

De Becker, G. (1997) The Gift
of Fear. Dell

■ 1 ■

IN THE PRESENCE OF DANGER

"This above all, to refuse to be a victim."
—Margaret Atwood

He had probably been watching her for a while. We aren't sure—but what we do know is that she was not his first victim. That afternoon, in an effort to get all her shopping done in one trip, Kelly had overestimated what she could comfortably carry home. Justifying her decision as she struggled with the heavy bags, she reminded herself that making two trips would have meant walking around after dark, and she was too careful about her safety for that. As she climbed the few steps to the apartment building door, she saw that it had been left unlatched (again). Her neighbors just don't get it, she thought, and though their lax security annoyed her, this time she was glad to be saved the trouble of getting out the key.

She closed the door behind her, pushing it until she heard it latch. She is certain she locked it, which means he must have already been inside the corridor.

Next came the four flights of stairs, which she wanted to do in one trip. Near the top of the third landing, one of the bags gave way, tearing open and dispensing cans of cat food. They rolled down the stairs almost playfully, as if they were trying to get away from her. The can in the lead

paused at the second floor landing, and Kelly watched as it literally turned the corner, gained some speed, and began its seemingly mindful hop down the next flight of steps and out of sight.

"Got it! I'll bring it up," someone called out. Kelly didn't like that voice. Right from the start something just sounded wrong to her, but then this friendly-looking young guy came bounding up the steps, collecting cans along the way.

He said, "Let me give you a hand."

"No, no thanks, I've got it."

"You don't look like you've got it. What floor are you going to?"

She paused before answering him. "The fourth, but I'm okay, really."

He wouldn't hear a word of it, and by this point he had a collection of cans balanced between his chest and one arm. "I'm going to the fourth floor too," he said, "and I'm late—not my fault, broken watch—so let's not just stand here. And give me that." He reached out and tugged on one of the heavier bags she was holding. She repeated, "No, really, thanks, but no, I've got it."

Still holding on to the grocery bag, he said, "There's such a thing as being *too* proud, you know."

For a moment, Kelly didn't let go of that bag, but then she did, and this seemingly insignificant exchange between the cordial stranger and the recipient of his courtesy was the signal—to him and to her—that she was willing to trust him. As the bag passed from her control to his, so did she.

"We better hurry," he said as he walked up the stairs ahead of Kelly. "We've got a hungry cat up there."

Even though he seemed to want nothing more at that moment than to be helpful, she was apprehensive about him, and for no good reason, she thought. He was friendly

and gentlemanly, and she felt guilty about her suspicion. She didn't want to be the kind of person who distrusts everybody, so they were next approaching the door to her apartment.

"Did you know a cat can live for three weeks without eating?" he asked. "I'll tell you how I learned that tidbit: I once forgot that I'd promised to feed a cat while a friend of mine was out of town."

Kelly was now standing at the door to her apartment, which she'd just opened.

"I'll take it from here," she said, hoping he'd hand her the groceries, accept her thanks, and be on his way. Instead, he said, "Oh no, I didn't come this far to let you have another cat food spill." When she still hesitated to let him in her door, he laughed understandingly. "Hey, we can leave the door open like ladies do in old movies. I'll just put this stuff down and go. I promise."

She did let him in, but he did not keep his promise.

At this point, as she is telling me the story of the rape and the whole three-hour ordeal she suffered, Kelly pauses to weep quietly. She now knows that he killed one of his other victims, stabbed her to death.

All the while, since soon after we sat down knee to knee in the small garden outside my office, Kelly has been holding both my hands. She is twenty-seven years old. Before the rape, she was a counselor for disturbed children, but she hasn't been back to work in a long while. That friendly-looking young man had caused three hours of suffering in her apartment and at least three months of suffering in her memory. The confidence he scared off was still hiding, the dignity he pierced still healing.

Kelly is about to learn that listening to one small survival

signal saved her life, just as failing to follow so many others had put her at risk in the first place. She looks at me through moist but clear eyes and says she wants to understand every strategy he used. She wants me to tell her what her intuition saw that saved her life. But she will tell me.

"It was after he'd already held the gun to my head, after he raped me. It was after that. He got up from the bed, got dressed, then closed the window. He glanced at his watch, and then started acting like he was in a hurry."

"I gotta be somewhere. Hey, don't look so scared. I promise I'm not going to hurt you." Kelly absolutely knew he was lying. She knew he planned to kill her, and though it may be hard to imagine, it was the first time since the incident began that she felt profound fear.

He motioned to her with the gun and said, "Don't you move or do anything. I'm going to the kitchen to get something to drink, and then I'll leave. I promise. But you stay right where you are." He had little reason to be concerned that Kelly might disobey his instructions because she had been, from the moment she let go of that bag until this moment, completely under his control. "You know I won't move," she assured him.

But the instant he stepped from the room, Kelly stood up and walked after him, pulling the sheet off the bed with her. "I was literally right behind him, like a ghost, and he didn't know I was there. We walked down the hall together. At one point he stopped, and so did I. He was looking at my stereo, which was playing some music, and he reached out and made it louder. When he moved on toward the kitchen, I turned and walked through the living room."

Kelly could hear drawers being opened as she walked out her front door, leaving it ajar. She walked directly into the apartment across the hall (which she somehow knew would

be unlocked). Holding a finger up to signal her surprised neighbors to be quiet, she locked their door behind her.

"I knew if I had stayed in my room, he was going to come back from the kitchen and kill me, but I don't know how I was so certain."

"Yes, you do," I tell her.

She sighs and then goes over it again. "He got up and got dressed, closed the window, looked at his watch. He promised he wouldn't hurt me, and that promise came out of nowhere. Then he went into the kitchen to get a drink, supposedly, but I heard him opening drawers in there. He was looking for a knife, of course, but I knew way before that." She pauses. "I guess he wanted a knife because using the gun would be too noisy."

"What makes you think he was concerned about noise?" I ask.

"I don't know." She takes a long pause, gazing off past me, looking back at him in the bedroom. "Oh . . . I do know. I get it, I get it. Noise was the thing—that's why he closed the window. That's how I knew."

Since he was dressed and supposedly leaving, he had no other reason to close her window. It was that subtle signal that warned her, but it was fear that gave her the courage to get up without hesitation and follow close behind the man who intended to kill her. She later described a fear so complete that it replaced every feeling in her body. Like an animal hiding inside her, it opened to its full size and stood up using the muscles in her legs. "I had nothing to do with it," she explained. "I was a passenger moving down that hallway."

What she experienced was real fear, not like when we are startled, not like the fear we feel at a movie, or the fear of public speaking. This fear is the powerful ally that says, "Do what I tell you to do." Sometimes, it tells a person to

play dead, or to stop breathing, or to run or scream or fight, but to Kelly it said, "Just be quiet and don't doubt me and I'll get you out of here."

Kelly told me she felt new confidence in herself, knowing she had acted on that signal, knowing she had saved her own life. She said she was tired of being blamed and blaming herself for letting him into her apartment. She said she had learned enough in our meetings to never again be victimized that way.

"Maybe that's the good to come from it," she reflected. "The weird thing is, with all this information I'm actually less afraid walking around now than I was before it happened—but there must be an easier way people could learn."

The thought had occurred to me. I know that what saved Kelly's life can save yours. In her courage, in her commitment to listen to intuition, in her determination to make some sense out of it, in her passion to be free of unwanted fear, I saw that the information should be shared not just with victims but with those who need never become victims at all. I want this book to help you be one of those people.

Because of my sustained look at violence, because I have predicted the behavior of murderers, stalkers, would-be assassins, rejected boyfriends, estranged husbands, angry former employees, mass killers, and others, I am called an expert. I may have learned many lessons, but my basic premise in these pages is that you too are an expert at predicting violent behavior. Like every creature, you can know when you are in the presence of danger. You have the gift of a brilliant internal guardian that stands ready to warn you of hazards and guide you through risky situations.

I've learned some lessons about safety through years of asking people who've suffered violence, "Could you have

seen this coming?" Most often they say, "No, it just came out of nowhere," but if I am quiet, if I wait a moment, here comes the information: "I felt uneasy when I first met that guy . . ." or "Now that I think of it, I was suspicious when he approached me," or "I realize now I had seen that car earlier in the day."

Of course, if they realize it now, they knew it then. We all see the signals because there is a universal code of violence. You'll find some of what you need to break that code in the following chapters, but most of it is in you.



In a very real sense, the surging water in an ocean does not move; rather, energy moves through it. In this same sense, the energy of violence moves through our culture. Some experience it as a light but unpleasant breeze, easy to tolerate. Others are destroyed by it, as if by a hurricane. But nobody—nobody—is untouched. Violence is a part of America, and more than that, it is a part of our species. It is around us, and it is in us. As the most powerful people in history, we have climbed to the top of the world food chain, so to speak. Facing not one single enemy or predator who poses to us any danger of consequence, we've found the only prey left: ourselves.

Lest anyone doubt this, understand that in the last two years alone, more Americans died from gunshot wounds than were killed during the entire Vietnam War. By contrast, in all of Japan (with a population of 120 million people), the number of young men shot to death in a year is equal to the number killed in New York City in a single busy weekend. Our armed robbery rate is one hundred times higher than Japan's. In part, that's because we are a nation with more firearms than adults, a nation where 20,000 guns enter the stream of commerce every day. No

truth remains that your safety is yours. It is not the responsibility of the police, the government, industry, the apartment building manager, or the security company. Too often, we take the lazy route and invest our confidence without ever evaluating if it is earned. As we send our children off each morning, we assume the school will keep them safe, but as you'll see in chapter 12, it might not be so. We trust security guards—you know, the employment pool that gave us the Son of Sam killer, the assassin of John Lennon, the Hillside Strangler, and more arsonists and rapists than you have time to read about. Has the security industry earned your confidence? Has government earned it? We have a Department of Justice, but it would be more appropriate to have a department of violence prevention, because that's what we need and that's what we care about. Justice is swell, but safety is survival.

Just as we look to government and experts, we also look to technology for solutions to our problems, but you will see that your personal solution to violence will not come from technology. It will come from an even grander resource that was there all the while, within you. That resource is intuition.

It may be hard to accept its importance, because intuition is usually looked upon by us thoughtful Western beings with contempt. It is often described as emotional, unreasonable, or inexplicable. Husbands chide their wives about "feminine intuition" and don't take it seriously. If intuition is used by a woman to explain some choice she made or a concern she can't let go of, men roll their eyes and write it off. We much prefer logic, the grounded, explainable, unemotional thought process that ends in a supportable conclusion. In fact, Americans worship logic, even when it's wrong, and deny intuition, even when it's right.

Men, of course, have their own version of intuition, not

so light and inconsequential, they tell themselves, as that feminine stuff. Theirs is more viscerally named a "gut feeling," but it isn't just a feeling. It is a process more extraordinary and ultimately more logical in the natural order than the most fantastic computer calculation. It is our most complex cognitive process and at the same time the simplest.

Intuition connects us to the natural world and to our nature. Freed from the bonds of judgment, married only to perception, it carries us to predictions we will later marvel at. "Somehow I knew," we will say about the chance meeting we predicted, or about the unexpected phone call from a distant friend, or the unlikely turnaround in someone's behavior, or about the violence we steered clear of, or, too often, the violence we elected not to steer clear of. "Somehow I knew . . ." Like Kelly knew, and you can know.

The husband and wife who make an appointment with me to discuss the harassing and threatening phone calls they are getting want me to figure out who is doing it. Based on what the caller says, it's obvious he is someone they know, but who? Her ex-husband? That weird guy who used to rent a room from them? A neighbor angry about their construction work? The contractor they fired?

The expert will tell them who it is, they think, but actually they will tell me. It's true I have experience with thousands of cases, but they have *the* experience with this one. Inside them, perhaps trapped where I can help find it, is all the information needed to make an accurate evaluation. At some point in our discussion of possible suspects, the woman will invariably say something like this: "You know, there is one other person, and I don't have any concrete reasons for thinking it's him. I just have this feeling, and I hate to even suggest it, but . . ." And right there I could send them home and send my bill, because that is who it will be. We will follow my client's intuition until I have

“I solved the mystery.” I’ll be much praised for my skill, but most often, I just listen and give them permission to listen to themselves. Early on in these meetings, I say, “No theory is too remote to explore, no person is beyond consideration, no gut feeling is too unsubstantiated.” (In fact, as you are about to find out, every intuition is firmly substantiated.) When clients ask, “Do the people who make these threats ever do such-and-such?” I say, “Yes, sometimes they do,” and this is permission to explore some theory.

When interviewing victims of anonymous threats, I don’t ask, “Who do you think sent you these threats?” because most victims can’t imagine that anyone they know sent the threats. I ask instead, “Who *could* have sent them?” and together we make a list of everyone who had the ability, without regard to motive. Then I ask clients to assign a motive, even a ridiculous one, to each person on the list. It is a creative process that puts them under no pressure to be correct. For this very reason, in almost every case, one of their imaginative theories will be correct.

Quite often, my greatest contribution to solving the mystery is my refusal to call it a mystery. Rather, it is a puzzle, one in which there are enough pieces available to reveal what the image is. I have seen these pieces so often that I may recognize them sooner than some people, but my main job is just to get them on the table.

As we explore the pieces of the human violence puzzle, I’ll show you their shapes and their colors. Given your own lifelong study of human behavior—and your own humanness—you’ll see that the pieces are already familiar to you. Above all, I hope to leave you knowing that every puzzle can be solved long before all the pieces are in place.

People do things, we say, “out of the blue,” “all of a sudden,” “out of nowhere.” These phrases support the popular myth that predicting human behavior isn’t possible. Yet to successfully navigate through morning traffic, we make amazingly accurate high-stakes predictions about the behavior of literally thousands of people. We unconsciously read tiny untaught signals: the slight tilt of a stranger’s head or the momentarily sustained glance of a person a hundred feet away tells us it is safe to pass in front of his two-ton monster. We expect all the drivers to act just as we would, but we still alertly detect those few who might not—so that we are also predicting their behavior, unpredictable though we may call it. So here we are, traveling along faster than anyone before the 1900s ever traveled (unless they were falling off a cliff), dodging giant, high-momentum steel missiles, judging the intent of their operators with a fantastic accuracy, and then saying we can’t predict human behavior.

We predict with some success how a child will react to a warning, how a witness will react to a question, how a jury will react to a witness, how a consumer will react to a slogan, how an audience will react to a scene, how a spouse will react to a comment, how a reader will react to a phrase, and on and on. Predicting violent behavior is easier than any of these, but since we fantasize that human violence is an aberration done by others unlike us, we say we can’t predict it. Watching Jane Goodall’s documentary showing a group of chimpanzees stalking and killing another group’s males, we say the unprovoked attack is territorialism or population control. With similar certainty, we say we understand the cause and purpose of violence by every creature on earth—except ourselves.

The human violence we abhor and fear the most, that which we call “random” and “senseless,” is neither. It

how denial works against you, I'll show that fear, which can be central to your safety, is frequently misplaced. I'll explore the role of threats in our lives and show how you can tell the difference between a real warning and mere words. I'll identify the specific survival signals we get from people who might harm us.

Since the signals are best concealed when an attacker is not known to us, I'll start with the dangers posed by strangers. This is the violence that captures our fear and attention, even though only 20 percent of all homicides are committed by strangers. The other 80 percent are committed by people we know, so I'll focus on those we hire, those we work with, those we fire, those we date, those we marry, those we divorce.

I'll also discuss the tiny but influential minority whose violence affects us all: assassins. Through the story of a man who didn't quite complete his plans to kill a famous person (though he did kill five other people), I'll provide a look at public life you've never seen before.

In chapter 15, you'll see that if your intuition is informed accurately, the danger signal will sound when it should. If you come to trust this fact, you'll not only be safer, but it will be possible to live life nearly free of fear.

■ 2 ■

THE TECHNOLOGY OF INTUITION

"Technology is not going to save us. Our computers, our tools, our machines are not enough. We have to rely on our intuition, our true being."
—Joseph Campbell

"I walked into that convenience store to buy a few magazines and for some reason, I was suddenly . . . afraid, and I turned right around and walked out. I don't know what told me to leave, but later that day I heard about the shooting."

Airline pilot Robert Thompson is telling me about dodging death right here on the ground. I ask him what he saw, what he reacted to.

"Nothing, it was just a gut feeling. [A pause.] Well, now that I think back, the guy behind the counter looked at me with a very rapid glance, just jerked his head toward me for an instant, and I guess I'm used to the clerk sizing you up when you walk in, but he was intently looking at another customer, and that must have seemed odd to me. I must have seen that he was concerned."

When free of judgment, we inherently respect the intuition of others. Sensing that someone else is in that special state of assessing hazard, we are alerted, just as when we see the cat or dog awaken suddenly from a nap and stare intently into a dark hallway.

Thompson continues. "I noticed that the clerk was fo-

cused on a customer who was wearing a big, heavy jacket, and of course, I now realize that it was very hot, so that's probably where the guy was hiding the shotgun. Only after I saw on the news what kind of car they were looking for did I remember that there were two men sitting in a station wagon in the parking lot with the engine running. Now it's all clear, but it didn't mean a thing to me at the time."

"Actually, it did then too," I tell him. Combining what amounted to fear on the face of the clerk, with the man in the heavy coat on the hot day, with the men in the car with its engine running, with Thompson's unconscious knowledge of convenience store robberies from years of news reports, with his unconscious memory of frequent police visits to that store, which he'd driven past hundreds of times, and with countless other things we might never discover about Thompson's experience and knowledge, it is no wonder he left that store just moments before a police officer happened in and was shot dead by a man he surprised in the middle of a robbery.

What Robert Thompson and many others want to dismiss as a coincidence or a gut feeling is in fact a cognitive process, faster than we recognize and far different from the familiar step-by-step thinking we rely on so willingly. We think conscious thought is somehow better, when in fact, intuition is soaring flight compared to the plodding of logic. Nature's greatest accomplishment, the human brain, is never more efficient or invested than when its host is at risk. Then, intuition is catapulted to another level entirely, a height at which it can accurately be called graceful, even miraculous. Intuition is the journey from A to Z without stopping at any other letter along the way. It is knowing without knowing why.

At just the moment when our intuition is most basic, people tend to consider it amazing or supernatural. A

woman tells a simple story as if it were mystical: "I couldn't believe it! I absolutely knew when the phone rang that it would be my college roommate, calling after all these years." Though people act as if predictions of who is calling are miraculous, they rarely are. In this case, her old roommate was reminded of her by reports of the explosion of the space shuttle. Is it a miracle that both women happened to watch the same news event along with a billion others? Is it a miracle that their strongest association with space travel was the angry belief they shared in college that women would never be astronauts? And a woman astronaut died in the space shuttle explosion that morning, and the two women thought of each other, even after a decade.

These noncritical intuitions, which at first impress us, are often revealed to be somewhat rudimentary, especially in contrast to what the mind delivers when we might be in danger.

In *A Natural History of the Senses*, author Diane Ackerman says, "The brain is a good stagehand. It gets on with its work while we're busy acting out our scenes. When we see an object, the whole peninsula of our senses wakes up to appraise the new sight. All the brain's shopkeepers consider it from their point of view, all the civil servants, all the accountants, all the students, all the farmers, all the mechanics." We could add the soldiers and guards to Ackerman's list, for it is they who evaluate the context in which things occur, the appropriateness and significance of literally everything we sense. These soldiers and guards separate the merely unusual from the significantly unusual. They weigh the time of day, day of the week, loudness of the sound, quickness of the movement, flavor of the scent, smoothness of the surface, the entire mosaic of each moment. They discard the irrelevant and value the meaningful.

They recognize the survival signals we don't even (consciously) know are signals.

After years of praising intuition as the cornerstone of safety, I just recently learned to my surprise and appreciation that the root of the word *intuition* *tuere*, means "to guard, to protect." That is what it did for Robert Thompson. Shaken by his narrow miss, he later wondered why the police officer did not intuit what he did. It may be that the officer saw different things. Thompson saw only one car in the parking lot, but the officer saw two, likely giving the appearance of a business patronized by a few customers. Though the clerk's face had sent Thompson a fear signal, the police officer probably saw relief in that same face as he entered the store. It is also likely that the seasoned officer suffered the disadvantage that sometimes comes with being expert at something. He was operating with the accurate but (in this case) misleading knowledge that armed robberies are less frequent in the daytime than at night.

Many experts lose the creativity and imagination of the less informed. They are so intimately familiar with known patterns that they may fail to recognize or respect the importance of the new wrinkle. The process of applying expertise is, after all, the editing out of unimportant details in favor of those known to be relevant. Zen master Shunryu Suzuki said, "The mind of the beginner is empty, free of the habits of the expert, ready to accept, to doubt, and open to all the possibilities." People enjoying so-called beginner's luck prove this all the time.

Even men of science rely on intuition, both knowingly and unknowingly. The problem is, we discourage them from doing it. Imagine that you go to see a doctor, a specialist in some particular malady, and before you even sit down in his examining room, he says, "You're fine; please pay my receptionist on the way out." You might under-

standably feel that the opinion he rendered intuitively was not worth paying for, though it might be the exact same diagnosis you would get after his poking and prodding you with fancy equipment. A friend of mine who is a doctor has to prove his scientific acumen to patients before they'll accept his intuition. "I call it the tap dance. After I do a few steps, patients say, 'Okay, I see you can dance,' and then they believe me."

The amateur at the convenience store teaches us that intuition heeded is far more valuable than simple knowledge. Intuition is a gift we all have, whereas retention of knowledge is a skill. Rare is the expert who combines an informed opinion with a strong respect for his own intuition and curiosity. Curiosity is, after all, the way we answer when intuition whispers, "There's something there." I use it all the time in my work because it can unlock information that clients are hiding from themselves.

Often I will carry a conversation back to details a client provided but then rushed past. I am particularly interested in those that are not required elements of the story, those that might seem unimportant but for the fact that they were mentioned. I call these extra details satellites, shot off into space, later to beam back valuable information. I always follow them.

A client who recounted getting an anonymous death threat after a long and contentious lawsuit felt quite certain they were from the man she had sued, but her story included some extra details: "After the case was settled, I knew that the guy we'd sued was still really angry, but I was surprised he would stoop to sending me death threats. I was discussing the settlement one day with Tony—he used to be an intern for my lawyer, but he's not working for my lawyer anymore—anyway, I said to him, 'I hope the case being

over really ends the matter,' and I thought it would, but then the threat letters started coming."

What's the satellite in the story? *I was discussing the settlement one day with Tony—he used to be an intern for my lawyer, but he's not working for my lawyer anymore.* . . . These details about a person my client made a remark to are not key elements in the story, but her inclusion of them was a signal for me.

"Tell me about the guy who used to work for your lawyer."

"Oh, Tony? He got fired, one of the many casualties of the case, I guess. He was so sweet to me. He'd taken a real interest in the case, but apparently he'd let other responsibilities slide. Even after he was fired, he kept coming to court to give me support, which I really appreciated. When the case settled, my lawyer threw a party for us all, but Tony wasn't invited. It was sad, because he called me and said, 'I hope we can still stay in touch even though the case is over.' [A pause.] You don't think . . . ?"

My client then described several odd things Tony had done, followed by the revelation (more accurately, the recollection) that Tony had once told her he was helping an acquaintance who was getting threats from an ex-boyfriend. So an extraneous character in a story—a seemingly unimportant detail—became a suspect, and ultimately the proven threatener. On some level, my client knew all along he was the best suspect, but she denied it, preferring to indict her nasty opponent over her friendly ally.

How many times have you said after following one course, "I knew I shouldn't have done that"? That means you got the signal and then didn't follow it. We all know how to respect intuition, though often not our own. For example, people tend to invest all kinds of intuitive ability in dogs, a fact I was reminded of recently when a friend

told me this story: "Ginger had a really bad reaction to our new building contractor; she even growled at him. She seemed to sense that he isn't trustworthy, so I'm going to get some bids from other people."

"That must be it," I joked with her. "The dog feels you should get another general contractor because this one's not honest."

"The irony," I explained, "is that it's far more likely Ginger is reacting to your signals than that you are reacting to hers. Ginger is an expert at reading you, and you are the expert at reading other people. Ginger, smart as she is, knows nothing about the ways a contractor might inflate the cost to his own profit, or about whether he is honest, or about the benefits of cost-plus-fifteen-percent versus a fixed bid, or about the somewhat hesitant recommendation you got from a former client of that builder, or about the too-fancy car he arrived in, or about the slick but evasive answer he gave to your pointed question." My friend laughed at the revelation that Ginger, whose intuition she was quick to overrate, is actually a babbling idiot when it comes to remodel work. In fact, Ginger is less than that because she can't even babble. (If there are dogs out there intuitive enough to detect what's being read here by their masters, I take it all back.)

Contrary to what people believe about the intuition of dogs, your intuitive abilities are vastly superior (and given that you add to your experience every day, you are at the top of your form right now). Ginger does sense and react to fear in humans because she knows instinctively that a frightened person (or animal) is more likely to be dangerous, but she has nothing you don't have. The problem, in fact, is that extra something you have that a dog doesn't: It is judgment, and that's what gets in the way of your perception and intuition. With judgment comes the ability to dis-

regard your intuition unless you can explain it logically, the eagerness to judge and convict your feelings rather than honor them. Ginger is not distracted by the way things could be, used to be, or should be. She perceives only what is. Our reliance on the intuition of dogs is often a way to find permission to have an opinion we might otherwise be forced to call (God forbid) unsubstantiated.

Can you imagine an animal reacting to the gift of fear the way some people do, with annoyance and disdain instead of attention? No animal in the wild, suddenly overcome with fear, would spend any of its mental energy thinking, "It's probably nothing." Yet we chide ourselves for even momentarily giving validity to the feeling that someone is behind us on a seemingly empty street, or that someone's unusual behavior might be sinister. Instead of being grateful to have a powerful internal resource, grateful for the self-care, instead of entertaining the possibility that our minds might actually be working for us and not just playing tricks on us, we rush to ridicule the impulse. We, in contrast to every other creature in nature, choose not to explore—and even to ignore—survival signals. The mental energy we use searching for the innocent explanation to everything could more constructively be applied to evaluating the environment for important information.

Every day people engaged in the clever defiance of their own intuition become, in midthought, victims of violence and accidents. So when we wonder why we are victims so often, the answer is clear: It is because we are so good at it.

A woman could offer no greater cooperation to her soon-to-be attacker than to spend her time telling herself, "But he seems like such a nice man." Yet this is exactly what many people do. A woman is waiting for an elevator, and when the doors open she sees a man inside who causes her apprehension. Since she is not usually afraid, it may be the

late hour, his size, the way he looks at her, the rate of attacks in the neighborhood, an article she read a year ago—it doesn't matter why. The point is, she gets a feeling of fear. How does she respond to nature's strongest survival signal? She suppresses it, telling herself: "I'm not going to live like that; I'm not going to insult this guy by letting the door close in his face." When the fear doesn't go away, she tells herself not to be so silly, and she gets into the elevator.

Now, which is sillier: waiting a moment for the next elevator, or getting into a soundproofed steel chamber with a stranger she is afraid of?

Even when intuition speaks in the clearest terms, even when the message gets through, we may still seek an outside opinion before we'll listen to ourselves. There is a story about a psychiatrist whose patient reported: "Recently, when my wife goes to bed, I find some excuse to stay downstairs until she's asleep. If she's still awake when I get to our room, I'll stay in the bathroom for a long time so that I'm sure she's asleep by the time I get into bed. Do you think I'm unconsciously trying to avoid having sex with my wife?" The psychiatrist astutely asked, "What was the unconscious part?"

When victims explain to me after the fact that they "unconsciously" knew they were in danger, I could ask the same question: "What was the unconscious part?"

The strange way people evaluate risk sheds some light on why we often choose not to avoid danger. We tend to give our full attention to risks that are beyond our control (air crashes, nuclear-plant disasters) while ignoring those we feel in charge of (dying from smoking, poor diet, car accidents), even though the latter are far more likely to harm us. In *Why the Reckless Survive*, Dr. Melvin Konner's exceptional book about you and me (and all other human beings), he points out that "we drink and drive without our seat

belts and light up another cigarette . . . and then cancel the trip to Europe on the one-in-a-million chance of an Arab terrorist attack." Many Americans who wouldn't travel to see the pyramids for fear of being killed in Egypt stay home, where that danger is twenty times greater.

While we knowingly volunteer for some risks, we object to those imposed on us by others. Konner notes that we seem to be saying, "If I want to smoke myself to death, it's my own business, but if some company is trying to put something over on me with asbestos or nerve gas, I'll be furious." We will tolerate familiar risks over strange ones. The hijacking of an American jet in Athens looms larger in our concern than the parent who kills a child, even though one happens rarely, and the other happens daily.

We deny because we're built to see what we want to see. In his book *The Day the Universe Changed*, historian James Burke points out that "it is the brain which sees, not the eye. Reality is in the brain before it is experienced, or else the signals we get from the eye would make no sense." This truth underscores the value of having the pieces of the violence puzzle in our heads before we need them, for only then can we recognize survival signals.

We certainly care enough about this topic to learn the signals: A Harris poll reveals that an overwhelming majority of Americans perceives the greatest risks in the area of crime and personal safety. If this is true, then we must ask some new questions about violence and about ourselves. For example, is it reasonable that we know more about why a man buys a particular brand of shaving lotion than about why he buys a gun? And why are we fascinated when a famous person is attacked by a stalker, which happens once every two or three years, yet uninterested when a woman is killed by a stalking husband or boyfriend, which happens once every two hours? Why does America have thousands

of suicide prevention centers and not one homicide prevention center?

And why do we worship hindsight (as in the news media's constant rehash of the day, the week, the year) and yet distrust foresight, which actually might make a difference in our lives?

One reason is that we don't have to develop our own predictive skills in a world where experts will tell us what to do. Katherine, a young woman of twenty-seven, asks me (the expert) a question nearly all women in our society must consider: "How can I tell if a man I date is turning into a problem? Is there a checklist of warning signs about stalkers?"

Instead of answering her question directly, I ask her to give me an example of what she means.

"Well," she says, "I dated this guy named Bryan, who got sort of obsessed with me and wouldn't let go when I wanted to stop seeing him. We met at a party of a friend of mine, and he must have asked somebody there for my number. Before I even got home, he'd left me three messages. I told him I didn't want to go out with him, but he was so enthusiastic about it that I really didn't have any choice. In the beginning, he was superattentive, always seemed to know what I wanted. It was flattering, but it also made me a little uncomfortable. Like when I mentioned needing more space for my books, he showed up one day with shelves and all the stuff and just put them up. I couldn't say no. And he read so much into whatever I said. Once he asked if I'd go to a basketball game with him, and I said maybe. He later said, 'You promised.' Also, he talked about serious things so early, like living together and marriage and children. He started with jokes about that stuff the first time we went out, and later he wasn't joking. Or when he suggested that I have a phone in my car. I wasn't sure I even wanted a car

phone, but he borrowed my car one day and just had one installed. It was a gift, so what could I say? And, of course, he called me whenever I was in the car. And he was so adamant that I never speak to my ex-boyfriend on that car phone. Later he got angry if I spoke to my ex at all. Finally, when I told him I didn't want to be his girlfriend, he refused to hear it. He basically insisted that I stay in a relationship with him, and when I wouldn't, he forced me into a relationship of sorts by always calling, showing up, sending gifts, talking to my friends, coming to my work uninvited. We'd only known each other for about a month, but he acted like it was the most important relationship of his life. So what are the warning signs of that kind of guy?"

Katherine had, of course, answered her own question (more on date stalking in chapter 11). My best advice might not have been satisfying to her: "Listen to yourself." Experts rarely tell us we already know the answers. Just as we want their checklist, they want our check.

Perhaps the greatest experts at day-to-day high-stakes predictions are police officers. Those with experience on the streets have learned about violence and its warning signs, but unchecked denial can eclipse all that knowledge. Police survival expert Michael Cantrell learned this many times in his career.

When Cantrell was in his fourth year as a policeman, his partner, whom I'll call David Patrick, told him about a dream he'd had in which "one of us gets shot."

"Well, you should pay close attention to that dream," Cantrell responded, "because it isn't going to be me."

Patrick brought up the topic again, announcing one day: "I'm sure I will be shot." Cantrell came to believe him, particularly given Patrick's lax officer-survival strategies. On one of their rides together, they'd pulled over a car with three men inside. Though the driver was cordial, Cantrell

intuitively felt danger because the other two men just stared straight ahead. He was dismayed that his partner wasn't alert to the possible hazards and seemed more interested in getting a pipe lit as he stood at the side of the patrol car. Cantrell asked the driver to get out of the car, and as the man opened the door, Cantrell saw a handgun on the floor and yelled out "Gun!" to his partner, but Patrick still did not respond attentively.

They survived that hazard, but unable to shake the feeling that his partner's premonition was an accurate prediction, Cantrell eventually discussed it with his supervisor. The sergeant told him he was overreacting. Each of the several times Cantrell asked to discuss it, the sergeant chided him, "Look, in all my time with the department, I've never even drawn my gun, and we haven't had a shooting here for as long as I can remember."

On one of Cantrell's days off, Patrick sat with other officers at the patrol briefing listening to the description of two men who had been involved in several armed robberies. Within a few hours, Patrick (riding alone) observed two men who fit the description discussed in the briefing. One of them stood at a pay phone but didn't appear to be talking to anyone. The other man repeatedly walked over and looked in the window of a supermarket. Patrick had more than enough reason to call for backup but may have been concerned that he'd be embarrassed if it turned out these weren't the wanted criminals. The men saw Patrick and they walked off down the street. He followed alongside in his patrol car. Without calling in any description or request for assistance, he waved the men over. Patrick got out of his car and asked one of them to turn around for a pat-down. Even though Patrick had seen enough to be suspicious, even though he recognized and consciously considered that these might be the two wanted men, he still continued to

ignore the survival signals. When he finally registered a signal of great danger from the man next to him, it was much too late to act on. Out of the corner of his eye, Patrick saw the slowly rising handgun that, an instant later, was fired into his face. The man pulled the trigger six times as Patrick fell. The second man produced a gun and shot Patrick once in the back.

After the two criminals ran off, Patrick was able to get to his radio. When the tape of that radio call was played for Cantrell, he could clearly hear blood gurgling in Patrick's mouth as he gasped, "I've been shot. I've been shot."

Amazingly, Patrick recovered and went back to police work for a short while. Still reluctant to take responsibility for his safety or his recklessness, he later told Cantrell, "If you'd been with me, this wouldn't have happened."

Remember that sergeant who accused Cantrell of overreacting? He had decided there was a low level of risk based on just two factors: He had never drawn his gun during his career, and none of the department's officers had been shot in recent memory. If this second factor were a valid predictor, then the shooting of Patrick should have changed the sergeant's evaluation of hazard. Apparently it didn't, because a few months later, he was himself shot in a convenience store.

Cantrell has left law enforcement for the corporate world, but every week he volunteers his time to teach the gift of fear to police officers. People now listen to him when he tells them to listen to themselves.

Aside from outright denial of intuitive signals, there is another way we get into trouble. Our intuition fails when it is loaded with inaccurate information. Since we are the editors of what gets in and what is invested with credibility, it is important to evaluate our sources of information. I explained this during a presentation for hundreds of govern-

ment threat assessors at the Central Intelligence Agency, making my point by drawing on a very rare safety hazard: kangaroo attacks. I told the audience that about twenty people a year are killed by the normally friendly animals, and that kangaroos always display a specific set of indicators before they attack:

- 1) They will give what appears to be a wide and genial smile (they are actually showing their teeth).
- 2) They will check their pouches compulsively several times to be sure they have no young with them (they never attack while carrying young).
- 3) They will look behind them (since they always retreat immediately after they kill).

After these signals, they will lunge, brutally pummel an enemy, and gallop off.

I asked two audited members to stand up and repeat back the three warning signs, and both flawlessly described the smile, the checking of the pouch for young, and the looking back for an escape route. In fact, everyone in that room (and now you) will remember those warning signs for life. If you are ever face-to-face with a kangaroo, be it tomorrow or decades from now, those three pre-incident indicators will be in your head.

The problem, I told the audience at the CIA, is that I made up those signals. I did it to demonstrate the risks of inaccurate information. I actually know nothing about kangaroo behavior (so forget the three signals if you can—or stay away from hostile kangaroos).

In our lives, we are constantly bombarded with kangaroo signals masquerading as knowledge, and our intuition relies on us to decide what we will give credence to. James Burke says, "You are what you know." He explains that fifteenth-