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Something Happened to Grandma



Elizabeth Engstrom

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The hatred of relatives is the most violent.
—Tacitus (c. 55–117)

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Contents

Foreword by Marilyn Bardsley

Chapter 1—One February Night

Chapter 2—The Pressure Cooker

Chapter 3—A Fresh Start

Chapter 4—On the Run

Chapter 5—The Manhunt

Chapter 6—The Capture

Chapter 7—The Trial

Chapter 8—Conclusion

Photo Index/Credits

Resources

About the Author

Foreword by Marilyn Bardsley

Gabriel Morris was a rambunctious but adorable child who was probably sexually abused by his father while his mother tried to win custody of him. He grew into an intelligent and gifted adult, but something was very wrong. As he grew older, he exhibited serious character flaws and emotional problems that made it impossible for him to hold a job for any length of time. Eventually, his deceptions and deep-seated anger caught up with him, precipitating a tragic family crisis.

Elizabeth Engstrom is uniquely positioned to write this story. She lives in Oregon and attended Gabriel Morris' recent trial, observing both his behavior and the impact that his crimes had upon his family. Engstrom is known primarily as a novelist of mystery books with dark psychological landscapes. The chilling story of Gabriel Morris is one that dovetails with both Engstrom's fiction and nonfiction accomplishments.

Engstrom is the author of 13 books and more than 250 published short stories, articles and essays. Her most recent book is *York's Moon*, a critically acclaimed mystery, a wonderful tale of dark fantasy. An author, teacher, editor and former publisher, she is a sought-after panelist, keynote speaker and instructor at writing conferences and conventions around the world. Since she completed her master's degree in applied theology, she has begun a small interfaith ministry called Love and Mercy Ministries. She is on faculty at the University of Phoenix.

Chapter 1—One February Night

At daybreak on February 8, 2010, in a borrowed red GMC pickup truck, 33-year-old Gabriel Morris drove his wife Jessica and their 4-year-old daughter Kalea up the long tree-lined driveway toward the house where Gabe's mother lived with her boyfriend. The clutch was almost gone and they were running on fumes.

Gabe parked and handed his wife one of the walkie-talkies. He took the other and a pair of binoculars, then stealthily walked around the back of the property to the tree line, where he waited to see activity in the house. He looked for a sign that his mother and her boyfriend were up and about on this Monday morning.

Jessica, misunderstanding a radio transmission from her husband, started the truck and drove up toward the house. Gabe angrily directed her to instead drive down a spur road that wound around and ended up behind the garage, a parking area that was not visible from the house. Gabe went back to his surveillance while Jessica spent more than six hours in the cab of the truck trying to entertain their 4-year-old. Gabe didn't want to see his mother, Robin Anstey, or her boyfriend, Bob Kennelly, at least not on their terms. When that meeting took place, Gabe wanted to be in control. He needed to have the upper hand for the little chat he told his wife that he intended to have with them.

Gabe and his family had been living in Kennelly's nicely appointed two-story home that faced the river since September, but tensions had ratcheted up until Gabe and Jessica took off on a spontaneous road trip for about a week to escape what they perceived as a dangerous situation. They wanted to clear their heads, think through their options, and decide what their next steps ought to be.

But on February 8, they were back, weary from traveling and needing both food and sleep.

Gabe didn't like the way his mother and her boyfriend treated him and his family, and he told Jessica that their next step was to air out the issues. Have a chat. Get everything out in the open.

When that meeting took place, he'd be in complete control of it.

So he waited in the woods and his wife waited in the truck for his mother and her boyfriend to leave the house.



**Kennelly's Home in Bandon, OR
Police Evidence Photo**

Eventually, Robin and Bob left, and Gabe went inside. He got Bob Kennelly's .40 Magnum Heckler & Koch semi-automatic handgun from the safe inside the walk-in closet of the bedroom he had been sharing with his wife, indicating that he anticipated something other than a friendly chat or family meeting with his mom and her boyfriend. After a few more hours, he told Jessica that he'd be more comfortable if she was in the house too, so she and their little girl went inside and got something to eat. Then Jessica and Kalea put on their pajamas and went upstairs to bed.

Around 8:30 that evening, after having dinner with friends, Bob and Robin returned home and walked through the French doors into

the house. Robin set her purse and packages down on the couch, and from the upstairs balcony, Gabe, the devoted husband, devout Mormon, ex-police officer and former missionary, opened fire.

There was no discussion about money. There was no little chat about how they'd been treated. There were no accusations or defenses; there was only an ambush and a rain of gunfire.

Gabe continued to shoot as he walked along the balcony and down the stairs. Bob fell just inside the door. Gabe's mother made it out the door, screaming, before a bullet went through her buttocks, shattering her hip. He ended Bob's pain, as he later described it. Then, when he got to his mother, he was out of ammunition, so he dropped the empty clip, as he was trained to do as a police officer. He reloaded and put a bullet in her head, spraying her molars onto the deck.

When Gabe was finished, his 62-year-old mother and her 48-year-old boyfriend were dead. Gabe turned his mother over, just to make sure.



**Robert Kennelly and Robin Anstey
Family photo**

Gabe ran back upstairs into the bedroom and merely said, “Let’s go.” He hustled his terrified wife and screaming child down the stairs. He stopped to go through the dead man’s pants pockets for the keys to Bob Kennelly’s car and his wallet. Then, all of them shoeless, two of them in their pajamas, they stepped over the bodies and walked out into the February night. They got into Bob’s white Dodge truck, which spit gravel as Gabe sped recklessly down the steep driveway and into town.



**The Narrow Driveway
Police Evidence Photo**

Gabe knew exactly where to go. He knew precisely who to contact and what to ask for once he got there. He knew exactly how to ask for it, and he knew that he’d get it, too. It appears as if those plans had been very carefully laid well in advance.

Strangely, none of this information was ever in dispute, not even by Gabe Morris himself. What was in question was his state of mind for the two weeks leading up to the murders and, indeed, events in his life that molded him into the person who could behave in such a manner.

Was Gabe Morris a cold-hearted killer, or a good man who fell victim to a progressive, debilitating mental illness?

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Chapter 2—The Pressure Cooker

Gabriel Christian Morris began life on September 22, 1976, in San Diego, California. His mother, Robin, already had a 6-year-old son, Jesse, when she hooked up with and married Gabe's father, Danny Morris. Jesse was an easy baby, a delightful child who grew to be a compassionate man without a jealous, angry or vindictive bone in his body, but Gabe was a difficult child, a terror, even described as a maniac, at 2 years old. He broke toys just to break them. As he grew older, he was a loving boy, but needed a disproportionate amount of attention from his mother. He was also quick to take roughhousing to the level of pain. "Mom called Gabe 'the devil child,'" Jesse McCoy said.



**Jesse, Robin and Gabe about 1984
Family Photo**

Both Gabe and his father have been described as "scary smart." According to family members, Danny Morris was kind of strange, intense, nervous and twitchy. He wasn't offensive or frightening, but

he was tough on his stepson Jesse and overly devoted to Gabe. He loved playing Dungeons and Dragons and introduced Gabe to gaming. Gabe called him “insanely intelligent,” but manipulative, persuasive, controlling, cruel, and abusive. He took offense at every slight. Danny worked a variety of jobs, including in a bakery and at a sheet-metal plant, and for a while he dealt drugs. When Danny and Robin began to have marital problems, Danny moved out, then filed for custody, lying about Robin being a drug-dealing addict and an unfit mother. He was granted custody and Gabe was removed from her home and sent to live with Danny. Gabe said Danny sexually abused him. Jesse, out of concern for Gabe’s safety, went to live with his brother as well.

Danny frequently told Gabe that his mother had just gone off and left him, continuously reinforcing those deep, dark feelings of abandonment. Gabe never knew of her fight to regain custody. In return, Gabe wrote long Mother’s Day cards to Robin and professed his love for her with a fierce intensity that his brother, Jesse, thought made his own devotion to his mother pale in comparison. Were these the desperate cries for acceptance from a child who felt abandoned? That ferocious adoration continued throughout his life. Everyone says Gabe adored his mother, but it went much further than that. He wanted her to adore him. He wanted her to love him enough to compensate him for the years he spent at his father’s abusive hands.

She never could.

Gabe says his father abused him. Because Danny is now deceased, this information is difficult to corroborate, although some family members are convinced that it is true. At one point, Danny cried because Gabe wanted to spend the night with a neighborhood friend instead of being at home with him. Even Gabe’s brother, Jesse, said that Danny obsessed over Gabe, loving him way too much. During those summers, Gabe went to stay with his grandmother in Silverton, Oregon, and she said that Danny sent Gabe long love letters more suitable for a spouse than for a child. Pretty little blond Gabe, who spoke with an adorable lisp, was not allowed to wear

underwear, and was required to sleep nude in his father's bed at night.

Later, Gabe raged about his mother abandoning him and leaving him in the hands of an abuser, calling her evil. Yet, to all outward appearances, Gabe adored his mother and constantly worried about her safety.

Robin had her issues. She was born to Lynn and Martin Walsh in 1947 in Pontiac, Michigan. She had an older half-sister, Laurie, and a younger brother, Scott, born in 1958 after the family moved to California. Robin's relationship with her father was always strained. He was a highly regimented pilot in World War II who demanded certain standards from his family members, and she was a young, carefree hippie girl in the '60s. When she was a teenager, she ran off and married John McCoy, who was in the Navy. After John was discharged, the couple was footloose and fun-loving. Robin's parents bought their young grandson Jesse his first pair of shoes and gave him his first haircut, two things Robin didn't think were really very necessary at the time, but served to distance even her further from her disapproving father. Robin was talented and artistic, earthy and sexy, but perhaps because of her difficult relationship with her harsh, alcoholic father, who always thought she should have done more with her life, she had serious problems with self-esteem.



**Jesse, Robin and Gabe circa 2009
Family Photo**

When Robin and John McCoy's marriage began to disintegrate, Robin immediately found another man. Almost as quickly, that relationship failed and she met and married Danny Morris. When that fell apart, she moved to Coquille, Oregon, and lived with John Lindegren, "Big John," a smart, witty carpenter and American-history buff who helped raise Gabe until he finished high school. Then she met and married James Anstey. Together, they owned a gift and antiques shop in Bandon, Oregon, a small coastal community that relies heavily on seasonal tourism. Robin had the ability to turn trash into treasure, and the artistically displayed items they sold made "Hidden Treasures" a financial success.

Gabe referred to James Anstey as "the father he never had." After Robin and James' 10-year marriage ended, Robin immediately moved in with Bob Kennelly. In Bob's Bandon home, she met her death.

Robin always needed to have a man in her life and went from one man's home and bed to the next in rapid succession. Perhaps her lack of discrimination gave Gabe reason to fear for her safety. Perhaps Gabe's perception that her choice of the man of the hour over his welfare gave him reason to rage against her.

Robin regained custody of Gabe from Danny in time for Gabe to begin high school in Bandon, Oregon, where she lived with Lindegren. In school, Gabe met and began dating Esther Eschler, a Mormon girl with eight siblings whose parents both worked in the school system. Gabe found a stable, loving family structure he could relax into. He and Esther dated for several years while he studied and ultimately converted to the Mormon faith. Fred Eschler, Esther's father, baptized him into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) and welcomed Gabe into the family, gave him the run of the house, took him on family vacations with them, and generally treated him as one of his own. Before Esther, Gabe smoked a little dope, but once he embraced the Mormon faith, he gave that up.

After high school graduation in 1996, Gabe moved in with his grandmother in Silverton, Oregon, and went through the automotive program at Mt. Hood Community College, where he worked part time at the BMW dealership as a part of the curriculum. He completed the two-year program in 1998, then applied and was accepted for a mission to spread the gospel of Jesus and the tenets of the Mormon Church in Australia. He was, according to Dr. Barry, the mission president, an "exceptional young man among exceptional young men." This theme runs through the memories of everyone who knew Gabe as a youth. They said he was kind-hearted, sincere, helpful, honest, and incredibly smart—a good boy who grew to become a good kid, and finally, a fine young man with excellent prospects for his future. Gabe seemed to take his faith seriously—a little too seriously for some in his family, but hey, there were worse things he could be into. If asked, he'd say, "All I want to do is help people." These are golden words to those in the Mormon community, where helping people is a way of life.

Things were not always as they seemed, however. Dark storm clouds were brewing behind young Gabe Morris' eyes. Over the years, the compliments turned sour. He became known as "a real bullshitter," a gifted salesman who could talk for hours and never really say anything. Eventually, the descriptive terms others used to describe him changed to "con artist," "video game junkie," "pothead," "religious fanatic," "manipulative," "braggart," and "volatile."

After returning from his two-year mission in Australia in 2001, Gabe lived with his mother and James Anstey and worked as a waiter and bartender in a local restaurant. He eventually applied to Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, and was accepted into the Air Force ROTC program. At first, he roomed with Carl Eschler, Esther's brother.

Then he met Jessica Pope.

Never a womanizer, good-looking Gabe Morris was attracted to the company of more intellectual women, so it was somewhat of a surprise when he hooked up with sweet Jessica Pope. Jessica was devoutly Mormon, from a nice family in Blackfoot, Idaho. She was a dedicated English major, and oh, by the way, she had \$100,000 in cash in the bank as a settlement from an accident. Gabe and Jessica quickly married in the Mormon Temple and used her money to buy a house. While both Gabe and Jessica were in school at BYU, they invited Gabe's older brother, Jesse, and his wife to live with them.

Gabe's attendance at school eventually began to wane. While Jessica completed her studies, Gabe exited the Air Force ROTC program from which he had taken scholarship money. In ROTC, the four-year college degree is funded by scholarships and repaid through service as an officer in the Air Force upon graduation. Because Gabe dropped out of the program without finishing, that scholarship money now needed to be repaid. Instead of studying, Gabe went back to his adolescent habit of playing video games and trading one-upmanship stories with his brother, who had been in and out of the Army for 12 years. Jesse had experience with top-secret "special ops" missions, and he and Gabe loved to talk about

it. Gabe drank a little beer as they chatted, and he told Jesse that it would be better if his wife didn't know about that part, as drinking beer wasn't in line with the Mormon faith.

Gabe spent a year in ROTC. Cadets get their assignments after three years. Gabe wanted to go to pilot school and told everyone that he had been accepted into pilot training. This claim wasn't true, and as his lies began to catch up with him, he quit the program, telling Jessica's family that he didn't want to subject his wife to the stresses and rigors of being a military wife. He told his colonel that he had to leave the program to protect his mother in a way that law enforcement could not. Jessica graduated, and in 2005, they sold the house at a loss, having frittered away the rest of her cash.

Broke and now in debt, the couple moved back to Blackfoot, Idaho, to be near Jessica's parents. Gabe worked for a while at the Idaho State Mental Hospital as a psychiatric technician trainee. He enjoyed working directly with psychiatric patients. Later, Gabe graduated from the Idaho Police Academy and joined the Bingham County Sheriff's Department as a patrol deputy, about the same time he and Jessica welcomed the birth of their daughter, Kalea. From all outward appearances, life was smooth again for Gabe and his family.



Kalea, Gabe and Jessica Morris
Family Photo

According to newspaper records, Gabe fit in well with the police department, but when someone else got the promotion to detective that he thought should be his, he quit the force in 2007, telling his supervisor that he got a job in Alaska as a bush pilot. He complained to his brother that he felt his life had been put into jeopardy during a raid, and that his fellow officers unfairly trapped suspects. He told a variety of stories to a variety of people about why he left the force, continuing the pattern of not sticking with much of anything and blaming everyone else for his failures. As soon as things didn't go quite his way, he quit. This time, as with the Air Force, he was required to reimburse the department for his training at the academy, as he didn't fulfill his contract with the required years of service.

When he left the force, he left with good solid training in firearms and the ways of police work. Might it also be safe to say that a "scary smart" guy like Morris also left his employment at the state mental hospital with a good idea of what mental illness looks like?

He went to work at Gold's Gym in Blackfoot, where, true to his fast-talking, charismatic nature, he charmed all the clients, and a woman named Allie Smith in particular. One of the Gold's Gym clients recognized a good salesman in Gabe and offered him a job with American Family Insurance. Gabe took the job and hired Allie Smith to work for him. Eventually, he told her that he and Jessica were divorcing, igniting a romantic relationship. They took trips to Las Vegas, spending money neither of them had. Gabe lied to her, saying that he sold antiques for his stepfather, James Anstey. Gabe even went so far as to move to Pocatello and file divorce papers, which were never completed. Somehow, Gabe acquired access to Allie's credit cards and quickly ran up \$30,000 worth of charges, instead of tending to the insurance business, all the time telling his supervisors that things were going well.

But things weren't going very well with Gabe and Allie Smith.

In 2009, he returned to his wife, who took him back after he lied and said that he and Allie Smith had not been romantically involved. Jessica believed him. She wanted to believe him. She wanted her daughter to have a father. She wanted a family.

Needless to say, Jessica's parents were none too thrilled with their son-in-law, particularly after Allie Smith began calling them, looking for her money. "He's a real scumbag," Rita Pope said in a newspaper interview. "He makes Tiger Woods look like a saint." The Air Force was looking for its scholarship money. The police department wanted to be repaid for his training. The insurance company was discovering that he was not making the sales he claimed to be making, and the squeeze was on to pay for the Mercedes he bought for Allie and the BMW he bought for himself to impress his insurance agency clients. In a few short years, Gabe had blown through Jessica's settlement, racked up about \$100,000 in debt and had no job.

When her parents tried to talk to Jessica about Gabe, she wouldn't hear of it, according to a *Register-Guard* interview. "She thought she could make a responsible, hard-working fella out of him. Those two characteristics never seemed to appear," Bill Pope said. "She had all the faith in the world in God and his ability to transform people. It never happened. The subject of Gabe was kind of off limits for family discussion."

The pressure mounted and Gabe began to drink.

Chapter 3—A Fresh Start

Back in Bandon, Oregon, Gabe's mother, Robin Anstey, had a house on Bowman Way that was falling into disrepair. She had just divorced James Anstey, and they had closed the Hidden Treasures shop and were liquidating all the antiques that had been put into storage. Robin was living with Bob Kennelly in his nice home in the woods, and it was always their plan to fix up the Bowman Way house and sell it, but the real estate market wasn't good. Gabe thought he might be able to help her with that. They could fix up the living space over the garage and live there and rent out the main house. Jessica thought they might turn it into a bed and breakfast. Maybe he, Jessica and Kalea could move there and he could quit drinking, work on the house and help James Anstey with his antiques business. Jessica could get a job and they could file bankruptcy and start over.

Reluctantly, Jessica's father agreed that a fresh start was in order. He loaned the kids his red GMC pickup truck and \$5,000 in cash and wished them well. They packed up their daughter, and in September 2009, the family drove to Bandon.

Bandon by the Sea, as it's called in tourism publications, is a picturesque little coastal town on Highway 101. It sits on the banks of the Coquille River, renowned for its seasonal salmon runs. Bandon, the little town of Coquille, and the larger town of Coos Bay are all located in Coos County, a heavily wooded area of Oregon hit hard by the economic downturn in the logging industry. There's a nice casino in Coos Bay and a world-class golf course in Bandon. Both help bring tourist dollars to this depressed area. Its saving grace is the fact that it is located on arguably the most beautiful coastline in the country, and in the summer, visitors in RVs and

campers file up and down Highway 101, taking in the sights and filling the hotels and campgrounds to participate in the beach and ocean activities. In the winter months, the coast is cold, windy, foggy, and rainy.

The Morris family arrived at Robin and Bob's home in September 2009, eight miles inland from Bandon on Bob's 28 acres that included a beautiful shingled 2,800-square-foot two-story home facing the Coquille River, a detached six-car garage/shop with offices and living space above, a barn and several other outbuildings. Bob raised alpacas and goats on the acreage and spent most of his time maintaining the property that he bought in 2008 after his second wife died of cancer.



**Balcony in Kennelly's Home
Police Evidence Photo**

The house had vaulted ceilings and a turret, which they referred to as the "castle room." A large iguana resided in an enormous cage on one side of the well-appointed living room, which was filled with antiques and Robin's artistic touches. French doors led out to a wrap-around deck, with a hot tub in a gazebo. Inside, the spacious kitchen had oak cabinets and granite countertops.

Bob and Robin occupied the master suite on the ground floor, and Gabe, Jessica and Kalea moved into an upstairs bedroom across from the upstairs bathroom. The bedroom next to theirs was used as storage. Down the hallway, which opened as a balcony to the kitchen and living room below, was the castle room, where Gabe played video games, smoked pot and watched Kalea during the day while Jessica worked as a bookkeeper, taught seminary classes at the local LDS church, and volunteered at the Women's Safety and Resource Center in Coos Bay.

In the castle room, Gabe smoked a lot of pot. He and Bob bought a pound with the intent to sell it to make a few bucks, but Gabe smoked his half in a bong he kept in the castle room, where he went online every day and played *Perfect World*, an online fantasy game with dragons, queens, and quests that began in a time before humans and ended in apocalypse. Gabe had always been a gamer, beginning in his high school years, continuing through his time in Provo, but now he was a stay-at-home dad, and he had all the time he wanted to delve into his fantasy worlds. Bob, not a pot smoker, put his half-pound into one of the two safes he kept in the house and eventually traded it for an ivory statue that he intended to sell.

Because pot was expensive, Gabe talked Bob and Robin into getting Oregon medical marijuana cards so they could buy it as patients. Robin, not a pot smoker either, had whiplash from an old automobile accident, Bob claimed some injury, and Gabe put down a shoulder injury he received while on the police force. The three of them drove to Medford, filed their paperwork and received their cards. They also got a permit to grow marijuana to sell to other card-holding patients or caregivers, as well as to a new medical marijuana clinic that was soon to open in Coos Bay.

They bought building materials, built a secure room inside the garage and began a small-scale marijuana-growing operation. Somewhere along the line, Bob Kennelly loaned Gabe \$25,000 with which to launch their business, and that debt became a bone of contention between them.

Gabe even contacted James Anstey with a business proposal: He'd go to Nevada and steal things, specifically antiques, which Anstey could sell in Oregon. Anstey declined and tried to talk some sense into Gabe, telling him that he was on the path to destruction. Gabe didn't listen.

Tensions in the house began to escalate over the few months the Morris family lived in the house. Gabe didn't like the fact that his mother was living "in sin" with Bob without being married. Bob didn't like fact that Gabe and his family were living there without paying anything toward the household expenses. Robin confided in Jessica that she didn't want to live with Bob, but she needed a man in her life. "I can't just leave him and go back to my own house and be by myself. That scares me more than staying here," Robin said.

One day, Jessica started to feel ill. She got dizzy in the kitchen and Gabe convinced her that Bob Kennelly was putting rat poison in their food. At first, she was skeptical, but there was rat poison in the utility room, and Gabe showed her a white residue on some of the dishes. While Gabe and his family fixed their meals at home, Robin and Bob ate out. There was no question that she wasn't feeling right.

What they didn't know was that she was pregnant.

Gabe was the master of spinning tales out of thin air, and he began to get very creative with his art. Soon, everything started to smell like rat poison to Jessica's sensitive nose.

Gabe told her that he was developing a new video game with someone in Brazil. His conversations with others began to be peppered with tales of his time in the Air Force, when he was in "black ops" (*Black Ops* is a popular video game). He talked of going to China for one last mission for his employer, a secret government agency. At one point, he said that as soon as he told people that he worked for the government or the military, they relaxed and were willing to help him. He said people "want a story. They want to think that I work for the government. They want to think I work for the military. They want to think something, so I go along." He used this bit of knowledge to great advantage. Gabe began what appears

to be a very well-conceived and systematic revisiting of all his old friends from the days before he got himself into such trouble. He began to consciously lose a lot of weight.

Was his mental health deteriorating, or was he practicing an alibi and a new persona—one that was manic and seemed a little crazy—for a crime he knew he would inevitably commit?

He visited an old employer and told his grandiose stories, saying that he could “take care of” any problem that might arise. The inference was clear, although the former employer had no idea why Gabe visited him. They hadn’t seen each other in years.

He visited Pam Hansen, a woman he knew from church when he was a teen, and spun an outrageous story that in the “pre-mortal days” (part of the Mormon theology), she was his queen and they rode dragons together (dragons are a part of the *Perfect World* game). He said he was the forerunner of Christ’s second coming. He had begun to perfect the rambling rants at this point, mixing fantasy and reality, queens and dragons with military secrets and working security for a prostitution ring. Looming over the whole morass was fear for his family. He had to protect his daughter from being molested by Bob Kennelly, he had to protect Jessica and Kalea from the rat poison Bob was feeding them, and he had to protect his mother, even though he thought she was in on Bob’s rat poison scheme and was a “lost cause.” Pam was concerned for Gabe, but didn’t think he was in any danger of harming himself or others. He was just really, really stressed out. Yet, when she heard about the murders, Pam Hansen knew exactly what to do. She called the police and told them about her latest chat with Gabe.

Jessica was involved in a woman’s group at the Bandon LDS church. Around the same time, a month to six weeks before the murders, Gabe came to the group and acted in an inappropriate manner. When confronted by the leaders of that particular church, he said he was Christ and was told to leave the building. This Gabe was not the exceptional young man that the Mormon community had known when he was a teen and a missionary.

Pressures continued to mount as Jessica's parents called Robin and told her about Gabe's money problems. When Robin confronted him, he exploded in anger. Unknown to Jessica, Robin had asked Gabe to contribute to the household expenses, which Gabe thought was completely unfair, and he found their accounting suspicious. During this big blow-up, Robin even showed Gabe the paperwork on his childhood custody case. She had not abandoned him. She tried to tell him how hard she fought for him, but he wasn't listening. He had held on to his abandonment issues for too long to give them up now. He told his brother that their mother was evil. He began to describe Bob and Robin as bad people, and he began to convince Jessica that her parents were evil as well.

Toward the end of January, Gabe convinced Jessica that they needed to leave the house immediately, before any of them ingested more rat poison, so he sent Jessica to their room to grab a few possessions and get into the car. Jessica did as she was told.



**Bob and Robin
Family Photo**

With no apparent plan, they drove to Medford, about three hours away. Jessica, loyal to a fault, was not happy about missing work at the bookkeeping office, especially as tax season approached, but

there was no denying that she felt funny, and Gabe was very convincing.

Realizing they were ill-prepared for a road trip, they went back to the house the following day to pack up some belongings. Robin and Bob wanted an explanation as to why they were in such a hurry to leave, but Jessica was busy packing Kalea's things and making sure she had everything they were going to need, and Gabe was busy packing up a few things from the castle room. Jessica didn't want to talk to Robin. "I didn't want to say, 'Because I think your boyfriend's hurting us'," she said. Forty-five minutes later, they were out of the house and on their way to Gabe's grandmother's house in Silverton, where they washed all of their belongings to get the stink of rat poison out of them.

Gabe said he wanted to talk with his uncle, Scott Walsh, to see if there was a way to get Robin safely out on her own, maybe back into her own fixed-up house. When he did call his uncle, Gabe just ranted about a business opportunity he thought Scott ought to invest in. He never said a word about helping Robin, or getting the family back together. It was all a manic rant, a pathetic attempt to find some money.

They needed to find themselves a new place to live, too, because they couldn't live with Bob and Robin anymore. That good idea hadn't panned out as well as it had first seemed when they were in Idaho.

They went to church that Sunday and Gabe continued his systematic renewal of acquaintances with his new persona. He went to see Mike Woods, the shop foreman at the BMW dealership where Gabe trained during his Mount Hood Community College days. In those days, Gabe was a calm, compassionate guy. Now he seemed delusional, with multiple grandiose stories about his involvement with secret black ops units in the military.

He went to see David Bastian, with whom he served his mission in Australia. David said that Gabe used to be a sincere individual, but this time, seven years later, Gabe was very excitable and said he

worked for a black ops agency cracking codes. He insisted on talking with David in private. He began to talk about apocalyptic happenings in California and Utah. (*Perfect World* has an apocalyptic aspect). He said he wanted to move to Silverton and open a coffee shop so he could preach, and his wife wanted to open a bed-and-breakfast to help pay the bills. He talked nonstop about the \$200,000 car he had bought to outrun the police, and then he began to talk about killing anyone who tried to molest his daughter. He said that people who had a lot of money and nice houses should share with people who don't have as much. That night, David was mildly troubled about this new Gabriel Morris, but he didn't think that Gabe was in any danger to himself or others. He just thought Gabe was going through some stressful times.

Gabe and his family continued their ill-conceived road trip, searching for a place to live, although they had no money to get started and didn't have most of their belongings. They headed to Seattle, where Jessica unsuccessfully tried to borrow money from old friends, as she had served her LDS mission in the Seattle area. Then they headed back down south, pawning their wedding rings for gas money, talking about moving here and there, all the way to San Diego, where Gabe showed her the severely distressed neighborhood where he grew up.

He continually added new stories to his rant. Now Bob Kennelly was building a place where he could molest Kalea (the marijuana grow room they had built was secure and relatively soundproof). One of his wildest stories was that his father took him out into the ocean when he was 4 years old, dropped him in and left him to drown. He said he sank to the bottom, heard the voice of God and realized he could breathe underwater, so he just walked out of the ocean and back up the beach, to the amazement of his parents.

Now he could heal.

They spent a week in a motel in San Diego as the memories of a desperate childhood resurfaced. He remembered abuse at the hands of his father and his older brother and perceived abandonment by his mother. Perhaps a few things began to come into focus for him

with regards to his mother's series of boyfriends and her current choice of Bob Kennelly over Gabe and his family.

Finally, on February 7, they moved everything out of the motel room and back into the red truck that Jessica's dad had loaned them, and headed back to Oregon. Gabe said it was time to confront Bob about the rat poison and the way they were being treated. It just wasn't right.

Jessica went along with whatever Gabriel said. He was her husband, the father of her child and the head of their household. If he wanted to smoke a little dope, well, that was okay because he had a medical marijuana card. It was medicinal.

They drove all night, pulling into Bandon at daybreak and creeping up the long driveway. Bob and Robin generally stayed up until 2 AM and slept in until noon.

Gabe was adamant that he have the upper hand when he confronted them, so they parked behind the garage. For six hours, Jessica sat in the truck and tried to occupy her 4-year-old while Gabe went into the woods to keep surveillance on the house until his mother and her boyfriend got up and left.

Eventually they did, and that was the last time they left the house alive.

Chapter 4—On the Run

Gabriel took his terrified, disoriented family on a wild ride that February night after the shootings. The truck slid down the steep driveway, banging into the embankment, until Jessica thought the truck would tumble off the side of the road and roll down into the river. When she asked why he'd shot his mother and Bob, Gabe replied, "Because it had to be done." That was explanation enough for her.

Gabe drove directly to the Eschler's neighborhood in Coquille and parked a few houses down the street. Gabe knew that Fred Eschler had guns. He also knew that the Eschlers thought of him as a son, and that they were good-hearted people who would likely do anything for him in his hour of need.

He said to Jessica, "Follow along. Do what I say." And she did.

Fred and Laura Eschler were in the kitchen about 9 PM when the doorbell rang. Laura opened the door. Moments later, Gabe was in the kitchen, talking with rational urgency to them—no mystical, magical, manic weirdness. He said that he'd been working undercover for a secret Air Force agency and that terrorists had killed his mother and Bob. He claimed he had shot one of them at the scene before he and his family escaped. A handgun fell out of his clothing as he talked, and he asked for .40-caliber ammunition for Kennelly's gun and a ride to an Air Force base in California, where he could check in with his agency and find safety for his family.

Fred had no reason to disbelieve Gabe. He was very aware and very much in control. Both Fred and his wife had to work in the morning, so he couldn't give them a ride, but they could take his car. He gave Gabe a Beretta 9mm pistol and a shoulder holster, and together they loaded three magazines, while Laura cleaned some

personal items out of their silver Ford Taurus and fixed them some food for their trip. They didn't have any shoes for Kalea, but Laura gave Jessica some thick socks for the girl and warm clothes for everyone, as well as the cash they had on hand—about \$80. Jessica asked if they had a car seat, but Gabe said they wouldn't need one. He'd be down in the back seat with Kalea. Those who were after him would be looking for the white truck with three people. A silver Taurus with a lone woman driving would not be suspicious. When Fred asked more probing questions, Gabe countered with, "It's better for you not to know."

As they were leaving, Kalea looked up and said, "Something happened to Grandma."

"Let's not talk about Grandma," Gabe said, and hustled his family out the door and into a car they knew nobody would be looking for. He and Kalea got down in the back seat and Jessica drove through the night toward San Diego.

Again, the conversation revolved around where they were going to go to make a fresh start.

Because they had suddenly left the Kennelly residence, Jessica was without her purse, and Gabe had left without his wallet. They had no identification with them at all, so they drove straight through to the motel they'd stayed in the week before in San Diego, and Jessica was able to secure them a room for one night, without identification, because the desk clerk remembered her. Gabe disassembled Bob's gun and threw it out the window, where it was recovered and turned over to the San Diego police department. The police had custody of the gun before the bodies were discovered in Oregon. At one point, Jessica asked Gabe to drive past the Mormon temple in San Diego so she could show Kalea, but Gabe refused. "It's just another building," he said. Instead, he pulled into a hospital parking lot and stole a California license plate from a similar Ford Taurus, but never got around to putting it on the Eschler's car.

Short on cash, Gabe robbed a business while Jessica and Kalea waited in the car, and then they headed east. In Yuma, they used

the two Wal-Mart gift cards totaling \$170 from Bob Kennelly's wallet for provisions because they'd left with nothing. Kalea got some clothes and a car seat, and they bought toothpaste, soap, hair products and such. Gabe threw the rest of Bob's wallet out the window.

In Arizona, he robbed another business, and after that, they panhandled at truck stops. Jessica did most of the begging. "She's very humble," Gabe said. Big-hearted truckers were willing to give her money for gas.

In Mesa, they spent the night with some of Jessica's LDS friends. Gabe lied to them about being in the Air Force, and said they were on their way to California, relocating from the East Coast to the West Coast. The next morning, they continued their odyssey around the country, restlessly looking for a place to land. He convinced Jessica that they could change identities and live normal lives. Their past was behind them now, and they had a good future. She believed him. She didn't need to leave; she didn't need to call the police. He'd take care of his family, as the head of the household was supposed to do.

Occasionally they would stop at a public library to use a computer, trying to connect with people they'd met online playing the fantasy game *Perfect World*. While they connected here and there, nothing panned out.

They didn't find a place to stay until they reached Michigan. Then Gabe sweet-talked fellow gamer Kelly Love and her husband, Scott Snyder, and convinced them to meet him and Jessica in Washington, D.C.

Gabe had met Kelly in *Perfect World* and they talked and flirted via Skype. He told her he worked for the Air Force and he helped her with some ideas for graphics for her new website. When he called and said he was traveling around, meeting some of his gamer friends, she wasn't surprised.

The Morris family arrived in Washington on February 14 with \$10 to their names and found Kelly and Scott in the bar of a pizza place.

Kelly and Scott bought them dinner, and then, at Gabe's persistent and persuasive urging, reluctantly agreed to let the family stay with them for a night. Kelly and Scott were living at the home of Scott's mother in Dumfries, Virginia.

Gabe told Jessica that he thought very highly of Kelly. He said that in the online gaming world, she had stuck up for him, and he hoped they would be able to give them a car and some money. Jessica didn't know that Gabe and Kelly had been engaging in an online flirtation, but that attraction blossomed when they got together in person. When they got to Kelly and Scott's place, Gabe discovered that Kelly had been quite ill for some time with an intestinal ailment that made it difficult for her to eat.

Gabe offered to heal her.

This wasn't news to Jessica, as Gabe had healed her and Kalea many times before. "He's blessed in the ability to heal people. He's a priesthood holder in the church," she said.

Kelly wasn't sure about all of this, so she talked it over with her husband. Already she could sense that Gabe had a strong hold over Jessica, and that frightened her, as she felt herself becoming ensnared as well. She suspected that if Gabe really could heal her, he would have a powerful hold on her, too.

Gabe told Scott that he had been poisoned—that he deliberately ate an amount that would have killed an ordinary person—but because of his extraordinary powers granted by God, he was able to heal himself. Scott told Kelly said that receiving a blessing from Gabe couldn't hurt, and in fact, it might help. Kelly was tired of being in pain.

So Gabe prayed over her and convinced her that he had the power to heal. Immediately, she felt better.

She began sleeping in their bed. Kelly, Gabe, Kalea and Jessica.

Soon, it was just Gabe and Kelly in the bed. They had sex during the day while Scott worked and Jessica and Kalea were elsewhere in the house. If Jessica happened to get near the room where Gabe and

Kelly were having private time, he became furious, accusing his meek wife of spying on him.

To earn their keep, Jessica cooked for the family. When more people came over and she hadn't prepared enough to feed everyone, she wouldn't eat.

Once, Kelly found Jessica sitting by an open window, and she took the opportunity to ask her if she ever doubted Gabe's actions or the things he said. Jessica said no, that she trusted him, and when her trust faltered, it was a slip of her faith. Gabe told Jessica that her parents were evil, and she believed him. Later, Kelly said that she thought Jessica loved Gabe and wanted something he wouldn't give her, which was his love.

After a week, Gabe sensed that it was time to move on. He wanted to go to Florida, where his brother Jesse lived with his family. He began to pressure Kelly and Scott to join them on the road. Kelly and Scott had money and a fresh car, and Gabe convinced Jessica that if they all traveled together, Jessica wouldn't have to beg for gas money anymore. Kelly and Scott were going to help them.

Scott said no, and Kelly resisted. Gabe was insistent. He wanted Kelly to go with them. He began to do what had always worked for him in the past: Amping up his fast-talking line. Saying he worked in a secret agency for the Air Force had motivated people to help him in the past; surely it would work again. Kelly was skeptical. If they were so important to the Air Force, why were they so broke with no place to stay?

To try to convince her, Gabe confessed that he'd had to go so far as to kill his mother and her boyfriend, and Jessica confirmed it. He also said that his mother was a prostitute and never raised him. He told her that he grew up on the streets and never knew his father. He tried to help his mother by letting her move into his house in Bandon, and she tried to poison him in return. She tried to kill him for \$100,000, so he had his mother and her boyfriend kneel before him and he shot them both.

Scott's mother worked for the police department. When Gabe told Kelly that he had killed his mother, it didn't take long for this information to get to Scott's mom. She looked him up on the Internet and found him on the "America's Most Wanted" television show website.

Unbeknownst to Gabe, Kelly looked through the bag he had stashed in the closet and found Fred Eschler's 9mm Berretta. Clearly, she telegraphed her fear to Gabe, because after that, Gabe was with her at all times. Kelly never had the opportunity to be alone with her husband, her brother, or anyone else, because Gabe was always within earshot.

Gabe and Jessica had been with them for about a week. Gabe could feel the net closing in on him and he began to talk hard and fast to Kelly, who had no idea what to do. She had no idea what he was capable of. A week ago, she was helping out a friend and his family, and now she felt like a hostage. As Gabe got more and more agitated, life for Kelly turned dark and very, very frightening.

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Chapter 5—The Manhunt

Fred Escher called the police after Gabe and his family left his home, but because no homicides were outstanding, he was referred to the FBI. Terrorism was under the jurisdiction of the Federal Government, not Coos County.

Two days after the murders, on February 10, the Coquille police received a complaint that a white Dodge truck was illegally parked. A patrol officer was dispatched to look into the matter and when he traced the license plate, he drove to Robert Kennelly's house, where he could see the open French doors and a woman lying motionless on the deck. Upon closer examination, he also saw Bob Kennelly's body.

He called for reinforcements.

Detective Daniel Looney responded with the Coos County Major Crime Team. With the help of the Oregon State Police Crime Laboratory, they carefully searched the house for evidence. The Heckler & Koch handgun case, along with the receipt for the gun's purchase, was found in the safe in the Morrises' bedroom. Its serial number matched a gun found in a grass strip alongside a street in San Diego. A nationwide manhunt was initiated to locate the main suspect, Gabriel Morris. He was considered armed and extremely dangerous. Jessica Morris was wanted as a material witness. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children began looking for Kalea Morris and sent flyers around the country. The television show "America's Most Wanted" became interested in the case and aired an episode on the Morris family on February 20.



Heckler & Koch .40 cal Pistol
Image by C. E. Bardsley

Bob Kennelly was found face-up on the floor of the living room, with wounds to his lower leg and the back of his neck that indicated the trajectory of the bullets came from the balcony. The fatal wound cut through his liver and into his lung. The shot was fired as he lay on the ground. The shell casing fell onto his clothing.

Robin Anstey was found face-up on the deck, just outside the open French doors with wounds through her upper arm, her left leg and her buttocks. The fatal wound was to her head.

The Oregon State Major Crime Team used dowels with lasers on their ends to gauge the trajectory of all the bullets found in the furniture, walls and flooring. All in all, 13 .40-caliber shell casings were found. There were bullet holes in the leaves of the umbrella plant that Gabe stood behind when he began firing. Then he apparently leaned over the balcony, presumably for greater accuracy. Shell casings bounced off the wall and around the kitchen as he moved across the balcony and down the stairs. Bullet fragments were found in a candle bowl on the kitchen countertop and in a Christmas tree stand on the deck. Marijuana and smoking paraphernalia was found in the castle room, and 26 12-inch-tall juvenile marijuana plants were found in the grow room in the garage where Bob kept a pristine 1951 DeSoto.

Jessica's purse was found in the Pope's red truck, and Gabe's passport was in the castle room. Deep tire marks were grooved into a grassy area where they drove Bob Kennelly's truck recklessly down the steep driveway to escape the crime scene.



**Getaway Tire Tracks, Kennelly Home
Police Evidence Photo**

The murder of one's parent is not an uncommon event. "Parricide" is the term used when a child kills a parent. "Matricide" is the murder of a mother; "patricide" is the killing of a father. In *Why Kids Kill Parents* by Kathleen M. Heide, PhD, the author states that on average, about five parents are killed by their biological children in the US every week. Of the approximately 250 parents killed by their children each year, about 100 of these victims are mothers, most mothers who are slain by their offspring are killed by sons, and most matricides involve adult offenders.

Heide states: "In parricide cases, I have seen good parents overindulge their children with fatal results... [the child] has no frustration tolerance, meaning that he does not know how to deal with disappointment, and gets angry. Sometimes the anger is so intense that it erupts into deadly rage."

All evidence found at the Bandon house crime scene pointed to the eruption of smoldering rage. While Gabe seems to have carefully groomed those who would eventually testify in his behalf of his

craziness, once the deed was committed, he seemed to have no particular plan, except to get out of the house and get to the Eschlers for the help he knew they'd provide. After that, he knew he was running on borrowed time.

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Chapter 6—The Capture

Gabe convinced a terrified Kelly to go, but Scott wasn't having any of it. On the morning of February 22, Scott left for work. Kelly called her brother while Gabe told Jessica to start packing up the Eschlers' car because they were leaving. Kelly's brother brought over his Ford Explorer. Gabe packed up Kelly's belongings without her help or permission and began loading them into it, along with a shotgun that was kept mounted on the wall.

The police had a surveillance team at the house. As soon as they determined that the Eschlers' car was parked out front, a SWAT team was called in and the neighborhood sealed off.

Afraid for her daughter-in-law, Scott Snyder's mother called Kelly's cell phone. Knowing that Gabe was probably listening, she told Kelly that her mother was in the hospital and she needed Kelly to meet her there right away. Kelly knew that her mother-in-law was trying to tell her to get out of the house, and Kelly got the message, but getting away from Gabe wasn't that easy.

An extremely agitated Gabe recognized the police surveillance and got the show on the road. Later, he said that he thought it would be better to be apprehended in a public place during a traffic stop than to have police storm the house.

When they were stopped by the police, Jessica was driving the Eschlers' silver Ford Taurus with Kalea. Gabe and Kelly were in her brother's car with a shotgun in the back. They surrendered without incident. Gabe had Scott Snyder's wallet.



Dumfries, VA Neighborhood Where Gabe and Jessica Arrested
Photo by C. E. Bardsley

In a long, rambling videotaped interview, Gabriel Morris confessed to the murders, describing in detail how he ambushed his mother and Bob Kennelly, shooting from the balcony, and firing the fatal shots as he stood over them. He never said precisely why his mother had to die (rage can be like that), although he said that Kennelly had to die first because he was poisoning his family, and nothing was more important to Gabe than his family. He'd do anything for them. Secondly, he had evidence that Kennelly was thinking about sexually abusing Kalea, and nobody had ever loved a child as much as Gabe loved Kalea.

He told the story about being dropped into the ocean at age 4 and God granting him the power to breathe underwater. He denied robbing anyone to fund their cross-country adventure.

He related with some pleasure how he intimidated his wife. "Jessica does what I tell her to do, 'cause I'm intimidating. If you've got a guy who just shot two people and he's telling you to get into a car, you're gonna get in the car. That type of woman is gonna get into the car, especially if she's got a 4-year-old girl."



Gabriel Morris
Mug Shot

He fought extradition to Oregon.

Eventually, in a deal made with the Coos County District Attorney, the death penalty was removed from consideration in exchange for Morris' cooperation and stipulation to the facts that he killed Robin Anstey and Robert Kennelly Jr. He finally waived extradition and was brought back to Oregon. On May 6, 2010, he was arraigned on two counts of aggravated murder.

His defense? Insanity.

Gabriel argued with his attorney about this defense strategy, insisting that he had no mental defect and was perfectly sane.



Jessica Morris
Mug Shot

Jessica Morris did not fight extradition. She was brought back to Oregon and pleaded guilty to hindering prosecution. Her parents kept Kalea. She agreed to testify against her husband and was sentenced to three years' probation and fined \$1,344. She currently lives in Oregon with her two daughters.

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Chapter 7—The Trial

District Attorney R. Paul Frasier has his hands full. For a small county in southern Oregon with limited resources, there seem to be a lot of murder cases to try.

Frasier left his post as Special Prosecutor at the South Coast Interagency Narcotics Team and Deputy District Attorney in Josephine County, Oregon, when Governor Ted Kulongoski asked him to take over the Coos County position from retiring DA Paul Burgett. Frasier was sworn in on December 31, 2007. He inherited a serious budget problem with the loss of millions of dollars to the county's general fund as a result of reduction of federal timber money. In an interview in January 2011, Frasier said that because of the low pay offered his new deputy district attorneys in Coos County, his office serves as a training position until they can find a better-paying job elsewhere.



**DA R. Paul Frasier
Portrait**

Just because the prosecutor's office has budgetary problems doesn't mean that crime stops in the small coastal community. By April 13, 2011, a *Register-Guard* article stated that "not yet four months into the year, [Coos] County already has topped the three killings recorded in all of 2010 and has tied the number (four) set in 2009."

Considering his budget, Frasier felt it prudent to take the death penalty off the table in return for Morris' stipulation to the fact that he committed the killings. That way, Frasier didn't have to foot the bill to retrieve witnesses from Virginia for the trial, which could have lasted two weeks. Morris also waived his right to a jury trial, which further streamlined things.



**Coos County Court House
Oregon Secy. of State Website**

Along with his court-appointed defense attorneys, Peter Fahy and Michael Barker, Gabriel Christian Morris faced District Attorney Paul Frasier in Coos County Circuit Court Judge Martin Stone's courtroom for his trial, which began August 9, 2011.

Judge Stone runs an efficient courtroom. A thin man with sharp dark eyes and a smooth low voice reminiscent of actor George Takei's, he conducted himself with cool concern for the process. He wasted no time, but kept everyone on task.



**Judge Martin Stone
Portrait**

Frasier and Fahy were equally on task. All three men were at ease and comfortable in their roles, and they treated the defendant and every witness with respect.

The first day of testimony was dedicated to establishing the known facts of the homicides (when District Attorney Frasier referred to them as murders, defense attorney Fahy objected). Detective Sergeant Daniel Looney of the Coos County Sheriff's office testified to all of the crime-scene details and described evidence shown in many photographs displayed on a projection screen.



Bullet Hole in Leaf
Police Evidence Photo

Then Christine Karcher, a forensic nurse with the medical examiner's office and a member of the Major Crime Team, explained the autopsy photos and charts of wounds on the bodies of the deceased. As she took the stand, Fahy turned to family members in the gallery and wisely advised them to leave the courtroom. They stayed and listened, but the emotional nature of this particular evidence began to take its toll. Jesse McCoy and his uncle, Scott Walsh (Robin Anstey's brother), sat with their faces in their hands as Karcher described the grisly details. The defendant, his reddish hair and beard about the same scruffy length, looked on with no apparent reaction.

Before the prosecution rested, they showed the defendant's hour-long video confession, a rambling affair during which he related the story of being dropped into the ocean. He said he felt that he just wanted everyone to get along and had been looking for a place where people were nice. "My plan is to love everybody," he said. When asked what he thought would have happened had a police officer walked into the house when he was confronting Bob Kennelly about the rat poison and his plans to sexually molest Kalea, the defendant replied, "If a cop walked in, *he'd* have shot

them.” At the end of the interview, the defendant praised the professionalism of the SWAT team that took him and his wife safely into custody.

At the end of the first day, the prosecution read into the record some facts about the case that had already been agreed to between the parties, and then the prosecution rested.

On the second day of the trial, the defense began to call friends and family members of the defendant to the stand. The purpose was to identify Gabriel as a good-hearted human being, a devout family man who adored his mother, but who’d had some sort of a stress-induced “crack” that altered his behavior. Again, emotions ran high when Lynn Walsh, Gabe’s maternal grandmother, testified. Gabe, sitting at the defense table, asked for paper and began drawing little boxes on a legal pad, occasionally wiping his eyes. At the end of the prosecution’s cross examination, she looked fondly at her grandson and said, “I will never believe that my grandson killed my daughter. Never.”

In addition to Morris’ church friends, former employers and family members who testified to a similar downward trajectory in his mental state, Gabe’s brother, an emotional Jesse McCoy, testified about their childhood. As he recounted some good times and some not-so-good times, the defendant went back to drawing little boxes on his pad, occasionally wiping his eyes with a tissue. McCoy talked about the strong bond he and his brother shared and how he always worried about him. Gabriel was only 8 when Danny Morris filed for custody and won. “I had anxiety about Gabriel being okay,” McCoy said.

During the brothers’ last phone conversation before the killings, Gabe rambled about God, his distrust of Bob Kennelly, and his feelings of being abandoned by his mother. In this wordy monologue, Morris talked about being able to run through a forest with a blindfold on and not tripping or stumbling. He had superpowers from God and was now a prophet. He had the ability to heal, could see the future, and still could not believe that his mother had left him with Danny. While he said he didn’t like Bob Kennelly,

he never said anything about his mother's safety, or that he thought Bob would molest Kalea. Never, McCoy testified, did he think Robin or Bob were in any danger.

Nobody did. Nobody who testified thought Gabriel's apparent altered mental state was alarming enough to call the authorities or to think he could be a danger to himself or others.

Before the end of the day, Deputy Richard Gill testified to Morris' physical fitness. Morris was a model prisoner, the deputy said. Morris was not on medication, didn't have counseling, and was busy helping others. Gabe took under his wing a scared 18-year-old inmate who spoke little English. There was no outward evidence of mental instability.

"This case is just weird," Frasier said in a newspaper interview after Wednesday's testimony.

The third day of testimony opened with Coquille School Board member Fred Eschler, the man to whom Gabe ran after the murders. Fred said that Gabe was good with words and told a good story. He had a way of putting people at ease. In Fred's estimation, when Gabe and his shoeless family showed up at his doorstep on the night of February 8 with an outrageous story, he was not delusional, but in control of the situation. Fred had no reason not to believe him, so he and his wife outfitted the young family with a gun, ammunition, food, money, clothing, and a car, ostensibly to get them to the Air Force base where they'd find safety. He said that if he had it to do all over again, he would act exactly as he had that night, though he had taken a lot of flak from his friends and religious community for his part in the getaway.

Continuing the third day of testimony, "Big John" Lindegren testified about going out to the Kennelly place 10 to 12 days before the shooting to bid on a drywall job. While there, he said that Gabe was agitated, "bouncing on his heels," and that he and Bob weren't speaking. The prosecuting attorney, referring to an interview that Lindegren gave earlier, asked Lindegren if Gabe had met with him in his office after that appointment at the Kennelly place, and

Lindegren said that he seemed like the same old Gabe. In the interview, Lindegren said Gabe had asked about acquiring a gun. On the stand, Lindegren denied having said this. Lindegren did say in response to a question that if he had to think of who might have shot Robin Anstey, Gabe would never have even made the list.

At the end of the day, the defense attorneys announced that Morris would not testify in his own defense.

On Friday, Dr. Loren Mallory testified that in his opinion, Morris suffered from a delusional disorder, marked by grandiose and religious themes. In his psychological evaluation, he noted that Morris was of above-average intelligence. He “tends to present himself in a consistently favorable light, and as being relatively free of common shortcomings to which most individuals will admit. He appears reluctant to acknowledge personal limitations and will tend to repress or deny distress or other internal consequences that might arise from such limitations.” The report went on to say, “This person gives evidence of limited capacity to form close attachments to other people. Although he may not necessarily avoid interpersonal relationships, these relationships tend to be psychologically at arms’ length rather than up close... He shows less interest in other people than ordinarily would be expected.”

Dr. Mallory suggested on the stand that things got progressively worse in the months before Morris shot his mother and her boyfriend as he lost touch with reality. The district attorney challenged that diagnosis, and asked if he could be certain that Morris was not lying about his delusions. He offered another motive, the \$25,000 that the defendant owed Bob Kennelly for the marijuana business. Dr. Mallory responded, “Yeah, if you want to say that he would kill him for owing him \$25,000, you could say that.”

People have been killed for far less.

The only witness called to the stand on Tuesday was Laura Eschler, who, along with her husband, gave Gabe and his family

provisions to leave the state after the murders. She testified that he seemed himself and seemed in control that night.

In closing arguments, Fahy claimed that Morris acted on his paranoid delusions that Kennelly was trying to poison his family, that God was talking to him and that he was a prophet, perhaps even Jesus Christ himself. He self-medicated with marijuana and alcohol, confusing things further, but used the substances to try to quell the chaos in his mind. Fahy went through a list of things that a rational person would not do, such as standing on the balcony to open fire. A trained police officer such as Morris, he said, would find a better position from where to make his ambush. Then Morris left the scene without even retrieving his identification or putting on a pair of shoes.

Frasier argued that Gabe Morris' actions before, during, and after the killings weren't those of an insane person. Morris had a long history of making up elaborate lies and then bragging about how he got away with them. Frasier said that Gabe was in control of himself and that he knew what he was doing was a crime. He pointed to the way Gabe drove up the driveway, parking so that Robin and Bob would not see the truck. Gabe shot his mother four times and Bob five times, making certain they were dead before he left. "The defendant knew he shot those people, and that what he did was against the law," Frasier said. He stole money and gift cards from the dead man and cooked up a story for the Eschlers. "That was just a story I told so I could get a car and get out of there," Gabe told Virginia authorities. He threw away the murder weapon and later bragged to police that they'd never find it. These were all the calculated choices of someone who knew he had committed a crime and was trying to get away with it, Frasier said.

Morris may have had a mental defect, Frasier argued, but an insanity defense requires not just a mental defect, but one that prevents the person from having the capacity to appreciate his criminal conduct.

In Oregon, to find someone not guilty by reason of insanity, the person must "lack substantial capacity either to appreciate the

criminality of the conduct or to conform the conduct to the requirements of law.” Even if Morris was found to have a mental defect, or a personality disorder, it would not constitute insanity if he was aware that what he was doing was wrong or had the capacity to control his conduct. According to court documents, “This is an affirmative defense, requiring the defendant to prove the defense by a preponderance of the evidence.”

Disturbing behavior does not constitute insanity.

Mental disease cannot be determined through a blood test, and medical experts cannot make an absolute diagnosis. To make a mental-health diagnosis, the medical practitioner must rely upon the symptoms and actions of the person, according to court documents. If the person is not telling the truth to the doctor, the validity of the diagnosis is in question.

In the plaintiff’s trial memorandum, Frasier wrote:

The defendant’s credibility is almost non-existent. He will lie at any opportunity. He lied about why he left Air Force ROTC. He lied about being in the Air Force and being part of a special operations team. He lied about why he left the sheriff’s office in Idaho. He lied to Allie Smith about getting a divorce from Jessica. He cheated Allie Smith by improperly using her credit cards. He lied to Jessica when he denied being sexually involved with Allie Smith and Kelly Love. He lied to Bill Pope about what opportunities he had with James Anstey in order to get Bill Pope to loan him money and a truck. He lied to the Eschlers about what happened. He lies when it is in his best interest to do so. Clearly, he’s capable of lying to a psychologist.

After a two-hour lunch break, Judge Stone pronounced his verdict: Guilty on two counts of aggravated murder. “He was in control when he moved down to the ground level and finished off the victims by shooting them as they lay dying on the ground,” Judge Stone said. “Mr. Morris is not a dummy. He’s intelligent, articulate, he has training as a police officer. His actions speak

volumes. Those actions are not the actions of a person who is delusional.”

Before sentencing, Morris addressed the court. “There’s a million things I could say, but I’m not necessarily sure this is the best environment to say them in,” he said. “I’m proud of my family and friends, not for what they said about me, but I’m grateful for their love and support.... I pray we live in a society that can heal and change things the way they are.”

Judge Stone then delivered his sentence: Two consecutive life terms in prison without the possibility of parole.

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Chapter 8—Conclusion

The question remains: Why did Gabe Morris kill his mother? Not even he seems able to answer this question. All we have is his cryptic answer to his wife when she asked him why he did it: “Because it had to be done.”



Robin Anstey
Family photo

Two scenarios are likely.

The first is that he went back to the house that day fully intending to confront Bob about his share of the living expenses, the \$25,000 loan, the marijuana business and a few other things. While he waited those long eight hours, he chewed on all manner of injustices, beginning with his perception that his mother abandoned

him to the hands of his abusive father when he was a child. He ran scenarios in his head. He ran dialogues (“If he says this, then I’ll say that”) until his rage became so overwhelming that by the time they returned home, he could have talked himself into believing just about anything, but most of all, he believed, “It had to be done.”

In “The Role of Psychopathology and Personality in Rage-Type Homicide,” author Duncan Cartwright notes, “An act of murder driven primarily by an uncontrollable explosive rage reaction has been found by many to be a common form of homicidal behavior. What makes establishing a psychological profile of these kinds of offenders particularly intriguing is that most are classified as apparently ‘normal’ individuals. ‘Normal’ is used here to refer to offenders who do not typically have a history of violence or enduring psychopathology.” The author goes on to note that long parental absences and a chaotic family background usually characterized emotional deprivation.

Another scenario is that Morris began planning this day a long time ago, perhaps in his childhood fantasies. No matter what he did as an adult, he couldn’t get the type of attention he wanted from his mother, the primal source of a deflated ego and lifetime of humiliating events. He authored those events, but wasn’t strong enough emotionally to be able to triumph over them, as would a person with a healthy ego. Gabe worked at the Idaho State Mental Hospital, and perhaps he did some research by observing how mentally ill people act and took the time to perfect his manic persona so that people actually believed that he had suffered a breakdown. He seemed to systematically try this role on with people who knew him as humble Gabriel Morris, but he wasn’t altogether consistent with this act, at least not consistent enough to get away with murder.

In “The Narcissistic Exoskeleton: The Defensive Organization of the Rage-Type Murderer,” author Duncan Cartwright argues that for those with borderline personality disorder, the “bad self” remains concealed behind the narcissistic exoskeleton. As a result, bad experience simply accumulates and remains unmodified and

unarticulated. The separation between the external fantasy and internal reality as representation of idealized good objects and all-bad objects is important to maintain. People in this category are prone to violence that is catastrophically violent or homicidal. The coherent ego is maintained as long as the destructive and disturbed area of the personality remains split off.

Cartwright writes, "Hate and consequential fear are key factors that create an oversensitivity in violent individuals. In a transient form, this is not an uncommon experience for most of us. Prolonged hate, however, causes even greater sensitivity, and murder itself is seen as a fantasized end to these distressing emotions." Also, the author contends, "[This type of murderer] possesses a particular habitual kind of magical thinking that is supremely arrogant. Underneath this arrogance, however, these individuals often feel inferior and incompetent and are extremely passive. Violence or murder frees them from these disabling factors in the personality.... These individuals internalize a strong need to depend on the maternal object, conform, and succeed. However, due to their insecurities and confusion regarding their own identity and underlying hostility, they constantly fail. This tension sets up a cycle of personal failures that leads to escalating feelings of anger and rage. And then, the violent act is carried out followed by a superficial return to normality, *but with no insight into the event.*"

In discussing rage murders in those diagnosed with borderline personality disorder, Cartwright says that offenders have poor impulse control, transient blurring of fantasy and reality, altered states of consciousness, shallow or blunted affect, and finally a violent and primitive fantasy life.

In the end, perhaps "it had to be done" in order for Morris to free himself from the guilt of not being able to protect his mother, as well as never living up to his own expectations of himself in every other area. There was a way out of all the responsibility of being a husband, a father, a son-in-law, a son and a brother. There was a way out of financial obligations and trying to make a living. There was a way out of all the hassles and pressures of life and family

amid myriad temptations. Perhaps he envisioned the solution as living stress-free in a hospital for 10 years or so and focusing on what he said he always really wanted to do: Help others.

That part of his fantasy didn't exactly happen according to plan. Instead, he shattered the lives of all who knew and loved him. We all have a million tiny choices to make every single day. Gabriel Morris made all the wrong choices.

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Photo Index/Credits

Robert Kennelly's home in Bandon—Coos County District Attorney's office

Robert Kennelly and Robin Anstey—Family photo

The Narrow Driveway—Police Evidence photo

Jesse, Robin and Gabe about 1984—Family photo, thanks to Scott Walsh

Jesse, Robin and Gabe in 2009—Family photo, thanks to Scott Walsh

Kalea, Gabe and Jessica—Family photo

A view to the balcony—Coos County District Attorney's office

H&K .40 cal pistol—image by C E Bardsley

Getaway tire tracks—Coos County District Attorney's office

Dumfries, VA Neighborhood Where Arrest Took Place—Photo by C E Bardsley

Gabriel Morris—Mug Shot

Jessica Morris—Mug Shot

District Attorney R. Paul Frasier—Coos County District Attorney's office

Coos County Court House—Oregon Secy. Of State Website

Judge Martin Stone—Oregon Lawyer Directory

Bullet hole in leaf—Coos County District Attorney's office

Robin Anstey—Family photo, thanks to Scott Walsh

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Elizabeth Engstrom is the author of 13 books and more than 250 published short stories, articles and essays. Known as a writer of dark fantasy, her most recent book is *York's Moon*, a critically acclaimed mystery. An author, teacher, editor and former publisher, she is a sought-after panelist, keynote speaker and instructor at writing conferences and conventions around the world. Since she completed her master's degree in applied theology, she has begun a small interfaith ministry (www.love-and-mercy-ministries.com) and puts her pen to use for social justice. She is on faculty at the University of Phoenix.

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Nightmare Flower

Lizzie Borden

Lizard Wine

The Alchemy of Love

Candyland

Suspicious

Black Leather

Word by Word (with John Tullius)

Imagination Fully Dilated (co-editor)

Imagination Fully Dilated vol. II (editor)

Dead on Demand (editor)

Pronto! Writings from Rome (editor, with John Tullius)

Ship's Log: Writings at Sea (editor, with John Tullius)

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The Northwoods Chronicles

York's Moon

Something Happened to Grandma

Baggage Check