

# The Cost of Justice, Part 2 History of Mass Murder

by Carolyn Swift

August 21, 1970—  
Life Magazine had just published a four-page photo spread on the Southern California day camp dude ranch where ten "empty-eyed waifs with cracked-doll faces" pined for Charlie Manson. But Charlie wasn't coming; he was 50 miles away in L.A., on trial for the savage killings of actress Sharon Tate and six others.

Cults like Charlie's were a fad that filled people with angst, if not disgust. Long hair with headbands, wide-legged pants, miniskirts, chain necklaces and leather chokers were the fashions of the day, while college students were all treated more or less as radicals—regardless of their politics—and Vietnam War protests could be bloody in oceanside, fun-city Santa Cruz.

The Catalyst, mirrored around the fountain at the St. George Hotel, was too often filled with those who'd experimented with too many drugs too often. Even Capitola leaders acknowledged local cult activity.

Still, no one expected this happening.

"Halloween—1970. Today world war 3 (sic) will begin as brought to you by the people of the Free Universe. From this day forward, any one and-or company of person who misuses the natural environment or destroys same will suffer the penalty of death by the people of the Free Universe..."

Santa Cruz County history's ugliest chapter had opened, as it did so, the community bond of security shattered.

In two years, this would become "The Murder Capital of the World," with each grisly detail exposed for public review—butchery, cannibalism and cadaverous sex included.

Looking back, the carnage was in some ways harder to bear than natural disasters of

the '80s, for at least fires, floods and earthquakes drew communities closer together. Murder made everyone suspicious, even of their neighbors.

Why remember killers who caused so much pain? Can we dare forget?

And what about the victims, the people whose lives were cut short? Of 30 local murders, only three killed by the mass murderers were adult males 25-65 years of age. One was an elderly man, retired; four were teenage boys, and four male children. Eighteen women died; the majority were female students and in their twenties.

The slaughter of these young women came at a time college campuses were often philosophically at odds with the community as a whole; when bus service was utterly inadequate and female hitchhikers were viewed by the general public as deserving whatever happened to them.

## John Linley Frazier

On the evening of October 19, 1970, fire fighters from Live Oak and Soquel were summoned to the home of prominent Santa Cruz eye surgeon Victor M. Ohta. Entrance to the hilltop estate was blocked by Ohta's Rolls Royce, the "Halloween—1970" note under the windshield. The \$300,000 house was on fire, while in the swimming pool around back were the executed bodies of Dr. Ohta, his wife Virginia (Toby), sons Derrick and Taggart, and secretary Dorothy Cadwallader.

News accounts pointed sharply to "shouldering tensions" between longhairs and "the predominately elderly population of Santa Cruz." Authorities assumed a hippie cult was behind the killings. Vigilante sentiments drove many longhairs to the barber. Animal shelters were deluged with requests for watchdogs of all breeds. Handgun sales jumped.

Three days after the murders, authorities cornered and arrested John Linley Frazier, 24, a former Capitola Elementary School student and high school drop-out. A sometime mechanic, married yet separated from his wife, Frazier had been living in a cowshed about a half-mile from the Ohta estate.

He'd been arrested with the help of hippies who thought him "a real paranoid freak" for his delusion that he was on a mission to "save the world from materialism."

Even though the young man's search for 12 disciples had

failed to produce even a single convert, the press continued to associate him with Santa Cruz longhairs. On Oct. 22, the *San Jose Mercury News* printed the banner headline: "Hippie Pals Finger Massacre Suspect."

Because of the intensity of community tension and anger, the State Supreme Court ruled Frazier wouldn't get a fair trial in Santa Cruz. It was therefore moved to San Mateo, where ultimately Frazier was found sane and sentenced to death.

He did a stint on San Quentin's Death Row (with Charlie Manson) and remained there until the death penalty was abolished in California a few years later. Transferred to Folsom and in jail 22 years, Frazier was last denied parole in 1990.

## Herbert William Mullin

It happened again in October, almost exactly two years later, but no one was any the more prepared.

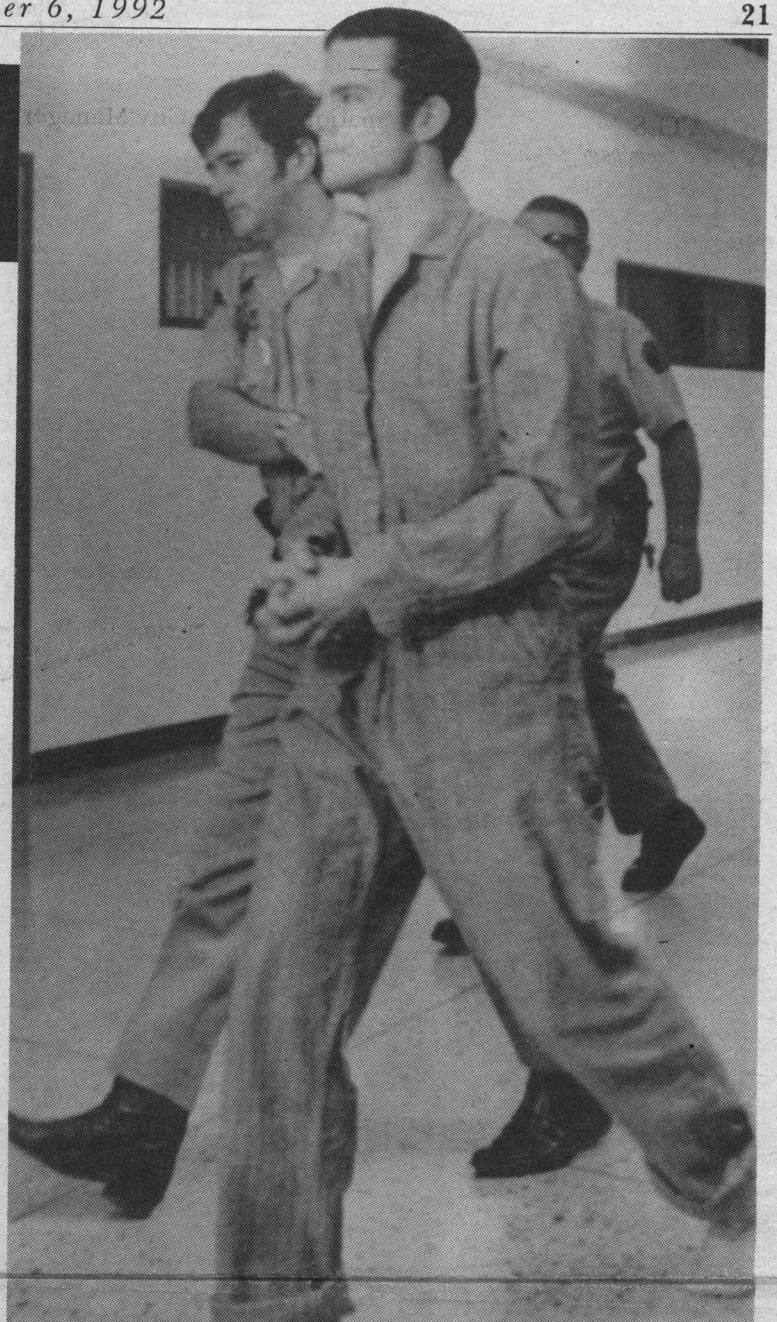
Between Oct. 12, 1972, and Feb. 13, 1973, Mullin used a knife, handgun, rifle and baseball bat to slay four men (including the Catholic priest he sought in confession), four women, four teenage boys and two children.

Mullin, 25, was a San Lorenzo Valley High School honors student. He was finally apprehended on Feb. 13, 1973, minutes after gunning down elderly Fred Perez, a retired fisherman out watering his lawn near West Cliff Drive. A neighbor saw Mullin's car speed from the scene and alerted police with enough detail for the capture. Mullin was convicted later that year of two counts of first degree and eight counts of second degree murder.

He was convicted in Santa Clara County of killing the Catholic priest (he'd admitted two other murders but was not tried on those counts).

Mullin said he was ordered in telepathic "die" songs to make sacrifices to avoid a catastrophic earthquake that would destroy California.

To Mullin, Santa Cruz owes its thanks for the murder capital title. Then District Attorney Peter Chang, walking away from the discovery of four bodies in Henry Cowell State Park, made a comment about "Murdersville, USA," to the late Marj von B, court reporter for the Register-Pajaronian. Another journalist picked up the remark and misquoted it over wire services as "murder capital of the world." The name stuck.



Herbert Mullin, now 43, is serving a life sentence for the murders he committed.

In 1985, Mullin was up for a parole hearing, denied because his psychiatric report showed he still behaved with delusional thinking.

Serving a life sentence at California Men's Colony at San Luis Obispo, parole was denied for the seventh time last year, when the California Board of Prison Terms said 43-year-old Mullin still had an unfavorable report and a poor social history in prison.

## Edmund Emil Kemper, III

One of Mullin's victims had been a young woman, a 24-year-old Cabrillo College student late for a job appointment on October 24, 1972. She was stabbed in the heart somewhere between Soquel and Santa Cruz; her body was then dissected and dumped in the mountains, where it was found the following February.

Hitching a ride was the most common form of mass transportation. In those days, male and female students relied on each other to get where they needed to go.

The killing of a hitchhiker, a woman, undermined the safety of every one of her sex who

needed to beg for a ride. In recent months, seven had disappeared. Assuming that Mullin was responsible for them all, the local community for a moment relaxed.

But it wasn't over.

Santa Cruz County Chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW) joined with UCSC's Women Against Rape (WAR) and local colleges to establish car pools and lobby for bus service. Offices of local law enforcement and the County Jail were the to be sites of protest demonstrations against what was seen as a lack of concern for not only the kidnappings (and suspected murders) but for 11 rapes and numerous attempted rapes of women hitchhikers in recent months.

Self-defense classes were hurriedly organized. College students were warned to ride in cars with staff lot stickers and to accept rides from couples or women only.

For some, this was lethal advice:

On February 15, a female student hitched with a young man who had a UCSC Staff "A" lot sticker. A few minutes later, another woman sought a ride, too, assuming they were a

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## CRIMES

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couple. Both women were dead before the car left the UCSC campus.

Later, Edmund Kemper said the women were "surrogate" victims for his mother, who—in the end—he also murdered.

As a child, Kemper had resented the separation of his parents. After he ran away from home at the age of 13 to find his father, his mother found him increasingly difficult to manage and sent him to live on the isolated ranch of her parents. Two years later, he shot and killed both grandparents and then called his mom. He sat calmly and awaited the police.

Kemper spent four years in a maximum-security mental hospital. At 21, he was discharged by the parole board into the care of his mother. He was six-foot, nine inches tall, and weighed 280 pounds. His I.Q. was in the 130 range, near genius.

From May 7, 1972 to April 21, 1973, Kemper murdered eight women by shooting, stabbing and strangulation. He acted out childhood fantasies by dismembering the bodies and eating

*Convicted killer Edmund Emil Kemper.*

flesh from his victims. After he killed his mother and her friend, he drove from her home in Seacliff to Pueblo, Colorado. In three days, he phoned Santa Cruz authorities and turned himself in, providing explicit details about the murders.

A little more than four years after his arrest, Kemper asked the courts to perform surgery on him which he believed would alter his personality to curb his violent tendencies. The Department of Corrections turned him down.

Kemper continues to serve out a life sentence in Vacaville.

## Richard "Blue" Sommerhalder

In 1976, Aptos resident Richard "Blue" Sommerhalder was arrested for murdering two local women and badly beating two others. The number of murders was too few to fit the mass murder profile, but the impact—particularly upon women in their twenties—was as traumatic as ever.

Twelve years later, the community had not forgotten the tension and fear. A petition drive of Santa Cruz County

residents prevented Sommerhalder's return to Aptos following his parole.

## David Carpenter

On March 31, 1981, Santa Cruz County Sheriff Al Noren warned the public of a "safety hazard"—another mass killer on the loose in the Santa Cruz Mountains. This one it turned out, was a member of the Sierra Club, and known as "the Trailside Killer" who'd been hunted in Marin County since 1980.

The Trailside Killer had murdered five women on trails in Marin County and two victims in Santa Cruz.

It took two months of tracking for authorities to close in on Carpenter, 50, but he was finally arrested May 15, 1981. He'd previously served eight years of a 15-year sentence for attempting to rape a woman and beating her with a hammer at the U.S. Army Presidio in San Francisco.

He was sentenced to death row for the two local murders.

## The Lost Boys

Santa Cruz County remains a beautiful and still remote stretch of California coastline, fragile in spite of or perhaps because of the eccentricities of its population. Those who continue to live here have adjusted to many things, but murder will never be one of them.

In the late 1980s, Santa Cruz was the set for an innocent sounding film called "The Lost Boys." In the opening scene—while credits are running—a mother and her two teenage boys ride along the coast of Santa Carla (Santa Cruz, West Cliff Drive), and as they pass a large billboard, one looks back to see the words "Murder Capital of the World" spray painted in red. Down on the boardwalk, pictures of missing children are tacked to poles and on bulletin boards.

The movie was about vampires living in the tourist heart of a sleepy resort town. It became not only a cult classic, but an eerie foreshadowing of one the latest in bizarre Santa Cruz murders—the killing last April of 22-year-old Brandon McMichaels, stabbed 27 times at his Riverside Avenue home.

Alleged vampire Deborah Jean Finch, age 20, told detectives she had at first lied that drugs were involved in the killing, because murder seemed unreal "like a movie."

"Murder Capital of the World," is a title neither warranted nor welcome in Santa Cruz. With it, many people have died and many others have suffered for years and years. But getting rid of this distinction may take more than time, or peace, or the public's short memory. □