

Foreword by **Dr. Henry C. Lee**

MORTAL

The Forensics behind Nine Shocking Cases

EVIDENCE

CYRIL WECHT, M.D., J.D.

AND

GREG SALTZ

WITH

MARK CURRIDEN



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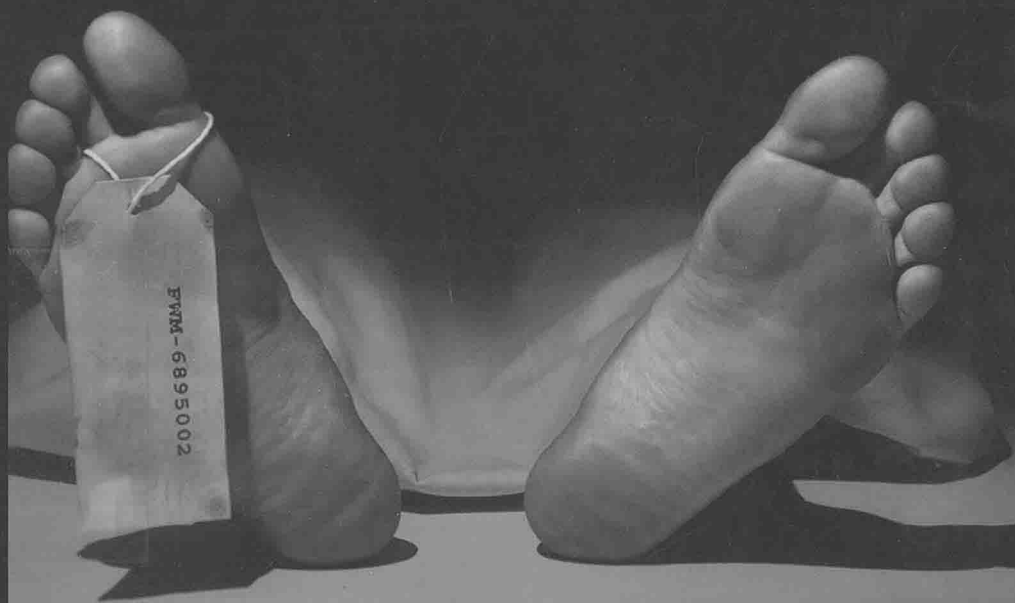
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MARK CURRIDEN



"Dr. Cyril Wecht has brilliantly fused his skills as a forensic pathologist, attorney, and author to show how the world of forensic science is used and misused by prosecutors, defense attorneys, police, and expert witnesses. *Mortal Evidence* is a primer on how the criminal justice system really works."

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FOREWORD

IFIRST MET CYRIL WECHT IN the early 1970s through the American Academy of Forensic Sciences. I was fairly new to the field, but Cyril already was well established as a major figure in forensic pathology. In the three decades since then, he has only added to his stature as one of the most astute medicolegal investigators in the world.

Over the years that we've known each other, we have given seminars and lectures together, and worked on many of the same cases. Sometimes, as you will read about in the O. J. Simpson case, we are on the same side. Other times we evaluate cases and come to different conclusions. But at the end of the day, even if we don't agree, we always respect one another's opinions.

In reaching those opinions, we often travel different roads. As a forensic scientist, I look at a crime scene and physical evidence

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such as blood spatters or fingerprints. In his role as a forensic pathologist, Cyril considers those things, but he focuses on a body—both inside and out—for critical clues. As you'll read in the case dealing with the death of Amy Grossberg and Brian Peterson's baby, the deductions that Cyril offers break away from those of the crowd.

And if there's one thing I've learned about Cyril, it's that he doesn't shy away from challenging the accepted line of thought. He speaks his mind, whether it diverges from the popular opinion or not. I believe everyone benefits when a person like Cyril dares to say that the emperor has no clothes.

In the case of JonBenet Ramsey, Cyril was one of the first, as you will read, to raise questions about the extent and timing of sexual abuse that the little girl endured before her death. He was largely attacked for voicing such an opinion. Although some other experts may disagree, we all respect his opinions.

Much of Cyril's sharpness comes from knowledge gained during an enviable career that spans more than four decades. While many who have reached his level of achievement and prominence delegate their workload, Cyril doggedly continues to pursue a dizzying array of investigations. He still conducts autopsies and actively works on cases both with the Allegheny County coroner's office and through consultations around the nation and the world.

And while I joke with Cyril that he has yet to learn how to send an e-mail, he continually updates his knowledge about the latest advances in the field of forensics, whether it be DNA testing or special histochemical stains. Such depth serves Cyril well, whether he is working in unraveling the details of the murder of Sam Shepard's wife or explaining how the forensics tell a different story about a shoot-out in Arizona than was given by some authorities.

Taken as a whole, the cases Cyril recounts with flair in this book are not only informative, but also entertaining, illuminating,

and thought provoking. And as always, Cyril doesn't pull any punches.

Dr. Henry C. Lee
Chief Emeritus for Scientific Services and
former Commissioner of Public Safety, State of Connecticut

PREFACE

FOR MOST PEOPLE, death is an ending. For forensic pathologists, it's only a beginning. Like generations before us, we scientists are driven by the desire to understand how someone met his fate. Was it through natural causes or something more sinister?

Most deaths are easily categorized. About three-quarters of them are the result of old age or illness. Accidents make up the next largest group of the other quarter, followed by homicides and suicides. Finally, there are a small number of deaths whose cause is never determined. Despite great advances in medical and scientific technology, sometimes we still can't know for certain.

But more often than not, a body provides clues that can help solve the mystery of not only how that person died, but also how long ago, and in some cases of murder, by whose hand. "Pinpoint

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bleeding” on the inside of an individual’s lower eyelids can be a sign of strangulation. Frothy fluid in the lungs may suggest a drug overdose death in a young adult who shows no signs of heart disease. Those details are critical to a forensic pathologist as he tries to determine the circumstances surrounding a death. After all, the field of forensic pathology is focused on delving into deaths that are violent, suspicious, sudden, unexplained, unexpected, or medically unattended.

Much attention is paid to deaths that are violent or suspicious—which is the realm of homicide detectives, criminalists, coroners, and medical examiners. All of those professions use forensic science to one degree or another to help solve cases. It can be a powerful tool; moreover, advances in the field have allowed practitioners to tease more clues out of less evidence. Forensic pathologists—coroners and medical examiners—are the ones who tie it all together. They perform the autopsy, collect information from the other investigators, analyze it, and make a conclusion about the cause and manner of death. That is my profession.

As forensic science has evolved, it increasingly has captured the interest of the public. All one has to do is look to prime-time television: *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* and *CSI: Miami*, for instance, have emerged as two of the most watched programs in recent years. The shows have taken *Quincy* to a whole new level. Cable channels regularly feature shows such as *Cold Case Files*, *The New Detectives*, and *Medical Detectives* that frequently focus on cases solved by forensics. I have also noticed the public’s fascination with such mysteries during the talks and seminars I give around the nation.

It’s no wonder. The power of forensic science can help solve cases that otherwise would defy a solution as well as an explanation. One man’s suspicious death was solved, as I describe in this book, by examining a few strands of hair. At the same time, foren-