

The Writer's Forensics Blog

Forensic Graphology: A Key to Understanding Killers by Sheila Lowe

Posted in Document Examination, Guest Blogger by D.P. Lyle, MD on August 24, 2009

Like her Forensic Handwriting Mysteries series (Penguin/Obsidian) character, Claudia Rose, Sheila Lowe is a real-life forensic handwriting expert who testifies in a variety of handwriting-related cases. A frequent guest in the media when there are interesting handwritings to comment on, Sheila recently appeared on Dateline NBC, discussing the Clark Rockefeller case. She's the author of the best-selling *Complete Idiot's Guide to Handwriting Analysis, Handwriting of the Famous & Infamous*, and award-winning *Sheila Lowe's Handwriting Analyzer* software.

Sheila was kind enough to share her expertise with us.

It's been fifteen years since Susan Smith, "killer mom," strapped her two little boys into their car seats and sent them into John D. Long Lake, drowning as she watched, hysterical, from the shore. In the late 1980s Christine Falling became infamous as the babysitter who, over a period of time, smothered six small children in her care. In more recent times we have Casey Anthony. What news watcher in 2009 has not heard of this young woman who is awaiting trial for the murder of her toddler daughter, Caylee? Or American student Amanda Knox, currently on trial in Italy for the murder of her roommate in a sex game gone horribly wrong?

Besides being tried for murder, what do these women have in common? Their handwritings have been studied by forensic graphologists. Graphology is the generic term for handwriting analysis and simply means "the study of handwriting." More specifically, the study of handwriting to understand personality, and in these cases, to understand what might have driven them to kill.

Can handwriting of women who kill really tell us something about them?

In reality, this is an enormously complex subject, but it can be boiled down to this basic fact: handwriting can reveal important information about what motivates the writer.

To be properly understood, a handwriting sample needs to be viewed as if it were picture. It's not a simple case of "this means that." There is no direct relationship between a single stroke of writing and a personality trait such as if you make high t-bars it mean you have high goals. Picking out bits and pieces such as how you dot your i's or how big your loops are, is not particularly useful unless they are examined within the context of the whole writing sample.

In examining these women's handwritings, are there commonalities?

Susan Smith:



Just as I stopped. I went again and stopped
 got out of the car and ~~was~~ stood by the
 bus wreck. Why was I feeling this way?
 Everything so bad w/my life? I had no
 to three questions. I dropped to the lowest
 allowed my children to go down what
 the water without me. I took off
 nd screaming "Oh God! Oh God, NO!" What

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August 2009

Christine Falling:



if I could put down
as you a better. I really
like interviews with you.
give you want to do
with me just be sure
me know and I will

Casey Anthony:



appreciate it. I know it is an
unusual request but it is
important nonetheless.
I was told that you could
help me in this manner. I
truly hope that it can be
done and without causing

Amanda Knox:



before I went to bed I was taken down
so I haven't yet met before. He had my ID
← which says I'm positive for HIV.
guy told me not to worry, it could be a
second test next week.

Smith, Falling, Anthony, and Knox all have handwriting that is very rounded and is concentrated in an area known as the "middle zone" (which includes letters that don't have upper or lower loops, or the middle parts of letters that do). In general, people with these characteristics (excessive roundness and large middle zone) have been found to need far more love, nurturing, and attention than the average person. Looking back on their early life, they felt

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deprived of those qualities. As adults, they spend an inordinate amount of time and energy trying to get their unfulfilled emotional needs satisfied in relationships, yet they invariably choose relationships with men who are unable to meet their needs.

Falling's handwriting has some interesting features, marked by arrows. The first part of the word 'me,' for example, is formed in a way that looks like an X, as the long initial stroke of the 'e' crosses the downstroke of the 'm'.

Interestingly, people who make this form often have a "death consciousness." In many cases, someone close to them has died and they may be feeling guilty about it. In Falling's case, the cause is much more sinister, of course. The other arrow in her sample points to a letter 'l' that is twisted on top, and which indicates idiosyncratic thinking—she doesn't see the world the way the rest of us do. It is reported that when Falling was a child of eight, her mother hit her in the head with a two-by-four, resulting in epileptic seizures.

A notable characteristic in Susan Smith's handwriting are the letter 't', which have a cross so low that the cross bar sits on the baseline. It also stays on the left of the 't' stem, rather than crossing through it. This has been identified in the handwritings of "professional victims" who set themselves up for punishment. Her letters squeeze together, bumping up against each other, which suggests a lack of social boundaries, and is sometimes seen as an aspect of suicidal thinking.

Casey Anthony's handwriting has some letters that are close together and others that are far apart, which reveals ambivalence about who she is. It also contains letters that are hard to distinguish, or that look like something they're not, an indicator for not telling things like they are.

Amanda Knox's handwriting is fairly typical of modern young women. Once again, the letter spacing is extremely narrow, and as with the other writers, the writing is concentrated in the middle zone. People who use this form tend to believe that the world revolves around them, they manage to rationalize their behaviors, and they look to no authority beyond their own noses.

Does handwriting reveal that someone is a killer? No. But it does provide information to help understand the motives behind their behavior. For the women whose handwritings appear here, the chief motivating factor is the need for love, attention, and approval. Smith rid herself of her children because the man she was seeing didn't want children and she desperately wanted his love and approval. Falling killed children to get attention. Neither Anthony nor Knox have been convicted so far, but their motivations are the same—they see only their own needs.

The few characteristics that I've pointed out here are only a tiny section of the dozens of elements that a handwriting professional considers in making an assessment, and that's true regardless of whether the writer is a killer, a salesman, a teacher, or a doctor. And, by the way, when it comes to their handwriting, doctors get a bad rap—like everyone else, doctors are individuals, some with bad handwriting and some with beautiful handwriting. And, like the killers and possible killers we've looked at here, their handwriting tells the truth about them!

Visit Sheila's [website](#).

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Jasmine Fiore's Killer Found Hanged in Canadian Motel

Posted in Corpse Identification, Interesting Cases by D.P. Lyle, MD on August 24, 2009

This bizarre story has finally reached a conclusion—of sorts. Doesn't it seem these cases always end this way? The killer takes his own life and leaves the victim's family with a lifetime of WHY?

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