

**B**ased in Plymouth, Rice is a nationally known handwriting expert and forensic behavioral profiler who has worked on such prominent cases as Timothy McVeigh, O.J. Simpson, the Zodiac Killer, Ted Bundy, and the Atlanta Bomber, and has appeared on NBC News, MSNBC News, and Unsolved Mysteries to discuss document-related cases.

For example, in the late 1990s Rice was contacted by MSNBC to analyze the JonBenet Ramsey ransom note on a live program hosted by Marcia Clark, the prosecuting attorney in O.J. Simpson's trial. At that time, there was considerable speculation about the involvement of JonBenet's parents, Patsy and John Ramsey, in the tragic case.

"No way," says Rice. "Her (Patsy's) handwriting showed yielding and submissive qualities, like Marilyn Monroe's handwriting. Neither of them could even come close to the brutality and perversion of the author of that ransom note. It was written by a male capable of extreme cruelty, someone with a Jack-the-Ripper personality."

After actress Brooke Shields received more than 100 letters, some sexually explicit, from fan Mark Bailey, she filed harassment charges and he was arrested. When the case came to trial in 1997, the key issue was a question perhaps even the defendant couldn't answer: what was his capacity for violence?

Ron Rice was hired to provide an answer. After examining documents for five days, he delivered an affidavit stating that the handwritten evidence clearly indicated Bailey had a need to confront the actress, and, if she resisted, was capable of attacking her with violence and deadly force.

Primarily a product of brain function, handwriting produces patterns that are unique to the individual. An extensive Justice Department study in 2003 found that handwriting is nearly as accurate (98%) as fingerprinting for proving individual identity.

Because patterns in handwriting also correlate with individual behavioral traits, handwriting analysis can provide information about the personality, character and state of mind of the writer. The current methodology for evaluating handwriting was standardized in the early 20th century, but the connection between handwriting and identity was observed by the ancient Greeks and Romans.

Long used in Europe, particularly for assessment of job applicants, handwriting analysis can identify over 115 traits, including procrastination, temper, impulsivity, stubbornness, generosity, and sensitivity to criticism. One top Dutch terrorist negotiator doesn't initiate contact until he has studied a writing sample of those he will be dealing with.

Particularly in cases of insurance and credit card fraud, illegal alteration of wills and deeds, and medical malprac-

This intensive work requires the scrutiny of every feature of handwriting, including individual letters' height above and below the base line, the particular shape of letters, lead-in and ending strokes, as well as the distance between letters, words or lines of writing. Strokes like the letter T are highly revealing of personality and character traits. For example, T-bars that are consistently placed low on the T-stem indicate a person who tends to underestimate himself or herself, while T-bars that are detached and above the T-stem show a tendency to be more invested in fantasy than reality.

tice when alteration of records is alleged, handwriting alone can often provide the information law enforcement officials need to prosecute guilty parties. "Ninety-nine percent of the time, we get them," says Rice. A letter, greeting card, yellow sticky note or even graffiti can potentially be converted into valuable forensic information by a handwriting expert, but usually larger samples are used.

In 1976 Ron Rice was a Pembroke private investigator specializing in insurance fraud. At the suggestion of a frustrated insurance attorney, Rice began to study handwriting analysis so they could successfully prosecute more fraud cases. He received national exposure in 1995 when he was hired by a private company to analyze the suicide note allegedly left by Vince Foster, aide and friend of then President Bill Clinton. After extensive analysis of the document, Rice announced at a Washington press conference that the document had, in fact, not been written by Foster.

A former national director of the American Board of Forensic Examiners, and founder in 1998 of the International Academy of Forensic Examiners and Investigators (IAFEI), Rice teaches basic, advanced and criminal training in forensic profiling of written documents at Massasoit Community College in Brockton. "I think every attorney and human resources department should have at least 100 hours in handwriting analysis," he says, adding that proficiency in this field requires at least three years of formal training and two years of field supervision.

It is painstaking work, "when you do handwriting analysis, you have to examine other documents known to have been authored by the individual as well as the document in question," explains Rice. "You're looking for similarities, dissimilarities, and unique letter formations that are consistent throughout the documents. When you find them, you put the original under a microscope and begin your evaluation, right down to the paper fiber. Documents can be enlarged up to 200 times. You can spend days looking at one document because there are so many variables." *continued on page 60*

These days, domestic and international harassment and terrorism cases are keeping Rice busy. "With terrorism, there are two major questions," says Rice. "Who is the person, and is this person capable of carrying out a threat or hurting someone?" He has worked with numerous colleges and universities dealing with racially- and gender-based personal harassment. At present, the five terrorism cases he is working on include two corporate, three personal and one involving an entertainer. "Every corporation is experiencing some form of terrorism or harassment now," he comments. "The problem is their staff doesn't have the expertise to deal with it because security and human resources personnel don't usually have the training."

Rice is often asked if a person can disguise their handwriting. Ultimately no, he says. Even if people accidentally or deliberately display different styles in the same document, their basic writing traits will be always identifiable. He recalls working on a case for the Massachusetts state police that involved an accomplished forger. "This gal was sharp," says Rice. "They were able to substantiate that she had embezzled \$50,000, and that was a drop in the bucket. She was instructed to copy 30 pages of text. In the last paragraph of the last page, she lost her concentration and made the error that enabled us to get her."

Of all the aspects of his work, "Profiling is the most fun," Rice says. "You're like an architect looking at blueprints. You have them laid out in front of you, and you can see the big picture in your mind. Behavioral profilers are able to see that person, to unmask them, their emotional potential for jealousy, for deception, for violence."

"What do you want to know?" he says. "A handwriting sample tells us everything."

