



Right Gabrielle Crofts in a park near her house, which she says is her "outdoor church". The park is the only safe place in her world, apart from her house. She goes there to pray to God and her Angels. "I go to the park when I need James (her son who died in 2001) and my prayers for help from my Angels are, I believe, heard," she says.

"It is almost to me like my own outdoor church where the Angels accept me for who I am, what I am and what I do, since no other church per se will accept my unique gifts from the Holy Spirit. I truly believe deep in my heart and soul and in God's eyes, the nature and natural setting of the park is where I feel I can reach out to God."

Crofts wears two psychic veils; one blue and one white. She wears the blue veil when she is happy and closest to her Angels. She wears her white veil when she is scared and needs protection.

Forensic medium Gabrielle Crofts believes she played a pivotal role in helping solve WA's gruesome Greenough massacre. She says her work has also helped police with more than 50 murders worldwide. **Yasmine Phillips** meets the mother-of-five who lives a private life in Perth's northern suburbs.

Pictures: Rob Duncan

Gift of the Gab

MEETING ONE OF AUSTRALIA'S leading forensic mediums is a disappointingly suburban experience.

But not as disappointing, perhaps, as the disdain with which Gabrielle Crofts' proven track record is treated by local law enforcement. Particularly so, considering she has such a remarkable success rate with international police forces who accept her unique skills without reservation.

In Japan she is accorded rock-star status, greeted at airports by hundreds of adoring fans every time she visits the country.

Yet in Perth, Crofts is simply a 43-year-old mother-of-five and many of her northern suburbs neighbours have quite happily pigeonholed her as a witch, rather than a woman with a rare gift.

But Crofts travels by car and commercial airlines, not broomsticks, and as serious as her work has been, does not take herself too seriously.

A royal blue psychic veil is draped around her welcoming face as she greets me at the door with an all-embracing hug.

Her house personifies her creative thought processes which flit from one exciting saga to another as she sets off on tangents. Remnants of her young boys' adventures litter the lounge room as children's games and opened DVD covers are sprawled across the floor.

Crofts' gregarious exterior is intensified by the familiarity of her home environment and confirmed by the ease with which she excitedly attempts to roll off each bizarre encounter with the mystic world in one long-winded breath.

Her husband of 21 years and the man she describes as her "soulmate", John, is established almost immediately as the family's balancing level as he brings her back on track to each question while he simultaneously sweeps the floor around us.

She might only take up a small corner of the family's couch but Crofts' overstated existence certainly fills the room. The woman, who says she has been able to see, sense and hear the dead since she used to speak to the "women" in the toilets during her primary school days, now uses her skill to find the missing link in some of the State's most horrific murders.

She first shot to prominence in the days after the sordid Greenough massacre, where she claims she gave police the vital clue they needed later to convict the killer.

It was early 1993. Karen MacKenzie, 31, and her three children — Danny, 16, Amara, 7, and Katrina, 5 — had been savagely murdered in the family's three-bedroom weatherboard house, about 20km south of Geraldton. The case, which remains one of the State's most sickening mass murders, sent shockwaves through nearby Mid-West communities as locals feared the cold-blooded killer could strike again.

Before full details of the shocking murders were released, Crofts was invited by a Channel 9 crew to make her first trip to the once-peaceful hamlet. The murdered woman's family invited her back to Greenough soon after, this time allowing her inside the isolated cream home, set back from Brand Highway.

"When I was inside the house with the family I kept hearing, 'Bill did it,'" she says. "And when I asked who Bill was and they said it was a friend of Karen's I knew I had to shut up or they would lynch him... it had to be done through the police. All these years later, that scene is so burned in my brain because that's when it hit me that it was him. Everything I said at the time turned out to be true — he was a local boy, he had lived in the house in the previous six months and his name was a combination of William or Bill and his surname sounded like Mickel or Michael."

Although the investigators in charge of the case deny Crofts' involvement, she insists she met one particular detective on about five occasions at the Heart of the Park shopping centre in Victoria Park.

"I told him how to get this guy and how to prove it was him — I said you have to go back into the house and redo the forensics because there is a single solitary thumb or fingerprint on the door and I'm sure it's the toilet or the bathroom door," she says, angry at the fact that her role has since been dismissed.

"And I'm sure that's where it was found — he denies it now though. I helped on the Greenough case and I am so pissed off about it because he now lies and tells people that I didn't help him."

Crofts even claims her long-time family friend and former CIB chief Don Hancock recognised her work, providing verbal permission for one of the officers at the scene to let her through the roadblock into the house.

"I actually profiled the killer and I said, 'You'll know it's him because he's shortly going to go outside Geraldton to work on a farm', and that's exactly what he did," she says.

"I also picked up the sexual assaults before the coroner's report was released."

A five-week investigation ended with the arrest of William Patrick Mitchell, 24, who was later convicted of four counts of wilful murder, sexually interfering with Ms MacKenzie's dead body and sexually assaulting Amara. He had moved to the rural town of Morawa, about 150km south-east of Geraldton, just weeks after he had bludgeoned the family to death with an axe in a frenzied attack, believed to have been fuelled by a cocktail of drugs.

Karen's mother Barbara Marchant, who does admit the whole ordeal remains a blur today, confirmed the family did let Crofts inside the family's home. She says she remembers her mentioning the name "Bill" while she was there, as well as the fact that something awful had happened to her daughter and one of her precious granddaughters.

"Afterwards we found out some of the things she said could have been right but it's hard to say because (the police) didn't tell us anything about that," she says. "I know she was in the house, I know she had a look around and I know she said a few things to us but it was mainly to the police (that she was talking)."

A spokesman for WA Police said current-serving officers did not recall Crofts' involvement in the investigation, which was successfully solved through effective police and forensic work.

Crofts' chilling accuracy on more than 50 murder cases in the US, Japan and locally has earned her greater respect internationally. She is the only Australian member of the US-based group Find Me, which is made up of international psychics and retired law enforcement officers who aim to find missing people and solve homicide cases. The concept, unlike any other in the world, was dreamt up in 2002 by Kelly Snyder, a retired law enforcement officer now based in the rural setting of Chandler, about 50km from Phoenix.

The day Snyder spoke to *West Weekend Magazine* he had received word the body of a missing boy, whom Find Me worked on in 2004, had been located. But despite working on 92 cases since the group began, Snyder regretfully concedes only 12 of them have actually been solved.

"It's very frustrating because you work your arse off trying to help somebody and then the case goes cold



Clockwise from top left
William Patrick Mitchell was convicted of the Mackenzie family massacre in Greenough. Crofts outside Curtin House wearing her white veil to show WA Police she comes in peace. Sgt Chris Ferris in the bedroom of Greenough victim Katrina MacKenzie, 5. The site of the massacre.



because you've given it to police and you can't force them to do what you want," he says.

Snyder, who worked with the US Drug Enforcement Agency for 25 years, says he was initially curious as to whether a psychic edge would offer an advantage to his newly formed group.

"I started my own group with retired federal agents and cops that I knew, and I've always wondered if the psychic stuff really works," he says.

Far from what he described as "criminal gypsies" who use their so-called "powers" for selfish reasons, Snyder says Find Me would not have enjoyed the success it has without its help from legitimate forensic mediums.

"Now I truly believe that the psychic phenomenon is real," he says. "I don't understand it and quite frankly it doesn't really matter if I ever do because the information they are providing to me is accurate and we're helping people. That's my motivation and I can truthfully say that their abilities, including Gabrielle's, have helped us find missing people."

Crofts' gift also helped her find her own future after the 2001 death of her oldest son James, who was diagnosed with a brain tumour.

It sent her spiralling into a deep depression, forcing her to put all her passions aside during two long, dark years.

Her love of working with women and children as the result of three university degrees in Women's Studies, Politics, Philosophy and Sociology and Family Studies was put on hold.

Even worse, her husband John and their four remaining children — Matthew, 18, Therese, 17, John-Andrew, 12, and Peter, 10 — suffered, and the hectic life that she had once led was no more.

"When James died I lost my mind, I was in such deep, profound grief," Crofts says. "I was an alcoholic and I was out of control — I couldn't sleep."

But while she turned her back on her gift, it would not let her go. Two years after James' death, Crofts was swiftly jolted from her drawn-out mourning period.

A team of investigative journalists from the Save our Souls program on TV Asahi contacted her after a concerned grandfather had begged the Tokyo-based

"When I was inside the house with the family I kept hearing, 'Bill did it.'"

Gabrielle Crofts

network to help him find his daughter and her four-year-old son, Sinya, who had been missing since 2001.

"James said something just before he died which really touched me," she recalls, with deep sadness in her voice as a softer, more fragile aspect of her personality is slowly uncovered.

"He said, 'I love you Mum, don't ever change. You're OK just the way you are', after I had told him I had decided to hang up my crystal ball."

So Crofts reluctantly agreed to make the Japanese trip, first stopping in Sydney where she underwent four gruelling days of accuracy testing against some of the country's top clairvoyants.

She was selected out of more than 100 Australian psychics to work separately on the case with a leading Polish psychic.

From Sydney, working only with a photo of the missing pair, Crofts drew a map which pinpointed where the TV crew would find the mother and son's belongings, hidden beneath some rocks. Later she described a search area which detailed specific marks where the missing mother and son, who had been viciously stabbed to death, would be found in separate shallow graves.

"We found those bodies exactly where I'd said they would be — that was a horrific murder. I described the area because I'm a remote viewer which means I use psychic abilities to pick up things over there. It's very hard to do but I can do it — I'm probably one of only a dozen in the world that can do it," she says, with an established sense of pride.

Each subsequent visit to Japan has forged her a well-known profile.

Her work, both through Find Me and independently, means she is highly regarded by all levels of the Japanese

legal system, including the country's leading coroner and top forensic profiler.

Yet in Australia she is still either shunned, or the average West Australian doesn't even know who she is.

"I've often tried to help with cases and been refused," she admits. "The WA Police Force is 100 years behind the rest of the world — they're too narrow-minded."

WA Police public affairs director Neil Stanbury says mediums are not used in local investigations simply due to their lack of credibility.

"Police officers may check out what they have to say, to exclude them as witnesses or offenders, but they are not used by investigators to aid inquiries," he says.

"They may be used by some US law enforcement agencies which seek to use mediums, but as there are approximately 17,000 LEAs in that country, it would not be surprising to find some forces that might use them."

Ever since she was a five-year-old student at Holy Rosary School in Doubleview, Crofts has known people would have trouble accepting her gift, and, by extension, her.

A precocious first-grader who had grander plans than going over her A-B-Cs, she spent a lot of time in the toilets, talking to what she would come to learn were spirits.

"I would always go in there to have a chinwag with the women in toilets," she retells with a certain naivety. "I later realised they were angels — I was five years old, I didn't know that everyone else couldn't see spirits."

The tale, which has become something of a legend at the school John-Andrew and Peter would later attend, is still retold excitedly by her sons.

"The kids were so scared to go to the toilet that they started to wet their pants," John-Andrew says with a proud giggle.

"The word had got around that the toilets were haunted and there was a massive outbreak of pants wetting," Crofts adds. "It all got traced back to me and I had my arse whipped in front of the whole school and was told to recant my evil ways."

But the sceptics among us, and there are many, she says, have managed to turn her life upside down despite what she insists has always been a genuine gesture with honest intentions.

"All I have ever wanted to do was serve humanity," she says. "My work on murder cases is always free of charge — I have no money and no assets. I've lost people who have been murdered and the devastation and loss is what propelled me into doing this. I'm sort of an outcast, I'm really socially shunned. People automatically assume I'm a fake. Well honey, I'm not."

"They simply attack what they don't understand. One of the things about me that people don't seem to understand is that I would rather die than lie. I've always lived by that motto."

"I try to teach our kids very old-fashioned values of truth and we have a saying in our family..." she is abruptly interrupted by John-Andrew, as he sits on the nearby couch, and recites almost in a monotone: "Virtue and honour." "In other words be honest but also be brave," she concludes.

"And that's the thing that I regret most — my bluntness. I'm over the top, I'm happy-go-lucky, I swear like a sailor, drink like a fish and smoke like a chimney. But I'm too blunt, and that's my eternal shame." ❧