

# Coed killer' remembered 25 years later

## *Key local figures reminisce on grisly legacy of Edmund Kemper*

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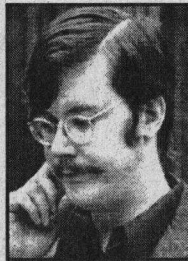
SANTA CRUZ COUNTY — It was a macabre year for Santa Cruz County — in 1972 there were 36 murders countywide.

Watsonville Police Chief Terry Medina and Captain Mickey Aluffi were both detectives at the time in the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office, sharing an office in the

McPherson museum and a single phone that swivelled between their desks. And thanks to the work of two serial killers operating in the area, they stayed plenty busy.

Aluffi remembers well his first meeting with Edmund Emil Kemper III, later dubbed the "Coed Killer." As the murder totals continued to climb, sales records from

local gun dealers routinely flowed into the sheriff's office. Aluffi went to go track down Kemper, who had just purchased a .44 Magnum, because detec-



Kemper

tives were alerted that Kemper had a juvenile record for double murder.

He went to 609-A Ord St. in Aptos, and knocked on the door. There was no answer. Across the street, a car had just pulled up and a man was laid out across the front seat of a car, fiddling with something under the dashboard or on the floorboards. Maybe this guy can tell us where to find

Kemper, Aluffi thought.

When the detective approached, the man got out of the car — all 6-foot-8 and 285 pounds of him.

It was Kemper. He was cooperative with the officers, chatting with them as he relinquished the weapon from the trunk of his car. Curiously, there was no liner in the trunk, just raw metal.

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# KEMPER

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Authorities would later learn that this was because he had been rinsing blood out of the vehicle, but for now he was not a suspect.

## The making of a murderer

Just a couple of weeks later, on April 21, 1973, Kemper murdered his mother and her friend in the same Aptos apartment. Aluffi surmised that the gun incident had clued Kemper to the possibility that law enforcement was onto him, and thus the "mental deterioration started."

Kemper was born in Burbank, where he grew up in a bizarre love-hate relationship with his mother. "His mother would lock him in a cold, dark basement," said Peter Chang, who prosecuted Kemper as district attorney. "In multiple ways, he was abused as a child."

In his pubescent years, Kemper lived with his grandparents in the town of North Fork, a mountainous community in California's Madera County. In 1963, at the age of 14, he shot and killed both of his grandparents, Edmund and Maude Kemper. Later he reportedly said, "I just wondered how it would feel to shoot Grandma."

After serving five years in state mental facility, Kemper was released and came to Santa Cruz County, where his mother, Clarnell Strandberg, worked as an administrative aide at College Five at UC-Santa Cruz. He briefly attended Cabrillo College, and in 1970 he worked for two months at the Green Giant plant in Watsonville.

## Killing hitchhikers

According to Chang, Santa Cruz County was an all-too-easy spot for Kemper to begin his string of eight more murders. After all, there were two college campuses and a main highway running through the middle. "You could pick up a hitchhiker and within three minutes be in an isolated spot," said Chang.

The first victims were roommates Mary Pesce and Anita Luchessa, both 19 and both students at California State University, Fresno. They had left for a weekend in Berkeley and ended up catching a ride with Kemper. Both disappeared on May 7, 1972. Pesce's skull was found on August 15 of that year on the summit of Loma Prieta. Luchessa's body wasn't discovered until

April 28, 1973, on the Old Santa Cruz Highway 1 1/2 miles north of Summit Road.

Aiko Koo, 15, disappeared from Berkeley on Sept. 14, 1972, while hitchhiking to a dance class. In tales that Kemper would later recount to authorities, Koo actually managed to lock Kemper out of the car. After two hours of pleading, the killer persuaded the girl to let him back inside. Once she did, he promptly murdered her. Koo's dismembered remains were found near Bonny Doon.

Just two days after Koo's death, Kemper paid a regular visit to state psychiatrists in Fresno, where they declared that he was no longer a danger to society. Koo's head was in the trunk of his car parked outside.

On Jan. 8, 1973, Cabrillo student Cynthia Schall disappeared. Pieces of her torso began washing up two days later on Big Sur and Santa Cruz beaches. Her head, positioned so that it was looking upward, was later found buried outside Kemper's bedroom window at his mother's Aptos apartment.

With an all-campus access car sticker provided by his mother, Kemper earned the trust of two UCSC students on Feb. 5, 1973. Rosalind Thorpe, 23, and Alice Liu, 21, got into his car outside Stevenson College — and both were shot with a .22 caliber handgun in the early evening hours before they were off campus. With the two bodies of the young women still in his car, Kemper pulled into a gas station on Mission Street and filled up his tank.

"We were trying to tell girls not to hitchhike," said Medina. "They said it was their right."

## Finding the killer

The problem with tracking the unknown killer lay in the fact that Kemper's murders coincided with those committed by Herbert Mullin, who was arrested in Feb. 1973, for what would be a total of 13 murders since 1972. For a time, Chang said that there was a tremendous amount of pressure on the district attorney's office to charge Mullin with the Kemper murders, because several anatomical drawings were found in Mullin's possession which suggested he could have been responsible for dismemberment of bodies. But none of Mullin's confirmed victims had been dismembered. "We just couldn't make the connection," said Chang.

Kemper's final known murders would be on Easter weekend, when

he killed his mother with hammer blows to the head. He then invited his mother's friend, Sally Hallet, over on the premise that he was going to take the women to dinner. Hallet was killed by a blow from a brick. Both women were dismembered and their parts were tucked away in closets of the Ord Street apartment.

Kemper then drove away on Easter Sunday, on what Chang called "a stupid mission to kill the president." His mother's murder was an act for which Kemper said he felt extreme remorse and guilt, but was also glad that she would no longer nag him. "He realized he had accomplished his mission," said Chang.

## Turning himself in

From a phone booth in Pueblo, Colo., Kemper called Lt. Chuck Shear at the Santa Cruz Police Department. Kemper, trying to confess the murder of his mother and her friend, had to call back three times

before he was taken seriously.

Chang believes that Kemper turned himself in because of a "combination of fatigue, coldness, remorse... He had a very funny definition of remorse."

Aluffi was selected to fly out to Colorado, along with Chang and Shear, while Medina stayed behind and processed the Ord Street crime scene. Aluffi remembers Kemper as "a little bit excitable, with total recall in great, great, detail. For some victims he expressed remorse, some he was nonchalant about."

"He described (his crimes) like he was doing a police report," said Medina of the serial killer, who possessed a genius I.Q.

Chang, 11 years into his career at the time, wished he could forget about his Colorado meeting with Kemper. He said he had nightmares for a long time after hearing the "horrific" tales straight from Kemper's mouth.

"I had never heard confessions

like that," Chang said, noting that the killer was "calm" as he spoke. "He was lucid, articulate, and had an incredible memory for detail."

## Kemper's trial

The trio drove Kemper back to Santa Cruz, since no airline would accept the prisoner. When he was booked into the county jail, Kemper came to the section of the form that ask for an emergency contact. He turned to Aluffi and asked, "Can I put you as my emergency contact?" Aluffi said yes.

During Kemper's three-month trial, he never recanted but he did maintain that he was insane. The court found otherwise, and Kemper was convicted of eight counts of first degree murder, punishable at that time by life imprisonment.

After the verdicts were announced, Kemper walked over to the prosecutor, shook his hand, and said, "Nice going, Mr. Chang." Chang recalls the feeling of that

handshake as "very weird."

Kemper, who turned 50 last year, is now housed in the California Medical Facility at Vacaville. According to Lt. Terry McDonald of the Department of Corrections, Kemper, who once sat down for an interview with Register-Pajaronian reporter Marj von Beroldingen, no longer talks to any members of the press since a book published by renowned FBI profiler John Douglas angered him. "He did not like it," said McDonald.

"He always left me with the impression there's something he didn't admit," said Aluffi, who said that the last time he interviewed Kemper, the killer alluded to a confession that he would make at a later date.

Kemper once told the young detective, "Stick with me, kid, and you'll get promoted." Testifying at Kemper's trial, Aluffi took the stand and told his name and new rank — sergeant — for the record.

Kemper nodded and smiled.