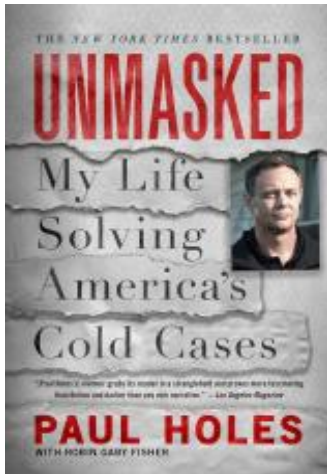


Unmasked: My Life Solving America's Cold Cases

by Paul Holes



About the Book

From the detective who found the Golden State Killer, a memoir of investigating America's toughest cold cases and the rewards --- and toll --- of a life solving crime.

I order another bourbon, neat. This is the drink that will flip the switch. I don't even know how I got here, to this place, to this point. Something is happening to me lately. I'm drinking too much. My sheets are soaking wet when I wake up from nightmares of decaying corpses. I order another drink and swig it, trying to forget about the latest case I can't shake.

Crime solving for me is more complex than the challenge of the hunt, or the process of piecing together a scientific puzzle. The thought of good people suffering drives me, for better or worse, to the point of obsession. People always ask how I am able to detach from the horrors of my work. Part of it is an innate capacity to compartmentalize; the rest is experience and exposure, and I've had plenty of both. But I have always taken pride in the fact that I can keep my feelings locked up to get the job done. It's only been recently that it feels like all that suppressed darkness is beginning to seep out.

When I look back at my long career, there is a lot I am proud of. I have caught some of the most notorious killers of the 21st century and brought justice and closure for their victims and families. I want to tell you about a lifetime solving these cold cases, from Laci Peterson to Jaycee Dugard to the Pittsburg homicides to, yes, my 20-year-long hunt for the Golden State Killer.

But a deeper question eats at me as I ask myself, at what cost? I have sacrificed relationships, joy --- even fatherhood --- because the pursuit of evil always came first. Did I make the right choice? It's something I grapple with every day. Yet as I stand in the spot where a young girl took her last breath, as I look into the eyes of her family, I know that, for me, there has never been a choice. I don't know if I can solve your case, I whisper. But I promise I will do my best.

It is a promise I know I can keep.

Discussion Guide

1. From the Golden State Killer to Laci Peterson's murder, Paul Holes worked on several high-profile cases throughout his career. Were you already familiar with any of them, and if so, what new details about these cases surprised you? Which case did you find most interesting?
2. Holes writes about how it's okay to be interested in serial killers, but that it can be damaging, especially for victims and their families, when people celebrate these criminals. Did Holes' points challenge your perspective? Why do you think there is such a public fascination with serial killers?
3. Using DNA evidence from private genealogical companies to track down criminals has been a controversial issue for years. After reading about how this technology helped identify perpetrators like the GSK and Carla Walker's killer, what is your opinion about this method, and do you have concerns?
4. Throughout his career, Holes often had to hide his work from higher-ups who devalued cold cases. He also found that politics and a lack of cooperation between jurisdictions slowed the capture of the Golden State Killer. Were you surprised by these obstacles within the system?
5. Holes speaks about how his desire to give the victims' families closure often led to him neglecting his own home life. If you were in his position, do you think you would have made similar sacrifices?
6. Holes is very open about his experiences with anxiety throughout UNMASKED. How did this openness and vulnerability impact your perception of him and of detective work?
7. In a way, [Michelle McNamara] was the Golden State Killer's last victim. What did you make of McNamara's role in the search for the GSK? If you've read McNamara's book, ILL BE GONE IN THE DARK, did UNMASKED change how you viewed her role in the case?
8. Holes talks about how his search for the Golden State Killer went from being a passion to an obsession. Where do you believe the line is between these two?
9. After reading UNMASKED, do you think you have what it takes to work in this field?

Author Bio

In 2018, Paul Holes retired as a cold case investigator after spending more than 27 years working in Contra Costa County, in the San Francisco Bay Area. Paul specialized in cold case and serial predator crimes, lending his expertise to notable cases, including the murder of Laci Peterson and the kidnapping of Jaycee Dugard. Most prominently, Paul's career culminated with his identification of the Golden State Killer, Joseph DeAngelo, the most notorious and cunning serial predator in U.S. history.

Since the arrest of DeAngelo, Holes has been very involved on the media side, continuing to assist law enforcement and victims' families with their unsolved cases through the television shows "The DNA of Murder with Paul Holes" and "America's Most Wanted," and the podcast "Jensen & Holes: The Murder Squad."

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