

Opening Statement

# HAS SOMEONE ELSE BEEN IN THIS ROOM?



“Please, please find out what happened to him!”

Cindy Matthews was shaking uncontrollably, tugging at her hands and shifting her weight anxiously from one foot to the other. She had just discovered her father, Richard, was dead, the apparent victim of a gunshot wound.

Our team was called to the location after the patrol officers responded to Cindy’s 911 call. The responding officers found her on the front porch of her father’s house, frantic and frustrated. She was unable to enter the locked residence but could see her father through the large living room window. He was unquestionably dead.

The top of Richard’s head was open and exposed; he appeared to have a gunshot entry wound under his chin. He was lying with both arms outstretched, the remaining portion of his head tilted back against his worn recliner. His legs were straight; he was swollen and discolored. A handgun lay on the floor as the television blared in the background.

I had been on our homicide team for only a short time. Standing to the side, my call-out bag slung over my shoulder, I was the new guy, and to make matters worse, I was fifteen years junior to everyone else on the team. I was here to learn, conduct a few interviews, and fetch coffee for the guys who would ultimately handle this case.

My senior partner, Alan Jeffries, was the last to arrive on scene; the rest of us dared not enter without him. He walked up to the porch of the residence and barked orders at several patrol officers, making sure they secured the crime scene and warning them to prevent looky-loos from contaminating the evidence. He was characteristically terse and short tempered.

“Newbie! Get on up here!” he snapped.

"On the way," I replied, turning briefly to finish my interview with Cindy.

Cindy couldn't stop the tears. "I tried to reach Dad on the phone on Monday," she told me. "He never answered. By Tuesday night I was starting to get concerned, but I couldn't come over until today because I had to take care of my son last night. He's been sick all week. I know he's dead, but I need to know if he killed himself."

"Why would you think such a thing?" I asked. "Did your father give you any reason to believe he was suicidal?"

"Well, he was recently diagnosed with liver cancer. I know he was a strong man, but I also know he was discouraged about the diagnosis." Cindy stopped crying and took a deep breath. "I hate to think my father would kill himself. Please, please find out what happened to him!"

Every homicide case begins as a simple death investigation. When a dead body is discovered, detectives must investigate the evidence to determine the most reasonable explanation. Did the deceased die naturally? Did he suffer some kind of accident? Did he commit suicide? Was he murdered? These are the four possible explanations at any death scene. Homicide detectives are concerned only with the last one.

I considered these four possibilities for a moment as I walked toward Richard's front door. Locked in his house, Richard lay motionless in a sealed room. *Of the four explanations, the first three did not require the involvement of anyone other than Richard.* If his death was an *accident*, the result of some *natural cause*, or the result of a *suicide*, all the evidence we might find related to Richard's passing would ultimately come from the very room where he died. Without evidence of an *intruder*, this death was likely to be the result of natural causes, an accident, or a suicide.

If Richard's death was a homicide, however, our team would likely find evidence someone *other than Richard* had been in his home. One simple strategy in cases like this, therefore, is to ask a foundational question: "Can I account for all the evidence in this room by staying *in the room*?"

We waited for the CSI investigators to photograph the porch and front door of the residence. Alan then assisted the officers as they carefully forced open the door. Our homicide team gathered for entry and immediately recognized the overwhelming smell of death; Richard had been in this condition for several days.

I scanned the scene with my inexperienced eyes and tried to categorize this death in my own mind. It was clearly not a natural death. Nor did it appear to be an accident. The location of the gunshot entry wound (under Richard's chin) seemed to be consistent with suicide, and Cindy had told us Richard had been "discouraged" about his recent cancer diagnosis.

In addition, a six-shot .38-caliber handgun was lying on the floor. Handguns used in suicides are often discovered on the floor near the victim's body. Most importantly, I saw no evidence anyone other than Richard had been in the room. As a new detective, I suspected he had committed suicide.

"Be very careful here, newbie. This is a homicide." Alan stuck out an arm to slow my entry. As usual, he made a quick assessment and proclamation, and as usual, the team responded as though Alan knew what he was talking about.

I held my tongue on my observations, but Bill Shaw, one of my partners, was less cautious. "What makes you so sure?" he said. His tone suggested he was challenging Alan's bravado more than his conclusion.

Alan was unflustered. "Take a look at the gunshot wound. Left side of the neck under the chin, right? But his coffee cup is on the table to his right. So are his reading glasses. This guy's right-handed, but the wound is on his left side."

Shaw left the room to ask Cindy if her father was right-handed. Alan continued in professional mode. "Now, look at the gun; it's on the floor to his left. How does that happen if it kicks out of his gun hand, his right hand, during the commission of a suicide?"

"Where's the suicide note, anyway? Then there's the television. Look at the screen. It's recording a show on the DVR. Who sets up a DVR recording when he knows he's going to kill himself?"

I wasn't quite sold, but Alan wasn't quite through: "Look at the dirt," he said, pointing to a small, octagonal bit of mud lying on the hardwood floor next to Richard's body. About the size of a grain of rice, the unusually shaped speck of mud looked out of place. Alan pointed to a second and similar speck closer to the door. "Did one of you knuckleheads drag this dirt into the room?"

We quickly checked our shoes. No mud, and certainly no sole pattern matching the dirt remnant on the floor. I looked at the soles of Richard's shoes. No match. Alan led us to the

front yard. Shaw reappeared and told us Richard was indeed right-handed. “She doesn’t think her dad has ever owned a handgun,” he added.

Alan crouched in the front yard and held his flashlight at a shallow angle over the dirt, grass, and mud in front of the porch. We picked it up quickly: two shoeprints, pointing toward the front door and bearing the distinctive octagonal pattern near the body.

Alan traced the footprints in reverse, looking for their point of origin. We found two more shoeprints closer to the sidewalk and adjacent to an empty spot along the curb. Alan continued to scan the area with his flashlight and caught the glimmering reflection of something in the street, about ten feet from the curb. He walked closer and identified the object as an unfired .38-caliber bullet.

“I’m guessing our killer parked and loaded here,” Alan said with a tight smile—he had proved his point.

Every death scene involves evidence of one kind or another, but intruders turn death scenes into crime scenes. As a detective, I’m curious about why someone might kill himself or die from accidental or natural causes, but once I’ve got good reason to believe an intruder has been in the room, my inquisitive interest turns into an intensive investigation. The clock is ticking, and I know the first several hours are the most important. Intruders turn curiosity into urgency.

Our team rallied. We worked through the next thirty hours without sleeping. There was good reason to believe someone outside Richard’s house was responsible for his death. We confirmed the handgun didn’t belong to Richard, the mud in his living room matched the front-yard shoeprints, and the .38-caliber bullet in the street matched the ammunition in the handgun we found in the living room. There were obviously many pieces of evidence indicating someone other than Richard had been in the room. An external person was responsible for his murder.

In addition to this, there were several conditions in the room inconsistent with suicide: the victim had left no suicide note, the television’s DVR was still recording television shows, and the handgun was lying on the wrong side of his body.

While the evidence for an outside source was compelling, the evidence supporting an inside cause (such as suicide) fell short.

## HAS SOMEONE ELSE BEEN IN *THIS* ROOM?

During most of my early investigative career, I was a committed atheist and resolute naturalist. I rejected supernaturalism thoroughly, denying both the existence of a supernatural God and the possibility of the miraculous. I truly believed everything I observed in the universe could be explained and attributed to natural, physical causes and processes.

Thinking of the universe as a “room,” I didn’t believe there was any evidence pointing to anyone outside. I certainly didn’t believe anything “extra-natural” or “supra-natural” entered this natural realm.

But I hadn’t yet looked at the evidence carefully; I wasn’t an experienced investigator like Alan Jeffries. Over the years, I learned how to evaluate and assemble evidential cases, and along the way—at the age of thirty-five—I was introduced to the New Testament.

I became interested in God’s existence only after investigating the gospels as eyewitness accounts. (I describe this investigation in detail in my book *Cold-Case Christianity*.) The New Testament accounts passed the same four-part test I apply to all my witnesses, yet I still rejected them on the basis of their miraculous stories. As a naturalist, I believed the accounts of miracles in the biblical narratives disqualified them as reliable history.

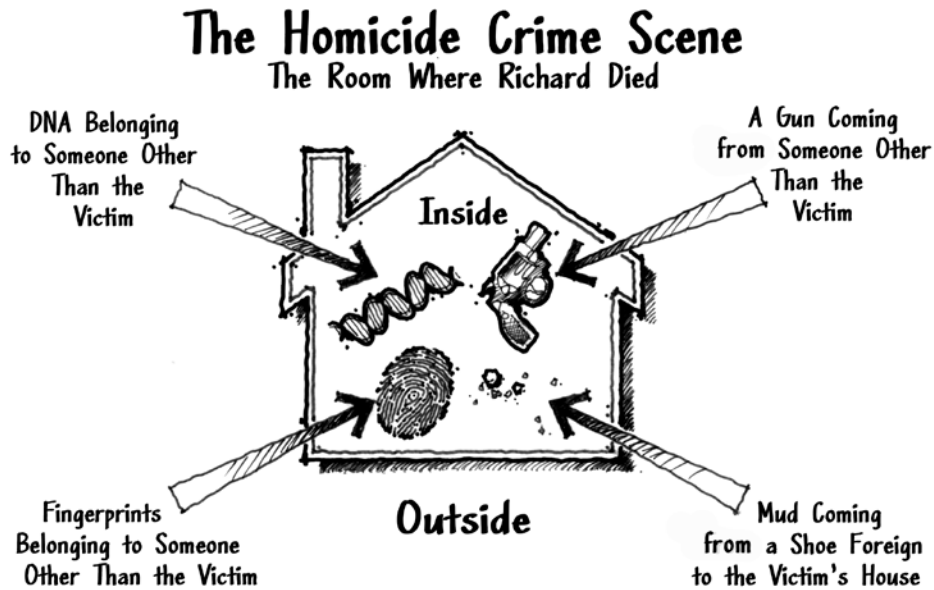
But what if I was wrong in my anti-supernatural presuppositions?

It was time for me to look carefully at the evidence for God’s existence. If a supernatural being *did* exist, the miracles in the Gospels would be possible and maybe even reasonable. The case for God’s existence was an integral part of the case for the reliability of the Gospels.

Like our investigation of Richard’s living room, my investigation of the natural universe required me to look at the characteristics of the “room” and determine if they could be explained fully by what already existed within the “four walls.” Was there any evidence *inside* the universe pointing to the existence or intervention of a supernatural being *outside* the universe?

Once again, my most important question was, Can I account for all the evidence in this “room” by staying *in the “room”*?

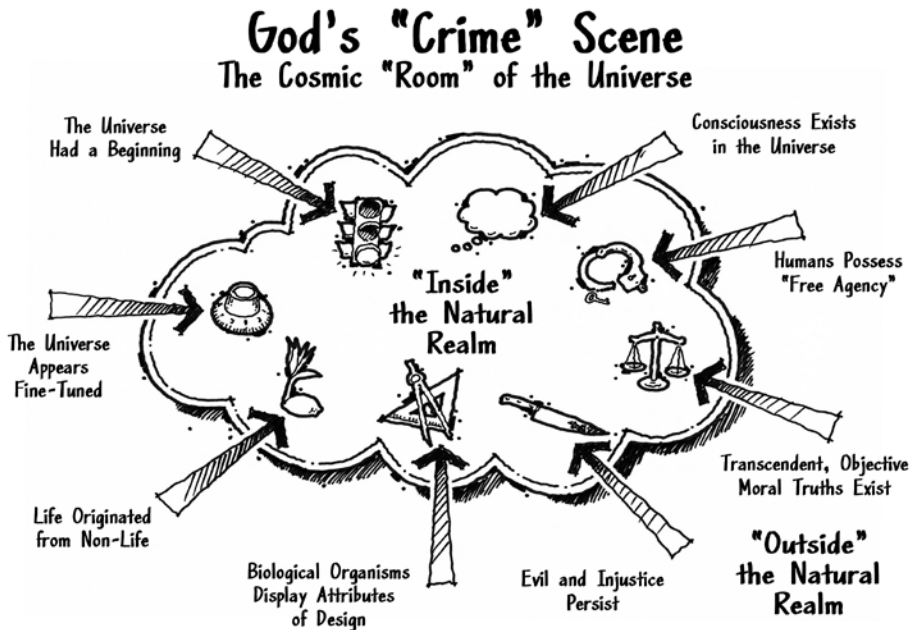
The investigation of Richard’s death required us to discover and list the important pieces of evidence related to his death. We then asked ourselves if these items of evidence came from *inside* or *outside* the room:



As I considered the natural “room” of the universe, I identified and listed four categories of evidence for consideration:

1. Cosmological Evidence
  - a. Our universe had a beginning.
  - b. Our universe *appears to be* fine-tuned for human life.
2. Biological Evidence
  - a. Life in our universe emerged from non-life.
  - b. Biological organisms *appear to be* designed.
3. Mental Evidence
  - a. Nonmaterial consciousness emerged from unconscious matter.
  - b. As humans, we are “free agents” in our otherwise “cause and effect” universe.
4. Moral Evidence
  - a. Transcendent, objective moral truths exist in our universe.
  - b. Evil and injustice continue to persist, in spite of our best efforts.

These features of the universe must be explained, and they can be attributed either to something *inside* the natural realm or to something *outside* the natural realm. In many ways, our investigation of God's existence is very similar to our death investigation:



In both cases, several evidences in the "room" require explanation. Their origin must be identified before we can decide the correct nature of the scene. As a result of this simple investigative approach, we determined Richard's death was a homicide. The evidence *inside* gave us good reason to believe there was someone we needed to look for *outside*. In a similar way, we can examine the evidence inside the natural, physical realm of the universe to determine if there is *someone* we need to look for outside the natural, physical realm.

This book is my attempt to help you look at the nature of the universe—my effort to share a personal investigation of God's existence. I hope to pass along a detective's perspective related to evidence evaluation and case construction. I want to make you a better investigator and give you a few tools for *your* call-out bag.

Along the way, I am going to share many "cop stories" with you. And I need to tell you up front: Some of the cases I am going to describe are disturbing. As a homicide detective, my

casework is graphic and challenging. I've done my best, however, to limit the details of these cases to illustrate the issues without including all the unnecessarily disquieting details. I've also cloaked my true-life experiences by changing identities and exchanging details from one case to another. I want to protect detectives, suspects, and victims from further public exposure. I also want to protect unsolved cases yet to go to trial.

For this reason I've altered the facts of some of these cases significantly. Cases already adjudicated and televised on *Dateline*, Fox, or Court TV are described more accurately. My goal is to provide insight into the way cases are investigated as well as tools to help you investigate these important pieces of evidence in our universe.

There are some important case files at the end of the book. For those of you who want to investigate the case more thoroughly (particularly the claims of those who want to stay "inside the room" to explain the evidence we'll be describing), I've included the case files for the Secondary Investigation. While these files are optional reading, they're particularly helpful if you are interested in a deeper and more academic examination or if you are simply trying to respond to objections.

I've also included case files describing many of the expert witnesses I've referenced in the book. This is a balanced list, including those who offer explanations from "inside" and "outside" the room.

Finally, I've included the case files containing my investigative notes. If you're wondering about the sources and witnesses I've consulted, these files will point you in the right direction.

Get ready to think hard about evidence. When I was a young patrol officer, I had a field training officer (FTO) who loved pursuit. He was an Indy driver at heart, and every time we began a chase, he'd look over and say, "Saddle up, partner!" I always knew we were in for a wild ride. This book may also be a bit of a wild ride through a myriad of scientific, sociological, philosophical, and theological arguments and evidences. Hundreds of books have been written about each individual piece of evidence. I'll do my best to distill the vast, historic discourse into short chapters designed to help you understand the issues at hand.

But I need you to saddle up. This pursuit of truth is crucial, and you're in the driver's seat.