

THE TEXTBOOK: THE MAN WHO WROTE THE BOOK ON MURDER

THE BAPTISM OF FIRE IN HOMICIDE

The nucleus of Sergeant Geberth's inspiration for writing his textbook on murder and death investigations began with his transfer into the Homicide Division as a Detective Sergeant into the 7th Homicide Zone.

By that time, Geberth had already earned his first master's degree in Professional Studies in Criminal Justice. His master's thesis was based on a research project he had personally designed concerning the subculture of youthful drug dealers in Harlem. He called the subjects of his study "Quarter Kids." The research examined the environment, behavior, and emerging criminal culture of young people who had become involved in the street-level drug trade.

Geberth later condensed his thesis into an article entitled "**The Quarter Kids**," which was published in *Law and Order Magazine*, Vol. 26, No. 9, Illinois, September 1978. It was his first professional publication—and the beginning of a long career of writing, teaching, and publishing on homicide investigation.

But his real education as a homicide investigator was about to begin.

The Baptism of Fire

In November 1977, Geberth finally managed to get out of O.C.C.B. Manhattan North Narcotics. He was transferred to one of the busiest Homicide Zones in New York City—the 7th Homicide Zone—which was handling approximately **225 homicides a year within a six-square-mile area**.

And he loved it.

This was the assignment he had wanted. After years of major narcotics operations and having been promoted to Detective Sergeant, Geberth finally found himself where he believed he belonged: homicide.

There was, however, one small problem.

He was now a supervisor responsible for homicide detectives, some of whom had **fifteen or twenty years of experience**.

Geberth understood immediately that he could not possibly duplicate, in a matter of months, what those veteran detectives had learned through years of working

murders. They had accumulated experiences that could not be obtained from a classroom or a textbook. They had seen crime scenes, suspects, witnesses, victims, and investigative problems that Geberth had yet to encounter.

But he could watch.

He could listen.

He could learn.

And, most importantly, he could develop a disciplined method for approaching homicide investigations.

Geberth realized that he needed to become thoroughly familiar with the duties and responsibilities of a Homicide Zone Sergeant. He also knew that he needed to understand the established homicide protocols and, equally important, the application of forensic science to the investigative process.

So, being the newly assigned Sergeant that he was, Geberth decided to do what he had always done when confronted with something he needed to learn.

He decided to study.

He laughs when he recalls what happened next.

His first mistake was asking the Lieutenant who commanded the 7th Homicide Zone a simple question:

“What are we supposed to be reading? What books do you recommend?”

The Lieutenant looked at him and gave him an answer that Geberth would never forget.

“We don’t read here, Sergeant. We do.”

Geberth paused.

OOPS.

He thought to himself that this was probably one of the doper remarks he had ever heard from a commanding officer.

He simply replied:

“Sorry I asked.”

The Lieutenant responded:

“No problem.”

And that was the end of the conversation.

But for Geberth, it was the beginning of something much more important.

He understood the message.

There was no ready-made textbook sitting on a shelf that would teach him everything he needed to know about managing a homicide investigation. There was no single volume that brought together investigative procedure, crime-scene management, forensic science, death investigation, evidence evaluation, interview techniques, and the practical responsibilities of the homicide supervisor.

If he wanted to learn, he was going to have to learn from the detectives, from the cases, from the evidence, from his own mistakes—and from every homicide investigation that came through the door.

So that is exactly what he did.

Geberth began watching the veteran homicide detectives closely. He studied how they approached crime scenes, how they developed witnesses, how they questioned suspects, how they evaluated evidence, and how they followed leads. He paid particular attention to what worked—and what did not.

He also began accumulating his own collection of homicide-related books, articles, forensic publications, and professional literature. He studied pathology, forensic science, death investigation, police procedure, and investigative techniques.

What began as a newly promoted Sergeant's effort to educate himself would eventually become the foundation for a career devoted to teaching others.

The irony was that the Lieutenant who told him, **“We don't read here, Sergeant. We do,”** inadvertently helped set him on the road to writing the book that would eventually become *Practical Homicide Investigation*.

Geberth was going to learn by doing.

But he was also going to write down what he learned.

And eventually, he would teach it.

SERGEANT GEBERTH'S PREPARATION

Establishing His Own Protocol

The advantage Geberth had when he entered homicide was that he had spent almost his entire career in an investigative capacity. He had been a detective, had worked major investigative operations, and had already been promoted to Detective

Sergeant. That experience gave him a leg-up when he assumed responsibility for supervising homicide investigations.

But Geberth also understood something very important: he was now supervising detectives who had considerably more homicide experience than he did.

So Vernon watched.

He listened.

And he kept his mouth shut.

He responded to numerous homicide scenes with his own team and with the other homicide teams he covered in his capacity as a Detective Sergeant. He began carrying a notebook and documenting procedures, techniques, and investigative approaches that he found useful.

He also asked the detectives questions.

He wanted to know what they thought worked. He asked them about successful tactics they had used and what they had learned from previous cases. He wasn't looking to tell experienced homicide detectives how to do their jobs. He was trying to learn from them.

It wasn't long before Geberth recognized who the “stars” were in the 7th Homicide Zone.

Once he identified the detectives whose investigative abilities he respected, he told them that he would be responding with them to their homicide cases.

His explanation was simple:

He wanted to learn.

He wanted to catch up.

There was a collective moan when Vernon made the announcement.

The detectives initially wondered why their Sergeant wanted to accompany them to every homicide scene. But once they realized where he was coming from—and, more importantly, that he wasn't going to stand over them and tell them how to conduct an investigation—the situation became much smoother.

Geberth was there to learn.

He took notes.

He asked questions.

He observed.

And he began comparing what he was seeing in the field with what he was reading in the professional literature.

The Library Card Catalog

There was another problem.

There was no Google.

On his days off, Geberth would go to the public library and work his way through the card catalog, searching for anything he could find concerning homicide investigation, death investigation, forensic science, and criminal investigation.

The process was painstaking. He would pull out the little index cards, examine the references, locate the books, and then determine whether they contained anything that could actually help him in the field.

There was a paucity of useful information.

There were only a handful of what Geberth came to regard as the “chestnut” texts—older, established works that continued to be useful because there simply wasn't much else available.

Among the books he found particularly useful were:

- *Fundamentals of Criminal Investigation*, 4th Edition, Charles E. O'Hara, 1974.
- *Homicide Investigation: Practical Information for Coroners, Police Officers, and Other Investigators*, LeMoyne Snyder, 1973–77.
- *Techniques of Crime Scene Investigation*, Svensson and Wendel, 1965.
- *Practical Homicide Investigation*, Edward A. Dieckmann, 1961.
- *Introduction to Criminal Investigation*, Richard Ward, 1978.

Geberth didn't simply read these books.

He digested them.

He took copious notes and then compared what he was reading with what he was actually experiencing on homicide scenes throughout the South Bronx.

That distinction became critical.

A procedure described in a book might sound logical in theory, but Geberth wanted to know whether it worked in the real world—on a chaotic homicide scene, with multiple detectives, witnesses, suspects, physical evidence, medical personnel, prosecutors, and the pressures that accompanied a major murder investigation.

He was developing a habit that would remain with him for the rest of his career:

Learn it. Test it. Apply it. Evaluate it. Then teach it.

The Autopsy Room as a Classroom

Geberth also began attending as many autopsies as he could.

He wanted to understand the relationship between what investigators saw at the crime scene and what the forensic pathologist discovered during the postmortem examination.

He would bring the crime-scene photographs with him to the morgue and show them to the forensic pathologists performing the autopsies. This enabled him to discuss the circumstances of the case and the physical evidence before him while simultaneously examining the medical findings.

He could compare the wounds described by the pathologist with what he had seen at the scene.

He could discuss the location and characteristics of injuries.

He could ask questions about the probable mechanisms of injury.

And, most importantly, he could begin reconstructing the relationship between the crime scene and the autopsy findings.

The forensic pathologists were often thrilled to have the opportunity to see the crime scenes associated with the bodies they were examining.

The exchange became mutually beneficial.

The pathologists could explain their findings to the investigator, while Geberth could provide investigative information and crime-scene photographs that gave the pathologist a broader understanding of the circumstances surrounding the death.

These discussions became informal forensic workshops.

Geberth later described the experience to the author:

“It was like going to a forensic workshop studying pathology and biology in the real world.”

That experience had a profound effect on the way Geberth approached homicide investigation. He began to understand that the crime scene, the autopsy, the physical evidence, and the investigative findings were not separate components of a homicide investigation.

They were pieces of the same puzzle.

Studying the Cases That Had Already Been Solved

Geberth also began reviewing closed homicide cases.

He wasn't simply interested in the final disposition of the cases. He wanted to know **why** they had been solved.

He searched for common denominators.

What had broken the case?

What investigative tactic had produced the breakthrough?

What evidence had mattered?

What had caused the suspect to confess?

What information had been obtained from informants?

What mistakes had been avoided?

What investigative leads had actually produced results?

A pattern began to emerge.

Many of the successful cases had ultimately been solved through confessions or information supplied by informants. But Geberth also recognized that those breakthroughs generally resulted from a series of investigative steps that had preceded them.

He began documenting those steps.

Little by little, Geberth was putting together something of his own.

It wasn't a textbook.

It wasn't a formal manual.

It wasn't even intended for publication.

It was his personal homicide protocol.

He was developing a collection of tactics, procedures, observations, investigative principles, and lessons learned from actual homicide investigations.

In effect, he was creating his own checklist—a mental and written framework that he could use whenever he responded to a murder.

This was the beginning of what would eventually become much more than a Sergeant's personal notebook.

It was the embryonic foundation of **Practical Homicide Investigation**.

CHECKLIST AND FIELD GUIDE

The checklist and field guide Geberth had been developing would eventually become the nucleus of his textbook, *Practical Homicide Investigation*.

At first, however, it was simply a working tool for himself.

As Geberth continued gaining experience in the 7th Homicide Zone, he began implementing portions of his developing protocol into the squad's homicide investigations. He was particularly insistent on one fundamental principle:

Physical evidence had to be found, documented, collected, and preserved whenever possible.

Geberth understood that a confession was valuable, but physical evidence could corroborate the confession, establish the circumstances of the crime, connect the suspect to the victim or scene, and ultimately help secure a conviction.

That philosophy occasionally met resistance.

Some senior members of the Crime Scene Unit felt that Geberth was making them perform unnecessary additional work. They were accustomed to doing things a certain way, and this new Sergeant was demanding more.

Geberth wasn't interested in making the investigation easier.

He wanted to make it better.

On one occasion, Geberth suggested that Luminol be used at one of his crime scenes to search for evidence that might otherwise be invisible. Some of the veteran crime-scene personnel, apparently trying to push back against the additional work, told him that Luminol was carcinogenic.

Geberth immediately recognized the comment for what it was.

He facetiously replied:

“If you can spell it, you don’t have to use it.”

That stopped them in their tracks.

The message was clear.

When Vernon Geberth was running a homicide scene, he expected the **full-court press**—an all-out investigative effort to locate, document, collect, and preserve physical evidence.

He was not going to accept the idea that evidence should be overlooked simply because finding it required additional effort.

That philosophy would become one of the recurring themes of his career.

Establishing Himself as a Writer

While Geberth was developing his homicide protocol, he was also establishing himself as a professional writer.

In 1979, he published three additional articles concerning narcotics investigations:

“Narcotic Buy Operations,” *Law and Order Magazine*, Vol. 27, No. 1, Illinois, January 1979.

“The Undercover Officer,” *Law and Order Magazine*, Vol. 27, No. 3, Illinois, March 1979.

“The Confidential Informant,” *Law and Order Magazine*, Vol. 27, No. 6, Illinois, June 1979.

These articles demonstrated that Geberth could take practical police experience and translate it into useful professional material. He received favorable feedback from readers as well as from the publisher.

More importantly, the experience gave him confidence in his ability to write.

His first publication had been the condensed version of his master's thesis, “The Quarter Kids.” His subsequent narcotics articles established that he could write about police investigative practices based upon actual field experience.

But homicide was where his real passion was developing.

The First Two Published Articles on Homicide Investigation

By 1979, Geberth had accumulated considerable practical experience as a homicide supervisor. He had also conducted extensive research into homicide and death investigation.

He now felt comfortable and confident enough to put his investigative philosophy into print.

His first published articles specifically dealing with homicide investigation were a two-part series entitled:

“The Homicide Crime Scene—Part I,” *Law and Order Magazine*, Vol. 27, No. 7, Illinois, July 1979.

“The Homicide Crime Scene—Part II,” *Law and Order Magazine*, Vol. 27, No. 8, Illinois, August 1979.

These articles were significant for another reason.

They represented the first published expression of what would eventually become Geberth's comprehensive approach to practical homicide investigation.

The articles were based upon research, observation, and his experiences supervising actual murder investigations in the Bronx.

Geberth had moved beyond simply learning from existing texts.

He was beginning to formulate his own methodology.

He had taken what he had learned from veteran homicide detectives, forensic pathologists, crime-scene personnel, professional literature, closed cases, and his own experiences and was organizing it into a coherent investigative system.

The checklist was becoming a field guide.

The field guide was becoming a body of knowledge.

And that body of knowledge was beginning to attract attention.

The First Publisher Comes Calling

In August 1979, Geberth received an unexpected and extremely flattering offer from **Thomas C. Thomas Publishers**.

The publisher inquired whether he would be interested in updating one of its existing textbooks on homicide investigation, using his recently published articles and his developing expertise as the basis for the work.

For Geberth, this was a significant moment.

He had not set out to become a textbook author.

He had simply been trying to learn how to become a better homicide supervisor.

He had watched veteran detectives.

He had attended autopsies.

He had searched library card catalogs.

He had read everything he could find.

He had taken notes.

He had developed his own checklist.

He had tested his ideas in actual homicide investigations.

Then he had begun writing articles about what he was learning.

Now a publisher was asking him to write a book.

The timing, however, was not right.

Geberth was scheduled to attend the **F.B.I. National Academy at Quantico, Virginia**, beginning September 30, 1979, and continuing through December 14, 1979.

He informed the Thomas company that he would be away on an educational sabbatical during that period.

The publisher would have to wait.

But the offer confirmed something Geberth was beginning to realize:

The material he had been accumulating for his own use had value far beyond his personal checklist.

What had started as one Sergeant's effort to learn homicide investigation was beginning to evolve into something that could be taught to other investigators.

And the next stage of that evolution would begin at the F.B.I. National Academy.

THE FBI NATIONAL ACADEMY

Quantico, Virginia

On June 25, 1979, Sergeant Geberth received notification that he had been accepted to attend the **F.B.I. National Academy in Quantico, Virginia**.

It was a prestigious assignment and one that would enhance his professional credentials. Selection to attend the National Academy was an important recognition of his educational achievements and investigative experience.

There was, however, a personal price.

The program would take Geberth away from his family for almost three months, although there were several built-in weekend furloughs. His absence placed an additional burden on his wife, Laura, who would be home caring for their four children.

There was another complication.

Laura was preparing to begin nursing school that same fall.

For Geberth, the opportunity was too important to pass up. But he was fully aware that his attendance at Quantico would require a substantial sacrifice by his family.

He packed his bags and headed for Virginia.

The Forensic Education

Once he arrived at the FBI National Academy, Geberth took virtually every course the Academy offered relating to death investigation and forensic science.

He immersed himself in pathology, forensic evidence, crime-scene examination, and the scientific aspects of death investigations.

The experience was valuable, but Geberth began noticing something that surprised him.

In his opinion, the FBI's greatest strength was in the **forensic aspects of investigation**.

When homicide cases were presented in the classroom, however, Geberth noticed that the actual investigative material frequently originated with another police department or law-enforcement agency.

The FBI was presenting the forensic component, but Geberth was increasingly interested in something else:

How did the investigators actually solve the case?

That was where his own experience in Bronx Homicide began to distinguish him from much of what he was being taught.

He had spent years dealing with actual street-level investigations. He had seen the crime scenes. He had worked with detectives, witnesses, informants, suspects, prosecutors, medical personnel, and forensic specialists.

He understood that forensic science was enormously important—but it was only one component of a successful homicide investigation.

The investigation still had to be conducted.

The Student Becomes the Instructor

It didn't take long before some of the FBI agent-instructors began approaching Geberth.

They wanted to talk with him about homicide investigations.

They also wanted to discuss narcotics investigations.

Apparently, the FBI was already aware of Geberth's published articles.

His reputation had preceded him to Quantico.

One FBI agent from the New York Office, Agent Chris M., came down to Quantico specifically to speak with Geberth about conducting training classes after he returned to New York.

There was a practical reason for this interest.

The FBI had recently been given expanded responsibility for narcotics enforcement. Traditionally, narcotics enforcement had been largely deferred to the **Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)**. Under the new guidelines, the FBI would share concurrent jurisdiction with the DEA.

The Bureau was consequently recruiting experienced law-enforcement personnel with narcotics backgrounds to become FBI agents.

Geberth's years in O.C.C.B. Manhattan North Narcotics suddenly had another application.

His experience was valuable.

An Uncomfortable Lesson

While Geberth was attending the National Academy, he unexpectedly encountered one of his former investigators from the NYPD's O.C.C.B.

The former investigator was now attending the FBI's new-agent training class.

One evening, the two former colleagues decided to get together after class and have dinner at a local restaurant.

It seemed perfectly innocent.

The next day, however, Geberth received a telephone call in his dormitory room.

His former investigator explained that one of his FBI instructors had seen the two men together.

He had subsequently been informed that new FBI recruits were not supposed to associate with former law-enforcement associates.

The new recruit had been put on notice.

Geberth told him not to worry about it.

He wasn't insulted, and he understood the predicament in which his former investigator now found himself.

But Geberth filed the incident away in his memory.

To him, it illustrated a contradiction he believed he was seeing within the Bureau.

On one hand, National Academy attendees were being told how special they were to have been selected and that they were now part of an elite law-enforcement fraternity.

On the other hand, new FBI recruits were being cautioned about associating with the very law-enforcement personnel from whom many of them had come.

Geberth regarded the episode as another example of the institutional mentality he had encountered.

His years as a street cop had taught him something he called “**cop intuition.**”

He had learned to watch behavior as carefully as words.

He would remember the incident.

But he had more important things to accomplish at Quantico.

Testing the Methodology

The National Academy provided Geberth with something he could not obtain inside the NYPD.

A national—and even international—audience.

Representatives of law-enforcement agencies from all fifty states were attending the Academy. There were also representatives from foreign countries.

Geberth now had an opportunity to test the homicide theories, tactics, and procedures he had been developing in the Bronx against investigators who had experiences very different from his own.

He began discussing his ideas with fellow attendees.

The response surprised him.

His material was not regarded as overly complicated or academic.

Quite the opposite.

The investigators considered it **practical**.

It was down-to-earth.

It dealt with problems they actually encountered.

Geberth realized that the methodology he had developed in the South Bronx was not limited to New York City.

The principles were transferable.

Then something happened that really got his attention.

FBI instructors began asking him to discuss some of his tactics and procedures with them so they could incorporate aspects of his practical approach into their classroom presentations.

Geberth had entered the National Academy as a student.

He was now being asked to contribute to the instruction.

That was the moment when something clicked.

He had been collecting notes.

He had been studying books.

He had been attending autopsies.

He had been reviewing closed cases.

He had developed his own checklist and field guide.

He had written articles.

And now his methodology was being tested against experienced investigators from across the United States and other countries.

It worked.

For the first time, Geberth realized that he had enough material—and enough practical experience—to write a comprehensive textbook on homicide investigation.

The idea that had started as a Sergeant's personal field guide was becoming something much larger.

Another Publication

Even while attending the National Academy, Geberth continued writing.

His eighth published article dealt with youth violence and homicide.

It was entitled:

The Crews

Law and Order Magazine, Vol. 28, No. 2, Illinois, February 1980.

The article continued his examination of youth violence and the criminal subculture that had first emerged in his earlier research on the “Quarter Kids.”

Geberth also received a highly complimentary letter from **Jack Stewart, Director of the FBI Academy in Quantico.**

The letter was particularly meaningful because it appeared that the FBI was not only aware of Geberth's published work but was also following his academic progress while he was at the Academy.

The recognition reinforced what Geberth had begun to understand.

He was no longer simply a Detective Sergeant who happened to write articles.

He was developing a body of professional knowledge.

And that knowledge was beginning to attract attention beyond the NYPD.

The FBI National Academy had provided the test.

His homicide methodology had passed.

Now there was only one thing left to do.

Write the book.

HOMICIDE TRAINING — 1980

Practical Homicide Investigation Takes Shape

The FBI didn't waste any time putting Geberth to work.

Following his experience at the FBI National Academy, the New York Office of the FBI requested Geberth's services through the NYPD to participate in joint homicide-training programs.

During **February, April, September, and October of 1980**, Geberth conducted homicide training classes at **Camp Smith** and the **Westchester County Training Center**, working with Special Agent Chris M. of the FBI.

There was an important distinction in what Geberth was now doing.

He wasn't simply presenting a collection of homicide experiences.

He was teaching a methodology.

Geberth had begun referring to his instruction as:

“Practical Homicide Investigation.”

The name was deliberate.

His approach was not intended to be an academic exercise or a theoretical discussion of criminal behavior. It was based on what actually worked in the field—what investigators needed to know when they walked into a murder scene and were confronted with the responsibility of determining what had happened, identifying the perpetrator, recovering the evidence, and building a case that would stand up in court.

The concept had been developing for several years.

It had started with Geberth's personal notes and field observations after his transfer to the 7th Homicide Zone.

It had developed into a checklist and field guide.

He had incorporated portions of it into actual homicide investigations.

He had tested his ideas with veteran homicide detectives.

He had compared his experiences with the professional literature.

He had attended autopsies and discussed cases with forensic pathologists.

He had written articles.

He had tested his theories at the FBI National Academy with investigators from across the country and abroad.

Now he was teaching the methodology to other law-enforcement officers.

And Geberth was simultaneously doing something else.

He was researching.

He was writing.

He was accumulating material for the textbook he had begun envisioning.

Every homicide scene provided another lesson.

Every training class produced another question.

Every discussion with an investigator exposed another problem that needed to be addressed.

Every article he wrote forced him to organize his thoughts and put his methodology into words.

The material was growing.

But so was the task.

Geberth now understood that writing a comprehensive textbook on homicide investigation would require far more than simply gathering together the articles he had already published.

He would have to organize years of investigative experience into a systematic body of knowledge.

He would have to research the forensic sciences in greater depth.

He would have to examine investigative procedures from the initial response through the final disposition of the case.

He would have to distinguish between what sounded good in theory and what actually worked on the street.

And he would have to create something that could be used by investigators—not merely read by academics.

The idea was no longer just a possibility.

Practical Homicide Investigation was becoming a discipline, a training program, and ultimately, a book.

But there was still a lot more work to be done.

THE PUBLISHER

When Sergeant Geberth returned from the FBI National Academy, he knew what he wanted to do.

He wanted to write a comprehensive textbook on homicide investigation.

There was only one problem.

He needed a publisher.

Geberth contacted **Thomas C. Thomas Publishers, Inc.**, the company that had approached him in August 1979 after reading his articles in *Law and Order Magazine*. He assumed that their earlier interest meant they were prepared to discuss a serious publishing arrangement.

He quickly discovered otherwise.

The company expected Geberth to write the book for them **gratis**.

They apparently felt that he should be grateful simply to have his work published.

Geberth's response was characteristically direct.

“Listen. I'm from New York City. Nothing is gratis, and there are a lot of publishers in Manhattan.”

That ended that conversation.

Geberth began querying other publishers.

Some rejected the proposal.

Then he found an interested publisher.

Elsevier Science Publishing Company had recently established a **Forensic Sciences** publishing line and expressed interest in Geberth's proposed work.

For the first time, the possibility of publishing the textbook became a realistic proposition.

But finding a publisher was only the beginning.

FORMULATING THE PRACTICAL HOMICIDE INVESTIGATION TEXTBOOK

In early 1980, Vernon seriously began designing and formulating the textbook that would become **Practical Homicide Investigation**.

He was already writing articles for *Law and Order Magazine*, and he deliberately wrote some of them with the future textbook in mind. The articles would provide building blocks for the larger work.

But Geberth first had to decide what kind of book he wanted to write.

He had some experience teaching college-level Criminal Justice courses at Mercy College in Dobbs Ferry, New York. As part of that teaching assignment, he had been required to use selected academic textbooks.

Geberth found many of those books frustrating.

They were, in his view, **written by academics for academics**.

The material could be intellectually sound, but it often lacked something he considered essential:

Practical experience.

There were few practical examples of what an investigator should actually do when confronted with a homicide.

Geberth knew he could do better.

He decided that his textbook would be constructed around a **classroom curriculum**, but it would be written for the person who actually had to investigate a murder.

It would contain practical examples.

It would contain photographs and other visual material.

It would contain investigative checklists.

And, most importantly, it would provide investigators with a systematic method for conducting an intelligent homicide investigation.

Designing the Book

Geberth decided that the textbook should follow the natural progression of a homicide investigation.

It would be chronological.

The book would begin with the first officer's response to the homicide scene and then progress through the various investigative assignments that developed during the preliminary investigation.

The reader would follow the investigation as it unfolded.

The book would begin with the homicide crime scene and the initial response. It would then address the responsibilities of the first officer, followed by the duties of the detectives arriving at the scene.

From there, the investigation would progress into crime-scene processing, photography, sketching, searching, evidence collection, medicolegal considerations, suspect identification, and ultimately the management of the homicide investigation.

Geberth originally designed the textbook around **sixteen chapters**:

1. **The Homicide Crime Scene**
2. **First Officer's Duties: General**
3. **First Officer's Duties: Specific**
4. **The Preliminary Investigation at the Scene: The Detectives**
5. **Specific Investigative Duties at the Scene**
6. **The Crime Scene Photographs**
7. **The Crime Scene Sketch**
8. **The Homicide Crime Scene Search**
9. **Estimating Time of Death**
10. **The Identity of the Deceased**
11. **Modes of Death**
12. **Collection of Evidence**
13. **The News Media in Homicide Investigations**
14. **The Autopsy**
15. **Identification of Suspects**
16. **Managing the Homicide Investigation**

The structure was deliberate.

The reader would not be thrown into a discussion of forensic pathology before understanding what the investigator had encountered at the crime scene.

Instead, the book would unfold in the same sequence that an actual homicide investigation unfolded.

First officer.

Crime scene.

Detectives.

Evidence.

Forensics.

Suspects.

Management.

It was a practical progression designed for practical investigators.

A Textbook for the Working Cop

Geberth envisioned the book as an indispensable teaching text and practical reference for field practitioners.

It was designed for the **working cop**.

Although the research supporting the book would be empirical and extensive, Geberth did not want the finished product buried beneath academic language or theoretical discussions that had little application at a crime scene.

He wanted the information to be definitive.

But he also wanted it to be usable.

That distinction became one of the defining characteristics of the book.

The textbook would not merely tell an investigator *what* something was.

It would explain **what to look for, why it mattered, what could be done about it, and where the investigator could obtain additional information.**

Translating Science for Investigators

The task became increasingly demanding.

While Geberth was designing the textbook chapter by chapter, he was simultaneously publishing articles that would eventually be incorporated into the manuscript.

At the same time, he was researching the scientific and medicolegal material that would support the investigative procedures.

He realized that he could not simply rely on his own experience.

He needed experts.

So Geberth began contacting specialists in the various disciplines that intersected with homicide investigation.

He interviewed experts in:

- forensic pathology,
- forensic odontology,
- forensic anthropology,
- and other specialized forensic disciplines.

He would obtain their published papers and journal articles relating to their areas of expertise.

Then Geberth would take the highly technical material and rewrite it into language that a police investigator could understand.

But he did not presume to become an expert in their specialties.

After rewriting the material, he would send it back to the appropriate expert for review and ask them to verify its accuracy.

On more than one occasion, the experts would read his version and tell him something to the effect of:

“You made it look too easy.”

Geberth understood the compliment.

But he also understood his role.

He wasn't trying to become a forensic pathologist.

He wasn't trying to become a forensic odontologist.

He wasn't trying to become a forensic anthropologist.

His response was essentially:

“I'm not trying to be you.”

His objective was much more practical.

He wanted to give investigators **viable alternatives** and enough forensic information to recognize when those disciplines could assist their investigations.

He also wanted investigators to know where they could go to obtain additional information and professional assistance.

That philosophy would become fundamental to *Practical Homicide Investigation*.

Geberth was not attempting to turn police officers into scientists.

He was teaching investigators **how to use science**.

And that was the difference.

What had begun several years earlier as a Sergeant's handwritten checklist was now becoming a comprehensive system of homicide investigation—built from street experience, tested in the field, supported by scientific research, reviewed by recognized experts, and organized specifically for the investigator who had to walk into the homicide scene and figure out what happened.

It was a tedious, time-consuming undertaking.

But the book was taking shape.

Practical Homicide Investigation was no longer an idea.

It was becoming a manuscript.

HOMICIDE PUBLICATIONS IN 1980

By 1980, Sergeant Geberth was no longer writing isolated articles. He was building a body of published material that would eventually be incorporated into **Practical Homicide Investigation**.

That year, he published five additional articles dealing specifically with homicide investigation:

- **“Supervision of Detectives,”** *Law and Order Magazine*, Vol. 28, No. 5, Illinois, May 1980.
- **“Estimating Time of Death, Part I,”** *Law and Order Magazine*, Vol. 28, No. 7, Illinois, July 1980.
- **“Estimating Time of Death, Part II,”** *Law and Order Magazine*, Vol. 28, No. 8, Illinois, August 1980.
- **“The Homicide Crime Scene,”** an updated version, *Law and Order Magazine*, Vol. 28, No. 10, Illinois, October 1980.
- **“Practical Homicide Investigation: First Officer's Duties,”** *Law and Order Magazine*, Vol. 28, No. 11, Illinois, November 1980.

Each article represented another piece of the developing textbook.

Geberth was essentially writing the book one subject at a time.

He researched a topic, tested the principles against his experience, organized the material, published it, received feedback, and then incorporated the lessons into the larger manuscript.

The textbook was growing organically out of his teaching and investigative experience.

CHIEF OF DETECTIVES HOMICIDE INVESTIGATORS COURSE

October 2, 1980

The New York City Police Department was receiving increasingly favorable feedback from the FBI concerning Geberth's homicide training.

As a result, he was invited to participate in the prestigious **Chief of Detectives Homicide Investigators Course**.

For Geberth, this was a significant development.

He was no longer simply teaching FBI personnel and investigators from other jurisdictions.

He was being asked to present his methodology to experienced NYPD homicide investigators.

Geberth was given a two-hour block of instruction entitled:

“Practical Homicide Investigation.”

It was the first time he formally presented the course under that title at the Chief of Detectives Homicide Investigators Course.

The response was extremely favorable.

But Geberth knew he had just faced one of the toughest audiences imaginable.

There is nothing harder than presenting to your own peers—particularly when some of those peers believe that they should be standing at the podium instead of you.

New York City cops were traditionally cynical, suspicious, and not easily impressed.

They had seen plenty of instructors come and go.

They had worked murders.

They had been on crime scenes.

They had developed their own methods.

And now a Detective Sergeant was standing in front of them telling them about **Practical Homicide Investigation**.

Geberth remembered the biblical observation:

“A prophet is honored everywhere except in his own hometown.”

Nothing could have seemed more appropriate.

As he stood before that room filled with over 200 hardened NYPD homicide investigators, Geberth could almost see the traditional New York **eye-roll treatment**.

He knew he had to earn their respect.

He wasn't going to get it simply because he was the instructor.

He would have to demonstrate that what he was teaching worked.

And that was precisely what he did.

The successful presentation was another major step in the development of the textbook.

The methodology that had begun as Geberth's personal checklist was now being presented to some of the most experienced homicide investigators in the country.

And they were listening.

HOMICIDE PUBLICATIONS IN 1981

Geberth continued publishing at an extraordinary pace.

In 1981, he published three additional articles on homicide investigation that would eventually be incorporated into his textbook:

- **“The Identity of the Deceased,”** *Law and Order Magazine*, Vol. 29, No. 2, Illinois, February 1981.
- **“The News Media in Homicide Investigation,”** *Law and Order Magazine*, Vol. 29, No. 7, Illinois, July 1981.
- **“Psychological Profiling,”** *Law and Order Magazine*, Vol. 29, No. 9, Illinois, September 1981.

The third article represented another important development in Geberth's professional writing.

In September 1981, he traveled to Quantico to interview **John D. and Robert R.**, who had pioneered the concept of criminal profiling.

Geberth's article represented one of the earliest law-enforcement publications dealing specifically with criminal profiling.

The FBI subsequently used Geberth's article as a handout in its training program for profilers.

Once again, Geberth was taking an emerging specialty and translating it into practical information that could be understood and used by investigators.

HOMICIDE TRAINING — 1981

By 1981, Geberth's teaching program had become a substantial undertaking.

During that year, he presented **nine homicide-training classes** and instructed approximately **511 attendees**.

Two of the programs were paid presentations—one in **Fairfax County** and another at the **Burlington County Police Academy**.

He also returned to the **Chief of Detectives Homicide Investigators Course**, where he presented *Practical Homicide Investigation* again.

This time, however, his block of instruction had increased from two hours to **four hours**.

That was significant.

The course was no longer merely an introduction to his methodology.

There was now enough material to support an extended curriculum.

Geberth also presented **three Practical Homicide Investigation courses for the NYPD Police Academy's CIC Course**.

In addition, he conducted **three FBI homicide-training classes at Camp Smith**, with Special Agent Chris M. coordinating the programs.

The pattern was becoming unmistakable.

The articles were feeding the textbook.

The textbook research was feeding the training.

The training was testing the material.

And the reactions of experienced investigators were providing Geberth with additional information that could be incorporated into the book.

It had become a continuous cycle:

Research → Write → Teach → Test → Revise → Publish.

By this point, *Practical Homicide Investigation* was no longer simply an idea Geberth had discussed with a prospective publisher.

It was becoming a comprehensive system of homicide investigation that was already being taught to investigators throughout the law-enforcement community.

The book was still unfinished.

But Geberth was no longer wondering whether he could write it.

He was now trying to determine how much knowledge could be packed into it without losing the practical quality that had made the material so successful in the classroom.

FORMULATING AND PREPARING THE MANUSCRIPT

By this stage, Vernon Geberth had accumulated an enormous amount of material for the textbook.

Crime-scene photographs, diagrams, investigative notes, research papers, references, articles, and other supporting material had been collected and organized into folders according to subject.

The research was essentially complete.

Now came the difficult part.

He had to turn all of that material into a manuscript.

The chapters had to be written, edited, reorganized, illustrated, referenced, and then rewritten—over and over again.

There were no computers.

There was no word-processing software.

There was no “delete” key that could make a paragraph disappear and allow the remaining text to automatically move into place.

There was typewriter paper.

There was carbon paper.

There were scissors.

There was paste.

And there was Laura.

Geberth's wife, Laura, literally typed the textbook **page by page, at least ten times**, before the final manuscript was completed.

The Geberth dining-room table became the command center for the entire project.

Manuscript pages covered the table.

Folders were stacked around the room.

Photographs and diagrams were laid out according to chapter.

References and notes were scattered everywhere.

The dining-room table had effectively become a publishing office.

Vernon later described the process:

“I'm sure you've heard of the expression ‘cut and paste.’ Well, Laura and I would review the typewritten pages and literally cut out the materials that we didn't want and paste the new materials back onto the 8½ x 11 manuscript pages, which Laura would then re-type.”

And then they would do it again.

And again.

And again.

The process continued until Geberth was satisfied with each chapter.

The entire manuscript would occupy the dining-room table for weeks at a time.

There was only one exception.

When a holiday approached, the family needed the dining-room table for its intended purpose.

The manuscript would have to be cleared away.

The pages, folders, photographs, and other materials would be carefully moved so the family could sit down and have a holiday meal.

Once the holiday was over, the table would once again disappear beneath manuscript pages.

The Domino Effect

Editing a book under these conditions created another enormous problem.

If Geberth changed something in one chapter, that change might affect material appearing in another chapter.

A reference might have to be changed.

A photograph might have to be moved.

A paragraph might have to be rewritten.

A later chapter might have to be amended to remain consistent with the earlier change.

Every alteration created a domino effect.

And every alteration meant that Laura had to retype the affected pages.

This was not simply a matter of correcting a few words.

Sometimes entire pages had to be retyped.

The placement of crime-scene photographs and diagrams created another complication. References had to be checked, illustrations had to be positioned, captions had to be prepared, and the manuscript had to remain coherent after every revision.

By the time the final manuscript was ready for submission, Laura had literally retyped the book **at least ten times**.

It was truly a family project.

Vernon also took the precaution of copyrighting each chapter before submitting the manuscript in order to protect his rights to the material.

The Crime-Scene Photographs

There was another issue that Geberth had not anticipated.

He had naively assumed that the NYPD administration would be pleased to assist in the production of a professional homicide-investigation textbook.

After all, the book was going to deal with homicide investigation, and he was a New York City Detective Sergeant who was writing about the very work that NYPD detectives performed.

Geberth had already requested and obtained professional contributions from numerous agencies and individuals.

The FBI at Quantico had been supportive.

Law and Order Magazine had encouraged his work.

Other law-enforcement personnel were enthusiastic about contributing.

Many people understood that this was going to be a significant professional publication and were happy to participate.

Geberth believed the NYPD would react in the same way.

He was wrong.

As a Detective Sergeant assigned to homicide, Geberth made a specific request to the NYPD.

He asked for permission to use **official crime-scene photographs from the City of New York Photo Unit** for inclusion in a professional textbook that was to be published by **Elsevier Science Publishing Company, Inc.**

Geberth had already identified several excellent photographs and had assigned them to specific chapters.

He expected the request to be approved.

Instead, the department rejected it.

The response left Geberth extremely disappointed.

The implication, as he understood it, was that he was attempting to profit financially from materials owned by the City of New York by using them in a commercial publication.

Geberth interpreted the response differently.

He suspected that there was some jealousy or resentment involved.

His reaction was characteristically brief:

“No problem.”

There was, however, an important detail the department did not know.

When Geberth had specifically requested **official** NYPD crime-scene photographs, he had not mentioned that he had personally taken numerous crime-scene photographs in color.

These photographs were different.

They were **unofficial photographs** because they had not been incorporated into official NYPD reports or otherwise become the property of the City of New York.

They were Geberth's own photographs.

That distinction would eventually become extremely important.

The NYPD had said no to the use of its official photographs.

But they had not said anything about photographs that belonged to Geberth himself.

And those photographs would ultimately help provide the visual foundation for the textbook.

A Family Effort Becomes a Professional Publication

The manuscript that was eventually submitted represented years of work.

Geberth had researched the subject extensively.

He had investigated homicides.

He had attended autopsies.

He had consulted forensic specialists.

He had written and published numerous articles.

He had taught homicide investigation to police officers, detectives, FBI personnel, and investigators from other jurisdictions.

He had tested his methodology against experienced practitioners.

And now, with Laura's assistance, he had transformed thousands of pages of research and practical experience into a comprehensive manuscript.

The undertaking was particularly significant because there had been **no major new textbook devoted specifically to homicide investigation for more than twenty years.**

It was also unusual because Geberth was writing the book as a working member of the NYPD.

He wasn't an academic sitting in a university office writing about homicide from a theoretical perspective.

He was a Detective Sergeant who was actively supervising homicide investigations and teaching investigators what he had learned in the field.

The book was being built from the ground up.

And sitting in the middle of it all was the Geberth dining-room table—covered with manuscript pages, photographs, diagrams, references, scissors, paste, and countless revisions.

Eventually, the clutter would disappear.

The table would once again become a dining-room table.

But by then, the manuscript that had occupied it for so long would be on its way to becoming **Practical Homicide Investigation**.

SUBMISSION OF THE MANUSCRIPT

By 1981, Sergeant Geberth had finally completed the manuscript.

After years of research, writing, teaching, rewriting, cutting, pasting, and retyping, the manuscript for **Practical Homicide Investigation** was ready to be submitted for review and publication.

Geberth believed the hard part was over.

He was about to discover otherwise.

Unknown to him, the publishing company had entered into an agreement with a forensic scientist, **Barry F.**, who had been appointed Series Editor for its new forensic-science publishing line.

Barry F. was not a police investigator.

He worked as a laboratory technician with the Los Angeles Police Department.

Nevertheless, Barry F. was given responsibility for reviewing Geberth's manuscript.

What happened next infuriated Geberth.

Barry F. took Geberth's manuscript and sent it to someone at the LAPD for review.

Geberth considered this completely unacceptable.

The manuscript was his copyrighted intellectual property. He had spent years developing the material, and he had already obtained independent evaluations and

favorable reviews from FBI personnel and recognized practitioners in the field of homicide investigation.

Now his manuscript had been sent to another police agency without his permission.

Geberth also believed there was an ulterior motive.

He suspected that Barry F. was attempting to use the manuscript as a foundation for having someone at the LAPD produce a competing homicide textbook.

The situation quickly developed into what Geberth regarded as a classic **West Coast versus East Coast** clash.

Barry F. attempted to use the criticism coming from the West Coast to persuade the publisher that Geberth's manuscript should be rejected.

Geberth wasn't having it.

Geberth Raises Hell

Geberth arranged a meeting with the acquisitions editor, **Ken B.**

And he raised holy hell.

Geberth made his position unmistakably clear.

He told Ken B. that Barry F. had no business sending his copyrighted manuscript to another agency for review without his authorization.

More importantly, Geberth challenged Barry F.'s qualifications to evaluate the investigative portions of the manuscript.

Barry F. was a laboratory technician.

Geberth's manuscript dealt with **homicide investigation**.

There was a difference.

Geberth told the acquisitions editor, in substance, that Barry F. should stick to the laboratory and leave the investigative material to people who actually conducted homicide investigations.

Geberth also pointed out that the manuscript had already received independent evaluations from FBI personnel and experienced homicide investigators.

He wasn't submitting an untested manuscript.

The work had been developed from years of practical homicide experience and had already been used in professional training programs.

Ken B. listened.

Instead of rejecting Geberth's manuscript, the publisher took a completely different course.

The confrontation resulted in a significant change.

Ken B., the acquisitions editor, appointed Vernon Geberth as a Series Editor for investigative textbooks.

The man who had submitted one homicide manuscript was now being given an opportunity to help shape an entire publishing series devoted to practical investigative subjects.

It was an extraordinary turn of events.

The Series Editor

There was an additional history behind the controversy.

Barry F. had originally come into the publishing company to update the scientific portions of an established textbook, **Techniques of Crime Scene Investigation**, by Svensson and Wendel, originally published in 1965.

Barry F. had a contract with Elsevier to update the book.

As successive editions appeared, his role expanded.

By the fifth edition, his name had replaced the original authors on the title.

Geberth regarded this as an example of how an academic could gradually assume control of an established work while expanding his influence within the publishing company.

Barry F. subsequently became a series editor for other scientific textbooks.

Geberth now had his own opportunity.

And he intended to make the most of it.

Over the course of his publishing career, Geberth would eventually acquire approximately **65 investigative textbooks** for his series, *Practical Aspects of Criminal and Forensic Investigations*.

In comparison, Barry F. would be associated with approximately five textbooks in his scientific series.

Geberth had effectively neutralized the attempt to undermine his manuscript—and had ultimately established himself as an important force in practical investigative publishing.

The episode also reinforced one of Geberth's fundamental principles:

Experience matters.

Scientific knowledge was indispensable to criminal investigation.

But knowing science was not the same thing as conducting an investigation.

Geberth intended to make sure that distinction remained clear.

PUBLICATIONS IN 1982

While the publishing battle was unfolding, Geberth continued to write.

In 1982, he published three additional articles.

Two dealt with burglary investigation, while another dealt specifically with homicide and would eventually be incorporated into *Practical Homicide Investigation*.

The publications were:

- **“Practical Burglary Investigation, Part I,”** *Law and Order Magazine*, Vol. 30, No. 2, Illinois, February 1982.
- **“Practical Burglary Investigation, Part II,”** *Law and Order Magazine*, Vol. 30, No. 3, Illinois, March 1982.
- **“Autopsy: The Medicolegal Investigation of Death,”** *Law and Order Magazine*, Vol. 30, No. 7, Illinois, July 1982.

The continued publication of his articles served another purpose.

Geberth was demonstrating that his expertise extended beyond a single book.

He was establishing a continuing body of practical investigative literature.

HOMICIDE TRAINING — 1982

By 1982, Geberth's training program had expanded dramatically.

During the year, he presented **eighteen homicide-training classes** and instructed approximately **1,289 attendees**.

Six of those programs were paid presentations:

- Two programs for the **University of Delaware**.

- One for **Connecticut State Central College**.
- Three programs for **Law Enforcement for Women (L.E.A.W.)** in Norwalk, Connecticut.

He also conducted an FBI program entitled “**Applied Criminal Psychology**” in Glen Cove.

In addition, Geberth made a professional-courtesy presentation to **22 physicians at the Riverside Practitioner's Society**.

His homicide curriculum continued to gain traction within the NYPD.

He presented **Practical Homicide Investigation three times at the Chief of Detectives Homicide Investigators Course**, again receiving a four-hour block of instruction.

He also presented two Practical Homicide Investigation courses for the **NYPD Police Academy CIC Course**.

His teaching expanded into academia as well.

He presented a program for **John Jay College** and conducted three in-service programs for NSU personnel, including sessions for **48 NSU members** and another for **52 members of the service**.

The numbers told the story.

The numbers told the story.

In a relatively short period, Geberth had gone from a Detective Sergeant developing a personal homicide checklist to an instructor teaching hundreds—and then more than a thousand—law-enforcement personnel.

The manuscript had been completed.

The publisher had been secured.

The conflict over who was qualified to evaluate investigative material had resulted in Geberth becoming a Series Editor.

And his practical methodology was being taught throughout the law-enforcement community.

The book that had begun as a collection of notes on a Homicide Sergeant's dining-room table was now on the verge of becoming a published professional standard.

PUBLICATION OF PRACTICAL HOMICIDE INVESTIGATION

After almost five years of research, writing, teaching, rewriting, and testing his methodology in the field, Vernon Geberth finally reached the moment he had been working toward.

Practical Homicide Investigation was published by **Elsevier Science Publishing Company** in October 1982, with a 1983 publication date appearing on the imprint.

For Geberth, the publication represented the culmination of an enormous undertaking.

The book had not been written in an academic office.

It had evolved from homicide scenes in the Bronx, from discussions with veteran detectives, from autopsy rooms, from forensic consultations, from thousands of pages of research, from professional articles, and from classrooms where Geberth had tested his ideas against working investigators.

By the time the manuscript became a published textbook, Geberth had presented his homicide-investigation material to more than **2,200 attendees** in classrooms and workshops in New York City and throughout various states, including programs conducted for the NYPD and the New York Office of the FBI.

The classroom had effectively served as his laboratory.

He had presented the material.

Investigators had challenged it.

He had answered their questions.

He had revised portions of the methodology.

And the process had continued until he was satisfied that the material was both practical and defensible.

Now the book was in print.

A New Role

The publication also formally established Geberth in his new role as **Series Editor of Practical Aspects of Criminal and Forensic Investigations** for Elsevier Science Publishing Company.

The transition was remarkable.

A few years earlier, Geberth had been a Detective Sergeant in the 7th Homicide Zone trying to determine what he needed to read to become a better homicide supervisor.

He had been told:

“We don't read here, Sergeant. We do.”

He had responded by doing both.

He investigated.

He studied.

He wrote.

And eventually, he produced the book he had originally discovered did not exist.

The FBI Distinguished Lecturer

On **September 8, 1983**, Geberth received another extraordinary recognition.

He was invited to serve as a **Distinguished Lecturer at the FBI Academy in Quantico, Virginia.**

The invitation was significant.

The FBI National Academy had once been the place where Geberth went as a student to expand his knowledge of forensic science and death investigation.

Now he was returning as a recognized authority and lecturer.

The student had become the instructor.

The practical homicide methodology that he had developed in the South Bronx, organized into a textbook, and tested in classrooms was now being presented at the institution where he had originally studied.

For Geberth, that represented more than professional recognition.

It was validation of the entire concept behind the book.

The Elsevier Reception

On **October 14**, Elsevier Science Publishing Company held a reception at the **Summit Hotel Penthouse Presidential Suite** to honor Vernon Geberth as the author of *Practical Homicide Investigation* and as the new Series Editor of *Practical Aspects of Criminal and Forensic Investigations*.

Geberth had invited a number of NYPD dignitaries, including **J.S., Chief of Detectives.**

It was a special evening for Vernon and Laura.

Friends, family, and professional colleagues gathered to celebrate what had taken nearly five years of work to accomplish.

The book represented a professional achievement, but it was also a family achievement.

Laura had typed the manuscript again and again.

She had lived with the manuscript pages covering the dining-room table.

She had cut and pasted pages with Vernon.

She had retyped page after page as the book evolved.

Now she was there to celebrate the finished product.

Recognition From the FBI

The publication also received recognition from the FBI.

Geberth received a **Letter of Congratulations from the FBI addressed directly to Police Commissioner Robert McGuire.**

That was particularly meaningful.

The FBI was not merely congratulating the author privately.

It was communicating its recognition of Geberth's professional accomplishment directly to the Commissioner of the New York City Police Department.

Geberth also presented the Police Commissioner and the Chief of Detectives with autographed copies of the newly published textbook.

The book was attracting considerable attention.

It was being described as the **first major homicide-investigation textbook written by a practicing homicide investigator in approximately twenty years.**

For Geberth, that distinction was especially important.

The book was not simply another academic contribution to the literature.

It was written by someone who had actually worked homicide investigations, supervised homicide detectives, responded to murder scenes, attended autopsies, consulted with forensic specialists, and taught investigators in the field.

The book was written for the investigator who had to walk into the crime scene and figure out what happened.

And now that book was finally in the hands of the law-enforcement community.

The publication generated substantial publicity, including coverage in the New York press.

One headline in the **New York Daily News** read:

“THE COP WHO WROTE THE BOOK ON MURDER.”

The headline captured the significance of what Geberth had accomplished.

After nearly five years of research, writing, teaching, revision, and persistence, the handwritten notes and typewritten pages that had once covered the Geberth dining-room table had become a published textbook.

Practical Homicide Investigation had arrived.

The publication generated substantial publicity, including coverage in the *New York Daily News*. The headline captured the unusual nature of Geberth's achievement:

Beneath the headline was an even more provocative line:

“GEBERTH UNDER INVESTIGATION.”

For a New York City cop, seeing himself described in the newspaper as “the cop who wrote the book on murder” was quite a moment.

But the words “**under investigation**” were certain to get attention.

And, as it turned out, there was a story behind that headline.

THE ATTACK

“GEBERTH UNDER INVESTIGATION”

No sooner had the *New York Daily News* article appeared than Vernon Geberth was put under investigation for writing his textbook.

Geberth never forgot the sinking feeling he experienced when he received a telephone call from an Internal Affairs captain.

The captain began the conversation with an almost absurd contradiction.

First, he congratulated Sergeant Geberth on authoring his new textbook.

Then came the punch line.

The captain informed him that Geberth was now the subject of an official NYPD investigation.

Geberth asked him directly:

“Why am I under investigation?”

The captain replied that Geberth had allegedly violated a Police Department ruling concerning the use of **official crime-scene photographs**.

Vernon immediately understood what was happening.

He remembered his original request to the NYPD for permission to use official crime-scene photographs in his textbook.

The department had denied that request.

But Geberth had never said that all of the photographs in his book were official NYPD photographs.

He had personally taken many crime-scene photographs in color.

Those photographs were **unofficial** because they had not been incorporated into official NYPD reports and were not property of the City of New York.

The distinction was critical.

The Internal Affairs captain apparently didn't see it that way.

At one point, the captain demanded:

“By whose authority did you author this book?”

Geberth's response was immediate and sarcastic:

“How about the First Amendment, Captain?”

Meanwhile, Geberth was receiving letters of congratulations from the FBI and other law-enforcement agencies praising his contribution to the field of homicide investigation.

The contrast was remarkable.

Other law-enforcement agencies were congratulating him for producing a professional textbook that would benefit investigators.

His own department was investigating him for writing it.

The Police Commissioner

Fortunately for Geberth, there was someone in the NYPD who understood what he had accomplished.

Police Commissioner **Robert McGuire**, to whom Geberth had presented an autographed copy of the book, thought highly of him and recognized the professional significance of his work.

McGuire was also a fellow graduate of **Iona College**.

The Commissioner ultimately intervened and prevented the investigation from becoming the career-threatening matter that Geberth suspected some people wanted it to become.

Geberth knew he was on solid ground.

So he waited.

He would let Internal Affairs conduct whatever investigation they thought necessary.

He had nothing to hide.

The Great Photograph Hunt

Then Geberth heard what that eunuch captain from Internal Affairs had done.

Through department channels, he learned that the Internal Affairs captain had ordered the **official crime-scene photographs from every homicide scene to which Geberth had responded**.

That was no small assignment.

Geberth had personally responded to more than **800 homicide crime scenes** during his career.

The captain apparently obtained the official photographs from those cases and began comparing them with the photographs appearing in Geberth's textbook.

The purpose was obvious.

They were looking for evidence that Geberth had used official NYPD photographs in his book despite having been denied permission.

The investigation became a massive photographic comparison.

Photograph after photograph was examined.

Case after case was checked.

The captain was apparently convinced that he would find evidence proving that Geberth had violated department policy.

But he didn't.

Because Geberth had known exactly what he was doing.

The photographs in the textbook were his own.

Eventually, the investigation reached a dead end.

Frustrated and apparently furious, the Internal Affairs captain telephoned Geberth at his command.

In a loud and angry voice, he demanded:

“Sergeant Geberth, what is the difference between ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ crime-scene photographs?”

Geberth knew exactly what the captain had failed to understand.

His answer was delivered with equal force:

“Read Chapter 6, you fucking moron.”

That was the end of the conversation.

Geberth knew he had beaten him.

And he knew the captain was furious.

But there was nothing the captain could do about it.

The answer was sitting in black and white in the very textbook that had triggered the investigation.

Chapter 6: The Crime Scene Photographs.

The distinction between official and unofficial photographs had been explained in the book all along.

Internal Affairs had spent an enormous amount of time and effort examining hundreds of official photographs from Geberth's homicide investigations.

They had found nothing.

The investigation had effectively proven Geberth's point.

The photographs in his textbook were not stolen from the NYPD.

They were his own photographs.

Vindication

In retrospect, Geberth viewed the entire episode as an attempt born out of jealousy.

The irony was impossible to miss.

While the NYPD investigation was taking place, Geberth was receiving congratulations from the FBI and other police agencies for producing a professional textbook on homicide investigation.

The FBI was recognizing his work.

Other law-enforcement agencies were recognizing his work.

The publisher was recognizing his work.

The law-enforcement community was recognizing his work.

And his own department had opened an investigation into him for writing the book.

Ultimately, the investigation went nowhere.

Geberth had protected himself by understanding t

Geberth had protected himself by understanding the distinction between the City's official photographs and his own unofficial photographs.

He had also protected his work by copyrighting the manuscript and its individual chapters before submitting it for publication.

Most importantly, he had refused to be intimidated.

The attempted investigation had failed.

The book remained in print.

And the chapter explaining the difference between official and unofficial crime-scene photographs remained right where it belonged:

in Chapter 6.

Looking back on the entire episode, there was another irony.

The department had effectively spent time and resources conducting an exhaustive photographic investigation into the very homicide investigator who had written the book explaining how such investigations should be conducted.

And, in the end, the investigator had out-investigated the investigators.

A Book That Still Teaches

Years later, the textbook would continue to serve its intended purpose.

Readers would study Geberth's detailed descriptions, investigative procedures, forensic explanations, and the extraordinary homicide cases used to illustrate the principles.

For those who have had the opportunity to read the book closely, its value goes beyond the sheer volume of information.

It is a record of actual investigative experience translated into a practical methodology.

The cases are not merely stories.

They are lessons.

The photographs are not merely illustrations.

They demonstrate investigative principles.

The checklists are not academic exercises.

They are tools.

And the entire book reflects the philosophy that had driven Geberth since his first days as a Homicide Sergeant:

Learn from every case. Document what works. Understand the science. And give the investigator in the field something he can actually use.

The NYPD investigation had been intended to attack the author.

Instead, it became another chapter in the story of the book.

And perhaps the greatest irony was that the answer to the entire investigation had been sitting on the captain's desk all along.

Chapter 6.

THE COP WHO WROTE THE BOOK ON MURDER

The Baptism of Fire Behind Practical Homicide Investigation

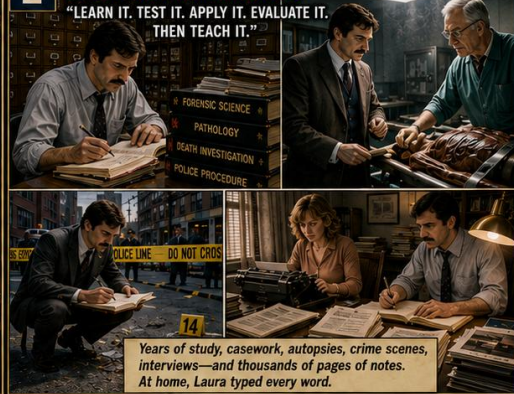
1 BAPTISM OF FIRE (1977)



WE DON'T READ HERE, SERGEANT... WE DO.

Assigned to one of New York City's busiest homicide commands, Geberth realized there was no practical manual for homicide investigators. So he began creating one himself.

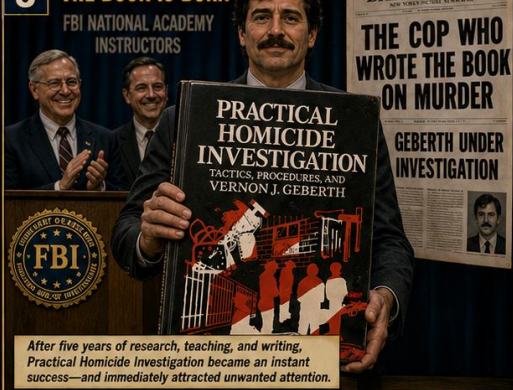
2 BUILDING THE METHOD



"LEARN IT. TEST IT. APPLY IT. EVALUATE IT. THEN TEACH IT."

Years of study, casework, autopsies, crime scenes, interviews—and thousands of pages of notes. At home, Laura typed every word.

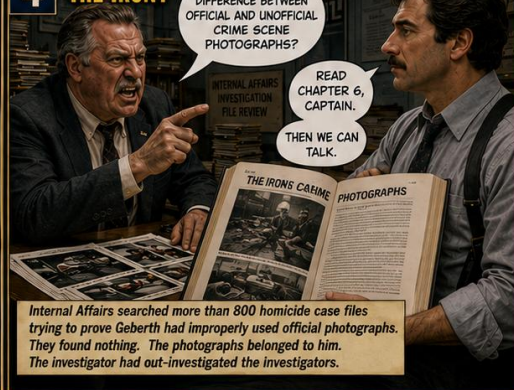
3 THE BOOK IS BORN



FBI NATIONAL ACADEMY INSTRUCTORS

After five years of research, teaching, and writing, *Practical Homicide Investigation* became an instant success—and immediately attracted unwanted attention.

4 THE IRONY



WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN OFFICIAL AND UNOFFICIAL CRIME SCENE PHOTOGRAPHS?

READ CHAPTER 6, CAPTAIN.

THEN WE CAN TALK.

Internal Affairs searched more than 800 homicide case files trying to prove Geberth had improperly used official photographs. They found nothing. The photographs belonged to him. The investigator had out-investigated the investigators.



★ THE BIRTH OF A CLASSIC ★

Practical Homicide Investigation became the world's leading homicide investigation textbook, used by investigators throughout the United States and around the world.

