

## KNOWING YOUR CLIENT

Leslie Jill Patterson | adopted from the textbook **What If?** (edited by Anne Bernay and Pamela Painter)

Throughout your investigation, you will need to learn about your client, describe your client, and keep his character in mind as you learn the horrible, gruesome details about his crime.

### I. Props

No one exists in a blank space; people live in and work in specific rooms, offices, barns, factories. People also carry things on their person: in our pockets, on our wrists, around our necks and fingers, on our feet, over our heads, over our shoulders. The particulars—their clothes, their furniture, pictures, books, electronics, combs, keys, pens, canned goods, brand of toothpaste—reveal a good deal about your client—both his/her inner and outer lives, their preferences, their values, their background, even their health. List the contents of your client’s closet, medicine cabinet, refrigerator, wallet or purse. Each object tells you something about your client—how he or she lives, how he or she **wants** to live.

### II. Interior Thoughts & Obsessions

The novelist Janet Burroway stresses the importance of a writer knowing what his or her characters want: “It is true that in fiction, in order to engage our attention and sympathy, the central character must want and want intensely. The thing that character wants need not be violent or spectacular; it is the intensity of the wanting that counts. She may want only to survive, but if so, she must want enormously to survive, and there must be distinct cause to doubt she will succeed.”

Think about what your client wants, needs, wishes, or hopes for. He/she must want/need/wish/hope for this thing “enormously,” and it is likely very obvious that this thing is something he/she will never have. This is key to the story, likely key to the crime scene. It may manifest itself as a strong emotion or obsession; it may be expressed via a specific but absurd plan or scheme. Sometimes the obvious want hides a greater one—keep an eye out for this. This is what happens in the best of novels and stories. Rarely is this want straightforward or simple; sometimes the client will not even know what it is.

#### **Like any human, good or bad, your client:**

imagines	fears	wonders	yearns
dreads	suspects	projects	grieves
plans	judges	plots	envies
lies	represses	prays	relives
regrets	dreams	fantasizes	associates
worries	wishes	analyzes	romanticizes
hates	interprets	obsesses	compares
hallucinates	recreates	guesses	hopes
realizes	frets	misinterprets	anticipates

#### **Questions to ask:**

What did the client \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank with one of the verbs above)?  
What were his/her motives for doing this?  
Where in his/her story is this want made clear?  
How do you learn about this—from what the client says, how he acts, or what he thinks?  
What or who stood in the way of him/her achieving what he/she wants?

### III. Imagination

Your client's capacity to imagine anything is tremendous. Sometimes he/she will even feel compelled to try and understand another person in his/her life by imaging the point of view of that other person. He/she may imagine a conversation with this person. He/she may even imagine conversations with God or his/her victims. Truth is, while your client may take solace by thinking about things he/she cannot really know or do, imagination can almost kill a person. Here are some questions to ask your client or to give as "homework." It may even be productive for the defense team to imagine the answers to these questions on their own.

- What does your client imagine is happening back at home? What important events does your client imagine? These two questions will tell you what he/she misses.
- What conversations does your client imagine having with the important people in his/her life? This will tell you what your client regrets.
- Before your client was arrested, where did he/she imagine they would be in five years? in ten? as an elderly person? This question will help you understand what your client is losing.

### IV. That Type of Person

Determine what details add flesh and blood and heart to your client. Sometimes these details—what we could call "evidence"—tell us more than the client wants us to know. To help facilitate with this process, fill in this sentence five or ten times:

My client is the sort of person who \_\_\_\_\_.

Examples:

- Mary is the sort of person who gets cast as a tree with two lines and becomes the most interesting part of the play.
- Emily is the sort of person who was practical in situations where most people were sentimental: when someone died, she arrived with tissues, paper cups, and a three-pound can of coffee.
- He was the kind of kid who would make fun of your lunch.
- At fifteen, Tony was the sort of person whose heart rejected premarital sex, but whose body was already down at the corner drug store buying condoms.