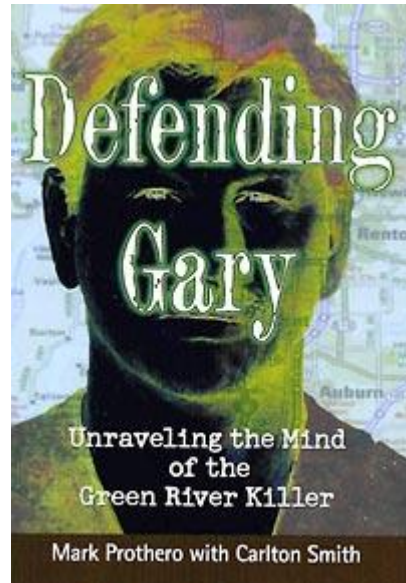


# Attorney's new book takes you to Ridgway's murder trial

By Steve Weinberg

Special to The Seattle Times



ELAINE THOMPSON / AP

Gary L. Ridgway, third from left, is shown in court. Defense attorney and author Mark Prothero is second from left.

Nearly five years ago, police and prosecutors decided they had accumulated enough evidence to arrest Gary L. Ridgway in the Green River killings.

When Mark Prothero heard the news, he was living one half of his dual life. Prothero, a defense attorney, also coached his son and other members of the swim team at Kent-Meridian High School, about 20 miles south of Seattle.

Somebody would need to defend Ridgway. It would be an ugly assignment, because if indeed Ridgway were the Green River Killer, that meant he had murdered 48 women minimum, probably 71 — and maybe even more, starting in the early 1980s.

Prothero worked as a public defender, which means representing mostly low-income clients. Did Ridgway have enough money to hire a private-practice lawyer, Prothero wondered, or would the case become part of the public-defender portfolio?

If Ridgway ended up in the public-defender system, Prothero figured he might serve as the lead lawyer, given his expertise analyzing DNA evidence and his designation as one of just a few certified to handle death-penalty cases.

Prothero received a call from his supervisor, telling him it appeared the public defender's office would represent Ridgway. Talk to Ridgway as quickly as possible, the supervisor said. So Prothero did.

Then he called Kelly, his wife of 19 years, who reminded him about dinner plans that night with another couple.

### **author appearance**

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**Mark Prothero** will give a talk on "Defending Gary: Unraveling the Mind of the Green River Killer" at 6 p.m. Wednesday, Elliott Bay Book Co., 101 S. Main St., Seattle; free (206-624-6600 or [www.elliottbaybook.com](http://www.elliottbaybook.com)).

When Prothero arrived at dinner, friends asked the question heard often by defense lawyers who represent alleged monsters: "Mark, are you really gonna do this case?"

It looks like it, Prothero replied.

"What's he like?" the friends asked. "Was he creepy?"

Prothero replied, "He seemed really nice. Normal, polite. He wasn't freaked out at all. He was a little stressed. He wanted me to call his wife and his brother."

Their friends asked Kelly what she thought about her husband defending perhaps the most prolific mass murderer in U.S. history. "Kelly had no moral objection to an accused serial murderer having a constitutional right of representation," Prothero writes in "Defending Gary: Unraveling the Mind of the Green River Killer" with Carlton Smith (Jossey-Bass, 558 pp., \$24.95). "She understood what my job was; her misgivings were much more practical. She'd already guessed that such a case might take over our lives."

She also understood that her husband wanted to handle one of the most gruesome, challenging cases of all time. If Ridgway were innocent, Prothero would want to participate in the exoneration. If Ridgway were guilty, Prothero would want to save him from the death penalty.

It seems unlikely that any Seattle-area resident reading this review is ignorant of the facts of the Green River Killer case. The book does not add a great deal to the public record.

Before Ridgway's arrest, Prothero's co-author collaborated with fellow Seattle Times reporter Tomas Guillen to write a detailed book about the stymied investigation to catch the Green River Killer (Smith and Guillen have since left the paper).

Since Ridgway's arrest, Guillen has written another book about the case (reviewed earlier this year in *The Seattle Times*). True-crime writer Ann Rule and former King County Sheriff Dave Reichert have published books, too.

The chief value of Prothero's book is its detailed narrative about the workings of the criminal-justice system in a case with the death penalty in play. One feature of that system is that defendants who have committed crimes that lead to a death-penalty charge receive more thorough representation than defendants who committed lesser crimes, and who might be worthy of rehabilitation. This book offers insights into behaviors of police detectives, prosecutors, judges, forensic psychiatrists, journalists and defense lawyers.

For readers interested more in Ridgway than in judicial-system operations, the book is both sober and titillating. I found the long sections about Ridgway occasionally tedious, mostly because it is often impossible to know whether the killer is lying. If Ridgway is telling lies to Prothero, I don't want to waste my time absorbing them.

As for Prothero, he seems to have come through the grueling experience in good shape. "I make no apologies for helping to get Gary Ridgway life in prison rather than execution. Through this deal, law enforcement was given a rare opportunity to get inside the mind of the nation's most prolific, and successful, serial killer. Knowledge was indeed gained, knowledge which will help in future serial murder investigations. And, hopefully, save some lives."

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