virginia Coffield said with a sigh. "We taught her the best we could."

Wendy and her mother never had much money, as Virginia struggled to support the two of them after she divorced.

“Wendy dropped out of school way back in junior high,” her mother said wearily.

She didn’t say, but Wendy had been caught in an all-too-familiar vicious circle. Virginia herself was only thirty-six, worn and discouraged beyond her years. Her own childhood had been a miserable time. She had come from “a big family of drinkers.”

Virginia had become pregnant at sixteen and given that child up for adoption. Then she spent two teenage years at Maple Lane, Washington’s juvenile corrections facility for girls.

By mid-1982, Virginia and Wendy were living in a run-down apartment in downtown Puyallup. Photographs of Wendy showed a smiling girl with a wide, open face. After she stopped going to junior high, she had been enrolled in Kent Continuation School in the hope that she could catch up. But she was a chronic runaway, perhaps wanting to leave behind a home where she wasn’t happy or only looking for excitement out in the world—or both.

Her mother had lost control of her. Wendy was known to police for minor offenses in both King and Pierce counties. “The last thing she did was she took one hundred and forty dollars in food stamps from one of our neighbors.” Her theft of the food stamps landed her in Remann Hall, the Pierce County juvenile detention center in Tacoma.

Since Wendy’s body had been found within the Kent city limits, her murder would be investigated by the Kent Police Department. Chief Jay Skewes said that the last time anyone had seen Wendy alive was shortly after she slipped out of Remann Hall, a week before her corpse was discovered in the Green River. She had been listed as a runaway, but no one had been actively looking for her. There were so many runaways that it was hard to know where to start.

And now Wendy’s sad little life was over before it really began. Her blurry photo appeared over and over in the media as the story of her murder was updated and details added. She was an attractive blond girl, and I had written about hundreds of homicide cases in the dozen years before Wendy was killed, a number of them about pretty blondes who had been strangled.

But she was so young. I had teenagers myself, and I remembered the girls I’d known when I was in college and worked summers as a student intern at Hillcrest, the juvenile girls’ training center in Salem, Oregon (a facility once known as a reform school). The Hillcrest residents ranged

## 10 / *Green River, Running Red*

in age from thirteen to eighteen, and they tried to act tough, although I soon realized just how frightened and vulnerable most of them were.

Maybe that's why I saved the clipping about the girl in the Green River. Or maybe it was because Wendy's body had been found close to where I lived, in the south end of King County, Washington. At least a thousand times over forty years, I've passed the very spot where someone threw her away.

This stretch of the Green River is about four miles from my house. The river courses south from Elliott Bay and the Duwamish Waterway, irrigating the floor of the Kent Valley. In the days before the Boeing Airplane Company expanded, the valley was known for its rich, loamy soil and was home to family farms. When my children were small, I took them every summer to one of the U-Pick strawberry patches that abounded in the valley.

I had driven along Frager Road on the Green River's western bank in almost total darkness any number of nights, coming home from dinner or shopping. Winter rains made the Green River run so deep that it nudged the shoulders of the road. Drivers under the influence or inexperienced or reckless often missed turns on the narrow road and sailed into the river. Few of them survived.

In the moonless dark, the lonely road along the river seemed somehow sinister. It was just a river in the daytime, running by fields and some tumbling-down farmhouses. There were usually a few dozen fishermen angling for steelheads along the river.

Kent was a small, mostly blue-collar town twenty-two years ago, without the block after block of condos and apartment houses it has now. Close to where Wendy's body was left, there was a restaurant called the Ebb Tide, with moderately good food and generous drinks served in its smoke-filled lounge. A block or so east of that, there was a topless dancing spot, a two-story motel, and a handful of fast-food franchises.

The Green River was running low in July 1982, and much of the rocky shore with its reedy grasses was exposed. It wouldn't have been difficult for a man—or men—to carry Wendy from a vehicle down to the river, but it would have to have been done in the hours of darkness. Someone walking across the Meeker Street bridge or driving along Frager Road could have seen what was happening. But no one had come forward to report any sightings.

I drove to the Green River and stood at the spot where Wendy had

been found, wondering how she had come to get in a car with the worst person possible. Had it been someone she knew and trusted not to hurt her? Homicide detectives always look first at a victim's friends, coworkers, family. If Wendy Coffield had known her killer, the Kent police had a reasonable chance of finding him. If she had encountered a stranger who had no ties that might link the two of them with physical or circumstantial evidence, her case might very well end up in the unsolved files.

# 1

FOR decades Tukwila, Kent, Auburn, Des Moines, and Federal Way depended on the Pac HiWay for their commercial sustenance, entertainment, and transportation to either Seattle or Tacoma. The road began as Highway 99, and then it was "Old 99" when the I-5 Freeway opened. Some spots are called Pacific Highway South, except where it passes the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, where it has become International Parkway. Despite the newly sophisticated name, fancy street signs, and the median planted with shrubs and bulbs, this part of Pac HiWay remains the SeaTac Strip to many King County residents.

Heading south from Seattle for the twenty-six miles to Tacoma, the highway was two-lane in the 1930s and 1940s, a pleasant drive out of the city on Saturday nights to dance at the Spanish Castle, gamble at a permanently anchored ship on the Duwamish River, or eat fried chicken at Rose's on the Highway.

There were little motels, which were referred to as "cabin camps," decades before the Hiltons and Motel 6's. And of course, 99 was the only highway to take to Portland and on to California.

Roads age and change the way people do, so subtly that nobody notices the first faint wrinkles and loss of rosy innocence. The Spanish Castle and Rose's burned down in unexplained fires. The marginal hotels and motels became seedier; a club called Dandy's, which featured topless dancers and male strippers, took over Pepo's Gourmet Hungarian Restaurant at the corner of the Pac HiWay and S. 144th.

"Pepo's corner" became the center point for something else entirely.

In the old days, the sections of Seattle where love for sale was commonplace were far from the SeaTac Strip. Undercover cops watched for prostitutes and pimps along downtown's Pike Street and out on Aurora Avenue in the north end of the city.

Over time the SeaTac airport morphed into a huge spiderweb of gates. The King County Port Authority Commission foresaw the need for more and longer runways. Through its power of eminent domain, the commission bought up whole neighborhoods of little postwar houses. Scores of homes were loaded onto trucks, leaving behind many miles of wasteland both north and south of the airport. The grass grew tall around the houseless foundations left behind.

By the early 1980s, the whole ambience of Highway 99/Pac HiWay/International Parkway had been transformed. Serious motorists raced along the new I-5 Freeway a mile to the east, and the Strip became a local roadway, full of businesses that catered to those who flew in or lived and worked nearby: fast food, overnight lodging to fit any budget, locksmiths, bicycle repair shops, hot-tub sales, one stupendous gourmet supermarket—Larry's—and any number of 7-Elevens.

Drug deals became commonplace as pimps and their girls moved to the area. Certainly, there were homicides and lesser crimes along the Pacific Highway. But no one could have foreseen that the deadliest killer of all would choose a ten-mile stretch of this roadway as his personal hunting ground.

He was like a wolf watching his quarry from the woods, almost invisible as he crouched where the leaves have turned to faint brown and gray, virtually hidden by protective coloration. No one really saw him, but if anyone did, they wouldn't remember him. More than any other serial killer in the annals of crime, he could quite literally hide in plain sight.

DISASTERS often begin silently, with an almost imperceptible shift in the way things are expected to be. Rock slides start with a pebble or two plinking down a mountain, and avalanches with the first tiny jar beneath pristine snowbanks. A small hole in a dike. By the time human beings find themselves in the path of destruction, it is all too often too late to save them.

Except for the people who had known and loved her, and the Kent Police Department, Wendy Coffield's murder didn't make much of a blip

on the awareness of people who lived in King County, Washington. Locals in the south end *were* afraid that summer of 1982, but not because of Wendy Coffield's murder; they were frightened because two people in Auburn had died suddenly and agonizingly the month before of cyanide poisoning after taking Extra-Strength Excedrin capsules purchased in Kent and Auburn stores. Investigators from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration were sweeping thousands of pill bottles off store shelves for testing. A lead investigator warned against taking *any* capsules until all the seized painkillers had been tested.

It was a scary time, but sadly, not because of one teenager whose defiant nature and habit of hitchhiking had probably ended her life. Various police departments in the greater Puget Sound area had unsolved murders and missing-persons cases involving young women, but there didn't seem to be any pattern among them.

In the next few weeks, the Green River rolled on, and fishermen sometimes talked about the body found in the river, but teenagers didn't swim in the Green River, anyway, and few of them had even known Wendy Coffield. The river's current was too swift for swimmers, and Lake Fenwick was close by. It was dangerous, too, because there were no lifeguards on duty, but it was still a popular spot for keggers.

And then the earth shifted and more stones bounced quietly down a mountain of catastrophe. It was another Thursday, August 12, 1982, four weeks after Wendy's body was found. Another woman's body floated in the Green River, about a quarter of a mile south of where Wendy was discovered. It was difficult to determine where she had gone into the river, but her corpse, unclothed, had been trapped in a net of tree branches and logs. It was unlikely that she had drowned accidentally.

The case was assigned to King County detective Dave Reichert, who was next up to be lead detective on a homicide. Reichert, a detective for only a few years, was about thirty, although he looked much younger, and the investigators he worked with usually called him Davy. He was a handsome man with bright blue eyes and an abundance of wavy brown hair. Reichert was a family man with three small children and a strong Christian ethic. Like a lot of King County deputies and detectives, he had grown up in the south end of the county. He was totally familiar with the area where he and several brothers had roamed as kids.

That summer of 1982 had been devastating for the King County Sheriff's Major Crime Unit, particularly for Dave Reichert. They had lost one of

their own in a senseless shooting. Sergeant Sam Hicks would surely have been working alongside Reichert. They were very close friends, not really “hot dogs,” but imbued with the enthusiasm of youth and the belief they could track down almost any bad guy they were looking for.

Only three weeks after Sam Hicks’s funeral, Wendy Coffield’s body was discovered. And now another dead woman. Hicks, one of the best homicide detectives the department had ever had, wouldn’t be there to help solve her case. But Reichert, if anything, would work as hard as two men now. He was a high-energy optimist who waded into the water, expecting that he would find out what had happened and quickly ferret out who had done it.

The woman’s fingerprints were in police files. Debra Lynn Bonner was twenty-two years old, and she had lately made a precarious living on Pacific Highway South, working as a prostitute. In the thirty days before Debra’s body was found, she had been arrested twice for offering sex for money.

Reichert and Detective Bob LaMoria learned that the last time Debra had been seen alive was on July 25, eighteen days before. She left the Three Bears Motel, located on the corner of Pac HiWay and 216th, telling friends that she hoped to “catch some dates.” But she never returned, and her room was cleaned and rerented. It was only a three- or four-mile drive east from the Three Bears Motel to the Green River, down a winding road.

In life, Debra had been a slender, exotic-looking woman. She grew up in Tacoma. Like Wendy, she had dropped out of school. She had been excited about taking a test to join the navy, but she didn’t pass. Still, she planned to get her GED (high school equivalency certificate) and start a different kind of life.

She was meticulous about paying \$25 a week on a \$1000 fine she owed to the Municipal Court in Tacoma, the seat of Pierce County. Fines were the cost of doing business for girls on the street. Week by week she had whittled her debt down to \$775 by the summer of 1982. Wherever she was, Debra was faithful about calling home. Her dad had an eye operation scheduled for July 20, and she called a few days later to see how he was. Debra had sounded cheerful in that call.

King County sergeant Harlan Bollinger acknowledged that they were focusing on a boyfriend, at least for the moment. As far as anyone knew, Debra had no links to Wendy—nothing more than their final resting place.

In a week, the task-force investigators talked to almost two hundred

people, most of whom worked in the areas where Wendy and Debra spent their days and nights—in Tacoma and along the SeaTac Strip. They questioned motel and hotel workers, taxi drivers, bartenders, and cocktail waitresses. They contacted police and sheriff's detectives in both Portland and Spokane to see if they might have unsolved cases involving young women who worked the circuit. None of them had.

But something was happening. Three days later, there was no question at all that a bleak pattern was emerging. It was a warm Sunday when a man in a rubber raft drifted along the Green River looking for antique bottles or anything else of value that someone might have thrown into the murky waters. Looking for treasure, the rafter found horror instead.

Two still figures floated beneath the surface, their unseeing eyes staring blindly at the sky. The treasure hunter paddled frantically for the bank. There were no cell phones in 1982, so he had to signal passersby and ask them to call the King County Sheriff's Office.

Dave Reichert and patrol officer Sue Peters responded first to the scene. Neither Reichert nor Peters could have imagined then that they were stepping into a nightmare that would grip them for more than two decades and undoubtedly haunt them for the rest of their lives. Each of them would remember that warm Sunday in crystalline detail.

Major Dick Kraske, commander of the Major Crimes Unit for the sheriff's office, would remember, too. His pager sounded as he stood talking to a neighbor, balancing grocery bags. Kraske always thought the Bundy murders would be the worst he'd see in his career, but he was wrong. He got to the riverside a few minutes after Reichert and Peters. Search and Rescue (SAR) was on the way already, and Reichert was photographing the riverbank.

Reichert half slid down the bank—it was very steep, at least a seventy-degree angle. The grass and reeds were as tall as the six-foot Reichert, and Peters disappeared completely in it when she followed him down. The grass closed like curtains behind them when they reached the river.

Someone had gone to a great deal of trouble to keep the women's bodies hidden. From the road, it was almost impossible to see the bodies down in the river. Now Reichert and Peters could see that both victims were weighted down by large rocks placed on their abdomens. The boulders were clearly designed to keep them from surfacing, as all bodies eventually do when decomposition gases form and make them buoyant.

Fixated on that, Dave Reichert suddenly slid on the slippery grass,



only to look down at something that lay on the edge of the river. He tumbled backward to avoid it. He had almost stepped on yet another female corpse. Either the killer had been too exhausted to carry the third victim all the way into the water, or he had been spooked by someone approaching and dropped his burden.

This girl looked quite young, in her midteens, apparently. She had a paler complexion, although she was severely sunburned, probably after death. She looked to be of mixed racial heritage, and it was obvious she had been strangled by ligature, her own blue shorts or slacks.

Whoever the killer was, he was certainly a very strong man. It would have been no easy feat to carry the three bodies from a vehicle down the steep bank and its slippery grasses. The river bottom was slick as grease, and yet he had somehow maneuvered the huge rocks into place.

Kings County medical examiner Dr. Don Reay had also responded to the scene, as the man detectives called “Doc Reay” always did. Sadly, there was no hurry now, and they waited for him to nod and say that it was all right to move the victims. They had to preserve as much possible evidence as they could. Still, they were all aware that the heedless river had undoubtedly washed away much of what would have helped them the most. If the victims had been raped, semen traces were probably gone now.

Kraske had called for radio silence while his investigators worked beside the Green River. The one thing they didn’t need was a full bombardment from the media, which always monitored police calls for interesting incidents. He hoped to buy time until the next day, when he knew reporters would descend on him like flies.

The two women who had floated beneath the surface of the river itself had ebony skin and were clearly African American. The girl on the bank could be either white or black. Along with Wendy Coffield and Debra Bonner, their three names would become indelibly etched in the minds of the investigators, the news media, and anyone who lived in the Northwest. For the moment, however, they had no names. Hopefully, someone might have reported them missing; they had been in the river for more than two days.