

Writing could provide clues

Local analyst examines handwriting on tainted envelopes

09-11-01

YOU CAN NOT STOP US.
WE HAVE THIS ANTHRAX.
YOU DIE NOW.
ARE YOU AFRAID?
DEATH TO AMERICA.
DEATH TO ISRAEL.
ALLAH IS GREAT.



The Oakland Press/JOSE JUAREZ

Handwriting analyst Ruth Holmes does a forensic examination of an envelope addressed to NBC News anchor Tom Brokaw

09-11-01

THIS IS NEXT.
TAKE PENACILIN NOW.
DEATH TO AMERICA
DEATH TO ISRAEL
ALLAH IS GREAT

This letter was sent to the New York Post; an identical letter was mailed to NBC anchor Tom Brokaw

The letter sent to Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle

By KRISTEN JORDAN
Community News editor

BLOOMFIELD HILLS — He tried to disguise his writing.

The block-style uppercase lettering is indicative of that, said Ruth Holmes, a professional handwriting analyst who operates her business, Pentac Inc., from her Oakland County home.

It's just as likely that the same person who addressed the letter containing anthrax that was sent to NBC news anchorman Tom Brokaw also addressed the anthrax-riddled envelope mailed to U.S. Sen. Tom Daschle.

"What we would say is that there are more similarities than dissimilarities and, based on that, it is likely that these letters were written by the same person," Holmes said.

She's examined letters, envelopes,

signatures, scribbles and scrawls from around the world since 1979, helping police and prosecutors link criminals to crime scenes, assisting lawyers with jury selection and even guiding employers as they determine whether certain applicants will make good hires.

Now, Holmes, a certified document examiner, is offering her forensic and personality profiling services to those who are trying to crack the anthrax case, which by Tuesday evening had claimed the lives of three people and infected dozens of others.

"I think the FBI has a monumental task, and those of us in the forensic community are willing to help," she said. "We certainly are) on alert that perhaps we will be

called on even more frequently ... We're trying to report as much as we can."

By looking closely at the details with a magnifying glass, she discovers some things about the person who addressed those letters.

"This is a very intelligent person who tried to make it look like fourth-grade writing," Holmes said, explaining how typically the writer would skew the script to make it look different. "The first thing a person would do would be to change the slant, use capital letters and alter the size."

It probably was written by a man, she said, because it's a very strong, masculine style of print. Although, she cautioned, handwriting analysis can't definitively identify the sex of the writer.

A few things, however, are apparent.

"This person wants to be very clear and wants to win, as evidenced by the last letter, which is larger and jumps up. Strong will power is evident in the 'T' bars. ... This person is on a mission."

The same is true, she said,

of Osama bin Laden, whose signature she also analyzed when it was printed in the London Times following the attacks.

"I think the first thing you would say is that this man is intelligent," Holmes said.

"(Bin Laden) is intelligent, he's focused, and he pays attention to detail.

"His signature also turns into an image..." she explained.

That image appears to be a gun.

Some people, even if unintentionally, seem to create pictures within their signatures. While bin Laden's resembles a gun, soccer legend Pele's signature looks like a soccer ball, Holmes said. Liberace's took the form of a piano.

Other people cross out their names after signing a document. That, she said, is a sign of internal anxiety and distress. Bin Laden's signature is full of crossed out lines.

"I would say that if Osama bin Laden is the mastermind behind all this, we have a formidable task ahead of us,"

Holmes said. "We have people who will not be dissuaded from what they want to do."

Americans should be at least somewhat reassured, she said, that other world and national leaders will offer guidance to President Bush.

"We can be grateful the president is surrounded by intelligent people," Holmes said. "Colin Powell, he's smart, articulate ... and always does the right thing. (British Prime Minister) Tony Blair is brilliant. ... Laura Bush, I think we're turning to her as much as the president."

"There's some solace in the fact that we have a good team."

And if authorities are able to pinpoint a suspect in the anthrax letter case, Holmes said handwriting analysts would likely be called in to offer their expertise.

"If they eventually end up with handwriting samples of the person who did it, we should be able to identify it."

"Handwriting is one piece of the puzzle."