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# Mullin: 'I know people would accept me...'

(This is the conclusion of a two-part series)

By Richard Palmer

Convicted mass murderer, Herbert Mullin, has spent one-fourth of his 34 years in prison. Now housed in the honor unit of the California Men's Colony in San Luis Obispo, he's had eight-and-a-half years to rationalize his killing of 13 people in 1972 and '73.

Once an honor student, his intelligence has not been diminished by incarceration. He's "only five percent guilty" of the murders, he

says, because he was a product of his environment. Those around him planted the seeds that blossomed in death. He argues for his freedom with chilling logic, carefully crafted, highly polished.

He presents a case that almost sounds reasonable, that's almost convincing.

Almost.

Until he talks about the murders, and the enormity of his crimes strikes home.

Following lunch, when Mullin

returns to the small room in the Men's Colony to resume the interview, he brings several copies of the inmates' newsletter.

"I really enjoy writing," Mullin smiles. "But it's difficult to concentrate," he continues, clenching his teeth and arching one eyebrow, "in this pit of resentment. The sounds in this place, the constant noise, the distractions. I have to write late at night."

His column in the weekly publication is entitled "Natural Science" and dwells mostly on environmental

or historical subjects. Mullin speaks fondly of his youth when he roamed the San Lorenzo Valley and swam in the San Lorenzo River each summer. He says he was seeking the peace and solitude of the redwood forests that day in February, 1973, when he set out on a hike through Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park.

Instead, Mullin found a makeshift tent in which Brian Card, Mark Dreibelbis, David Olier and Robert Spector were sharing dinner.

"It was good to walk, to get away," recalls Mullin. "But when I

came upon the tent and saw them, the first thing that came into my mind, was 'wow, human sacrifices'."

Mullin recalls observing the four youths, ages 15 through 19, before approaching them. "We sat down, they offered me some food, we talked," he says. "They told me where they were from, and told me how much fun they were having camping."

Mullin's gaze grows intense as he searches for words. "But there were two dialogues, the external

one and the internal one. I don't know how to explain it, but I've talked to Vietnam vets who say you get this sixth sense in wartime. That's what it was like. And the internal dialogue told me they wanted me to kill them. Something told me if those four didn't die, then four others would."

And though his walk that day had begun in solitude and peace, Mullin was carrying the .22 caliber revolver he'd purchased a few weeks earlier. The campers became

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## After nearly 40 years,

# ✓ Mullin interview

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Mullin's ninth, 10th, 11th and 12th victims.

Before he left the campsite, Mullin picked up a .22 caliber rifle he found inside the tent. On Feb. 13, 1973, Mullin used the rifle to gun down 72-year-old Fred Perez in front of his Santa Cruz home. "I was getting these vibrations, like, 'if you don't, you'll shame your parents. You've got to save the San Andreas fault,'" Mullin says, pausing. "The old man, he was raking up leaves in his front yard."

The shooting was witnessed by a neighbor who gave a description of Mullin's car to police. Within a half hour, a patrolman spotted the station wagon and arrested Mullin without incident.

after I was arrested, when I'd been in jail 60, maybe 70 days, that I realized what had happened. That was when it all came together."

Mullin grows intense when speaking of his family, his voice rising at times to a near-shout, expressions flashing across his face. He says the last time his parents visited him was in fall of 1976; he's refused to see them since.

"They kept writing me letters, but they were full of bullshit," Mullin says. "They'd write and tell me how they really prayed that I would be a healthy child, how all they wanted was for me to be a successful person. It was obviously bullshit." Now, he says, his parents send him a card at Easter and Christmas.

good accomplishments. I've learned how to think. I've learned how to act, react, talk, pray, work, feel, emote. I can talk to you about the universe, about how it has 200 billion galaxies, each four million light-years apart, about how each galaxy has 200 stars, each three light-years distant from each other." Leaning forward, voice rising, "but you want to talk about my resentment, my crimes. I'm telling you I can talk about anything, and that I don't want you or anyone to think of me as a criminal."

More calmly, Mullin continues. "Believe me, I have no vengeance. I swear on God's name, I have no feelings of revenge. I finally feel independent from my family, from those people in my past. I can block those games now, I could get them to talk about something else. I want to do all the things I haven't been able to. The things I never had a chance to do. All I need is my freedom."

When he's asked if he thinks he'll ever be released, Mullin smiles.

"Oh yeah," he says. "I've talked with the parole board, I've talked with the psychs (psychiatrists), the program administrators, the counselors, and they all tell me I'll get out someday."

But what about the victims?

"I think about those people, now," Mullin says. "I pray for their souls. And sometimes, I believe I

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## **'I didn't think I'd be caught,' says Mullin. 'I didn't think they wanted to catch me.'**

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"I didn't think that I'd be caught," Mullin says. "I didn't think they wanted to catch me. I just didn't do too much thinking."

Mullin believes the force that made him kill, the idea that human sacrifice was necessary to prevent a cataclysmic earthquake, was instilled by those close to him. He chooses to minimize, even ignore, the fact that drugs could have caused an honor student and exceptional athlete to become a paranoid, schizophrenic killer.

Yet Mullin admits his drug use far surpassed the simple experimentation of his peers. At one point in the interview, Mullin says he tripped on LSD 40 times; later, he recalls one instance alone when he purchased 50 hits of acid. He recalls using heroin about 25 times, then revises that figure to about 10. He cannot approximate the number of times he smoked marijuana and hashish or took amphetamines.

Though drugs "may have had something to do with it," Mullin maintains it was his family that warped his mind and made him kill. Then why, he's asked, didn't he turn on them?

"Because I didn't know what they were doing," he says. "I was gullible, easily taken in. I didn't realize the danger. It wasn't until

Mullin is asked if he ever, during the four months the murders took place, thought about the people he'd killed.

"No, brother, I couldn't feel that," he says. "A mature person thinks about what he's going to do and does it. An immature person never thinks about what he's doing. I was immature."

Did he ever think about taking his own life?

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## **'I've talked with the parole board . . . and they all tell me I'll get out someday.'**

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"Nope," he smiles. "Not even once."

Suddenly restless, Mullin gets up and walks around the small room, stopping to gaze out the barred window. "For me, this (incarceration) is not a valid action. I'm sitting in here, but the people who played the games on me are out there, partying, having fun. I'm only five percent guilty, but they're punishing me like I'm 100 percent guilty."

Returning to his chair, Mullin sits. "I'm not a failure, I'm not an ignoramus. I have good qualities,

come in contact with a power, a beneficial spirit that assures me they'll be taken care of, that God will reward them and help them."

"I believe in reincarnation, you know," Mullin says, "and those kids (his seventh and eighth victims, ages 9 and 4), just think; they're out there somewhere, fishing."

"You tell people," he says, "that Herbert Mullin says he's only five percent guilty. Tell 'em I'd like them to write the governor. That I deserve a retrial. Maybe they'll hear me. I know people would accept me if I get out."