**Introduction**

Law enforcement officers make their living fighting crime. They have taken an oath to protect the citizens of their community, county and state, and they will do whatever it takes to fulfill their sworn duty. Yet for many of these brave men and women, the battle of good versus evil means the ultimate sacrifice—laying down their lives in the unconditional fulfillment of their duty.

The death of an officer killed while on duty presents the most heartfelt crisis an agency can face. When an officer is struck down, the death sends shock waves reverberating throughout the department and the community he or she served. Law enforcement agencies make it the highest priority to solve the case and bring the murderers to justice. But it is not a perfect world, and sometimes, but not many, they are not successful.

What was first an unbearable loss of a brother or sister officer swells into a mountain of guilt and remorse when a killer avoids capture. Many in the law enforcement community experience survivor guilt, believing they had done something wrong or they could have done more. Some officers cry out, “This just couldn’t happen!” Many will suffer nightmares and flashbacks to the tragic event. The loss of a brother or sister officer is something that never leaves your soul.

Investigations of homicides of law enforcement officers are not unlike a roaring river, which can become a trickle as it passes through a dam. Clues in the murder of a police officer come thundering in by the hundreds the first few weeks and then become a dribble the following month. Front-page stories fade to the back of the paper and then are gone altogether. Rewards are posted, government officials cry out for justice and television stations run the story—for a time. Soon weeks turn to months, and before you know it, years have melted away. But there is one given that is the same in virtually all unsolved police cases—no matter how stale things get, the detectives investigating the case will never give up. Never. Even though many will promote, retire and die, there are others coming up through the ranks who will take over the reins of the investigation and keep fighting to identify the perpetrators.

These dedicated and savvy detectives handling cold-case files become very creative in generating new interest in cases that are long forgotten by most. Decades after the 1967 murder of Officer Walter Franklin Stathers (chapter 54), detectives from the Miami-Dade Police Department conducted a detailed reenactment of the murder, going so far as to finding an old Plymouth police cruiser like the one Stathers was driving the night he was murdered. Consequently, the story was run on all the local stations offering investigators hope that someone might come forward and turn the tide in the case.

New investigators look at long-unsolved homicides with fresh eyes and with renewed energy. They reinterview witnesses, run DNA samples through crime labs, mail out letters to those witnesses who are difficult to locate. They may erect billboards highlighting an officer’s murder to get people talking about the case again. They do this with the hope, and many times with prayers, that the one break they need in the case will occur, no matter how long ago the crime took place. Such was the

situation in the murder of two police officers from the El Segundo, California, Police Department.

In 1957, two young police officers, Richard Phillips and Milton Curtis, were shot and killed after stopping a vehicle for running a red light. What the officers didn’t know was that the driver had just raped a teenage girl after robbing the two young couples at gunpoint. Detectives had no leads in the case until 1960, when two watches and a gun were recovered in the backyard of a Manhattan Beach, California, home.

It was determined that the watches had been stolen from two of the teenagers. The gun was traced back to Louisiana. But there the trail went dead—again. Moving ahead 40 years, basically two police generations, investigators finally got a break when a tipster provided the name of the alleged killer. The tip proved false, but as a result, detectives took a closer look at the case. Aware that the FBI had just released a new computerized database for fingerprints collected across the nation, detectives decided to submit the fingerprints they had on file.

It worked! The prints led to Columbia, South Carolina, where in 2003, 45 years after the murders, police arrested Gerald F. Mason, a 68-year-old retired gas station owner living in a comfortable suburban home of the city. In 2003, the suspect was convicted of both murders and through a plea agreement, the remaining counts of rape, robbery and kidnapping were dismissed. Mason was sentenced to life in prison.

This is one of the reasons for this book. By breathing new life into these unsolved homicides of police officers, justice may be served and the perpetrators finally made to pay for their gutless acts. When I decided to research this subject, I was appalled to discover that there was no centralized database that listed the name of each officer killed in the line of duty and the disposition of the case. While the FBI does maintain records going back to the 1980s, no agency has a definitive listing of the names of these brave officers, their departments and the basic information about the cases since the beginning of policing in the United States. After two years of comprehensive research, I have been able to document the sacrifices of these officers and put them in one place—this book.