

## **I. *DISCOVERY OF THE CRIMINAL: Hillside Strangler***

In a city the size of Los Angeles, three women were found strangled and dumped naked on hillsides northeast of the city between October and early November of 1977.

Five more young women and girls were found on hillsides in the Glendale-Highland Park area. These five young women, one of which was 12, another only 14 were not prostitutes, but "nice girls" who had been abducted from their middle-class neighborhoods.

Newspapers and television stations talked of rape, torture, abduction and murder. The term "Hillside Strangler" was coined by the media, even though police were convinced that there was more than one person involved.

On November 20, 1977, LAPD Homicide Detective Sergeant Bob Grogan was called to an obscure area in the hills. As he tried with difficulty to locate the site, he thought to himself that whoever was using this area to dump bodies must be very familiar with the neighborhood to even know this place existed.

The dead girl was found naked in a modest, middle-class neighborhood. Grogan noticed the ligature marks on her wrists, ankles and neck. When he turned her over, blood oozed under her. The bruises on her breasts were obvious. Oddly enough, there were two puncture marks on her arm, but no signs of the needle tracks that indicate a drug addict.

As Grogan saw no indication of any disturbance in the foliage nor any sign that the body had been dragged there. He made a mental note to himself that the murder occurred somewhere else and a man, maybe two men, had carried her body and dumped it there in the grass. The woman was identified as Kristina Weckler.

The LAPD had been investigating two homicides on the other side of that same hilly area. The two dead girls had been found by a 9-year-old boy who had been treasure hunting in a trash heap on the hillside.

Again, there was no indication that the murders had occurred where the bodies were found, nor was there any evidence that the bodies had been dragged there. There was the probability that more than one killer was involved in dumping their bodies on the hillside.

The girls were identified as Dolores Cepeda, 12, and Sonja Johnson, 14, both of whom had been missing for about a week. The girls had been last seen getting off a bus from school and going over to a large two-tone sedan to talk to someone. Information that there was a person on the passenger side corroborated the theory that there were two killers, probably both men.

The day before Thanksgiving, another young woman's body was found. Her maggot-covered body was estimated to have been there some two weeks. She had been strangled like the others, but it was not certain if she had been raped. Jane King was 28 at the time of her death.

### **A Witness**

The naked body of a young woman was found lying partially in the street on Nov. 29th. The ligature marks on her ankles, wrists and neck were the Hillside Strangler's calling card.

But something was different: it looked as though she had burns on her palms. Like the strange puncture marks on Kristina Weckler's arms, it looked as though the killers were experimenting - possibly with methods of torture. There was also something else that was different - a shiny track of some sticky liquid, which had attracted a convoy of ants. If this substance was semen or saliva, there was the possibility that the killer's blood type could be determined. Tests on semen found in the earlier victims had revealed

nothing.

The young woman was identified as Lauren Wagner, an 18-year-old student who lived with her parents in the San Fernando Valley. Her parents had gone to bed the previous night, expecting her to come home before midnight. The next morning, they found her car parked across the street with the door ajar.

When Lauren's father questioned the neighbors, he found that the woman, Beulah Stofer, had seen Lauren's abduction. She had seen Lauren pull over to the curb around 9 pm. Two men had pulled their car beside hers. There was some kind of disagreement and Lauren ended up in the car with the two men.

Beulah described the killers' car as a large and dark with a white top. One of the men had dragged Lauren from her car into his. She heard Lauren cry out, "You won't get away with this!" Beulah was so terrified by the incident that she did not even tell her husband who had been home the whole time. She was sure that there were two men: one was tall and young with acne scars; the other one was Latin-looking, older and shorter with bushy hair.

### **Early Victims**

The rampage of Thanksgiving week threw into the spotlight three earlier murders of prostitutes or suspected prostitutes, beginning in October.

On October 17, 1977, a tall, leggy prostitute called Yolanda Washington was raped and strangled. Her nude body was dumped near the Forest Lawn Cemetery. Almost 2 weeks later, Sgt. Frank Salerno, was called to the town of La Crescenta to investigate the homicide of a woman.

The naked body of the woman lay close to the curb in a residential area. The bruises on her neck showed that she had been strangled. She had ligature marks on wrists and ankles as well as her neck. On her eyelid was small piece of light-colored fluff that Salerno saved for the forensic experts.

The body was placed deliberately where it would be found quickly -- a nasty wake-up call to that respectable middle-class neighborhood. There was no indication that the victim had been dragged to the spot where she lay, so Salerno theorized that she had been carried from a car, possibly by more than one person.

The coroner determined that she had been strangled around midnight, some 6 hours or so before she was found that morning. It was also clear that she had been raped and sodomized. After a couple of days, she still didn't match any missing person's report. Salerno took to the streets around Hollywood Boulevard, which was a 'mecca' for runaways, addicts, prostitutes and the homeless.

With her sketch in hand, he showed it to hundreds of street people. The name Judy Miller kept surfacing as a young destitute prostitute. A man named Markust Camden said he saw Judy Miller leave a restaurant at 9 p.m. on the evening before she was found dead. Salerno's only other clue, the little piece of fluff that he found on the victim's eyelid, could not be identified. Eventually, Salerno tracked down the Miller family and got a positive identification on the body.

A week later, the naked body of another strangulation victim was found. Salerno talked to the Glendale police and recognized the similarities between the 2 victims. Both had been strangled by ligature and their bodies had been dumped within six or so miles of one another. Both girls had the same 5-point ligature marks (ankles, wrists, and neck). There was evidence of rape, but not sodomy, in the newest victim.

Looking at the scene where the body had been deposited, Salerno was certain that at least 2 men were involved. This victim was Lissa Kastin, a 21-year-old waitress. Lissa had last been seen leaving the restaurant just after nine o'clock on the night she was murdered.

### **Three More**

Eight victims in the space of two months had been found. The investigation went into high gear, but the killer or killers took a couple of weeks off. In mid-December, police were called to a vacant lot on a steep hillside where they found the body of Kimberly Diane Martin, a tall, blonde call-girl.

This time the police department had what seemed like two reasonably good leads. Kimberly Martin's last client had beckoned her to Apartment 114 on Tamarind St. The murderer had called from a pay phone in the lobby of the Public Library

There were no more victims in December or January. After 2 months, in mid-February, there was another victim, when an attractive young woman named Cindy Hudspeth was murdered. Her strangled, violated body was put into the trunk of her car and was pushed off a cliff.

The next day when the police investigated, it was clear from the ligature marks that the Hillside Strangler was at work once again. Police focused on the details of Cindy's life in the hopes that they could determine who was with her when she disappeared.

Cindy had been a 20-year-old clerk who everybody liked. A vivacious young woman, she had won several dance contests. Cindy had been last seen in her apartment. She had probably been headed toward the community college. Between her apartment building and the community college, Cindy had been kidnapped in the late afternoon. Detectives Bob Grogan and Frank Salerno both believed that there was a good chance that at least one of the killers lived in Glendale.

### **A Co-Operative Effort**

The investigation was going nowhere. The few clues they had produced no good suspects. They knew the kind of person they were looking for, but that wasn't much help in a huge metropolitan area. Darcy O'Brien in his book, *Two of a Kind*, summarizes what the forensic psychiatrists had to say: "The Strangler was white, in his late twenties or early thirties, and single, separated, or divorced -- in any case not living with a woman. He was of average intelligence, unemployed or existing on odd jobs, not one to stay with a job too long. He had probably been in trouble with the law before. He was passive, cold, and manipulative -- all at once. He was the product of a broken family whose childhood was marked by cruelty and brutality, particularly at the hands of women." Armed with that useful profile, Grogan said: "Gee, all we got to do now is find a white male who hates his mother."

One unusual twist to the investigation was the arrival in L.A. of a psychic from Berlin. Grogan was polite, but unenthusiastic, when the psychic wrote in German what they should be looking for:

Two Italians  
Brothers  
Aged about thirty-five

### **Seattle Connection**

On January 12, 1979, the police in Bellingham, Washington were told that two Western Washington University students were missing. The two women roommates, Karen Mandic and Diane Wilder, were not the type of people to take off irresponsibly without telling anyone. When Karen didn't show up for work, her boss became worried. He remembered that she had accepted a house-sitting job in a very wealthy Bayside neighborhood from a security guard friend of hers.

Bellingham police contacted the security firm, who in turn called the security guard to ask him about the supposed house-sitting job for one of the company's clients. The security guard claimed he knew nothing about it and had never heard of the two missing women. The security guard had told his employer that he had been at a Sheriff's Reserve meeting the night the two women disappeared.

When police found out that the security guard was not at the Sheriff's Reserve meeting as he had told his employer, they decided to contact the security guard directly. They found him to be a friendly young man

who had skipped the Sheriff's meeting because it was on first aid, which he already knew.

The police had no indication that the 2 women had met with foul play. In their home, he found the address of the house where the two were to house-sit. A look at the records of the security firm brought up the name of that same security guard in conjunction with the address in which the girls were to house-sit.

Police learned that the security guard had used a company truck the night the women disappeared, supposedly to take it into the shop for repair. However, the guard never took the truck in for servicing. He asked the Highway Patrol to check on sites that might be used to dump bodies or abandoned cars

The police to search the Bayside address where the girls were supposed to house-sit. Police found a neighbor who had been contacted by a security guard and had been asked to check on the house each day except for the night that the girls disappeared. That night, the guard told the neighbor, there was special work being done to the alarm system and he didn't want her to be taken as an intruder.

Next, the police enlisted the help of the news media, requesting that they describe the missing women and car to their audiences. Shortly thereafter, a woman called about a car that had been abandoned near her home in a heavily wooded area. Inside the car were the bodies of Karen Mandic and Diane Wilder. Both had been strangled. Other bruises suggested that they had been subjected to other injuries as well.

Police Chief Mangan ordered that the security guard be picked up for questioning. They needed to proceed cautiously since this suspect was a trained security officer. As it turned out, the security guard gave them no trouble whatsoever when they picked him up. He was a handsome, friendly, intelligent and articulate husband and father by the name of Kenneth Bianchi.

## **Kenny**

Kenneth Bianchi lived with a long-time girlfriend, Kelli Boyd, and their infant son. Kelli could not believe that someone as kind and gentle as Kenny could be a suspect in a murder case. Nor could Kenny's employer, who considered him a valuable and responsible member of his staff.

The police mounted a first class investigation of all the forensic evidence. They were exceptionally thorough in the handling of every hair and fiber. More hairs were found on the steps at the Bayside home. Fibers from the carpets of that home matched the fibers found on the dead girls' shoes and clothes.

Meanwhile, the police wanted to keep Kenny under lock and key. Since Kenny had lived in L.A. before he had come to Bellingham, Mangan had calls placed to the police to the L.A. Sheriff's Office. Det. Frank Salerno responded to the Bellingham police call. Piece by piece, the evidence mounted that Kenny Bianchi was at least one of the Hillside Stranglers. The jewelry that was found in Bianchi's home matched the description of jewelry that was worn by two of the victims: Kimberly Martin's ramshorn necklace and Yolanda Washington's turquoise ring. And the hair and fiber evidence further substantiated his guilt.

## **A Rocky Past**

Kenneth Bianchi was born May 22, 1951 in Rochester, N.Y. His biological mother was an alcoholic prostitute who gave him up at birth. Three months later, Frances Bianchi and her husband, a worker in the American Brake-Shoe foundry, adopted him.

By the time Kenny could talk, Frances knew she was coping with a compulsive liar, and his childhood unfolded as one of idleness and goldbricking. When he was 5 ½ yrs., Frances became worried by his frequent lapses into trancelike states of daydreaming; she consulted a physician. The doctor, hearing that little Kenny's eyeballs would roll back into his head during these trances, reached a diagnosis of petit mal seizures. But they were nothing to worry about. He would grow out of them."

Despite his IQ of 116 and artistic and verbal gifts, he was a chronic underachiever and his grades were

erratic. He was prone to temper tantrums and was quick to anger. Frances took him to a psychologist, who decided that Kenny was overly dependent upon his mother.

Mr. Bianchi died of a heart attack when Kenny was 13 and Frances had to go to work to support the two of them. Kenny went to a public high school where he was polite and neat, avoiding all of the social turmoil that caught up so many young people in the late 1960s.

He married a young woman his age when he graduated from high school in 1971, but neither of them was mature enough to make the marriage last. Eight months into the marriage, she packed up all of their goods, left him and filed for an annulment. Kenny was crushed. He felt betrayed and used.

When he got over the pain, Kenny started going to a community college to take courses in police science and psychology, but did not do particularly well and finally dropped out. He was rejected when he applied for a job in the sheriff's department. He drifted into a job as a security guard, which allowed him to steal things, which he then gave to his girlfriends. The stealing caused him to change jobs a number of times.

At 26, Kenny went to live in Los Angeles. He started out living with his older cousin, Angelo Buono. His first love was police work, but there were no openings available in the LAPD and the Glendale Police Department turned him down. Eventually, he got a job working for a title company.

He moved in with Kelli Boyd, a woman he had met at work. In May of 1977, she told him she was expecting his child. He wanted to marry Kelli, but she was not sure. While Kenny was very kind to her, he had some serious faults. He was very jealous, immature and he lied. Kenny lost his job over some weed that was found in his desk.

Kenny had set himself up as a psychologist with a phony degree and set of credentials that he had fraudulently obtained. He rented some office space from an unsuspecting legitimate psychologist. Fortunately, very few people came to see him for help. When Kelli found out about the counseling service, she was angry.

During late 1977, Los Angeles was panicked by news of the Hillside Strangler, but this had little effect on the relationship of Kelli and Kenny. When Kenny started coughing and having difficulty breathing, Kelli insisted that he go to a doctor. He told her that he had lung cancer and was going to have to take radiation and chemotherapy to save his life. It was a lie.

Kelli was traumatized by the news, but did her best to keep his spirits up. Kenny started to miss work because he claimed that the therapy was making him ill. One day when he was home sick from work, detectives came to question him about one of the Strangler murders that may have taken place in his apartment building. The detectives were favorably impressed with Bianchi and did not consider him a suspect. Ken asked to participate in LAPD's ride-along program, which let civilians go along in patrol cars as a kind of community education program. Ken did nothing but talk about the Strangler murders.

The relationship between Kenny and Kelli became tense. In February, their son Sean was born. For awhile, things were better between them, but the old problems surfaced once again. Kelli went back home to Bellingham to start over. Her parents and old friends were there to help. Ken was devastated by the decision. Once again, his woman abandoned him.

## **The Second Killer**

The police in Los Angeles released a photo of Bianchi to the news media and received a call from a lawyer named David Wood. Wood had rescued a girl from Bianchi and his cousin, Angelo Buono, who had forced the young women into prostitution by threats and brutality. The detectives had a strong hunch that this Angelo character was the other Hillside Strangler.

## **Angelo**

Angelo Buono was an ugly man physically, emotionally and intellectually. He was coarse, vulgar, selfish, ignorant and sadistic. He was also a big hit with the ladies and called himself the "Italian Stallion." He had been married several times and had a number of children, all of whom he abused at least physically and sometimes sexually. At the time the detectives interviewed him, Angelo was in his forties with dyed black hair, poor teeth and a nose that dominated his face.

He was born in Rochester, New York, on October 5, 1934. His mother and father were divorced in 1939. His mother supported the family by doing piecework in a shoe factory. He remained uneducated throughout his life, spiritually, morally and academically.

He has a deep loathing for women and a desire to humiliate and injure them. Angelo Buono called his mother a "whore" and worse to her face, but was emotionally tied to her until her death. Even as a 14-year-old, he boasted to his friends about raping and sodomizing girls. He was sent to the Paso Robles School for Boys after he was convicted for grand theft auto.

### **Killing Cousins**

Angelo provided a strong role model for the easy-going Kenny. He taught Kenny how to get a whore free by flashing a badge in her face after he got what he wanted. When Kenny was short of money, Angelo came up with the idea of getting some girls to work for them as prostitutes. Kenny's charm could be used to recruit the girls and Angelo's connections could be used to get the customers.

Two teenage runaways, Sabra Hannan and Becky Spears fell under their influence. Once under their control, the girls were forced to prostitute themselves or be subjected to severe physical punishment. They were virtually being held prisoner.

Eventually, Becky happened to meet lawyer David Wood, who was appalled at their plight and arranged for her to escape from the city. Emboldened by Becky's escape, Sabra ran away from Angelo and Kenny a short time later.

They found more girls to use as prostitutes and developed a list of tricks. Yolanda Washington, delivered the trick list to Angelo in October of 1977. Yolanda was their first kill.

Kenny was not stupid. Already an accomplished liar, he convinced Dean Brett, the lawyer appointed by the court to represent him, he was suffering from amnesia. Brett was so concerned about Kenny trying to commit suicide that he had a psychiatric social worker called in to talk to Kenny.

The psychiatric social worker could not comprehend how such a mild-mannered, considerate person could have strangled two women unless he was suffering from a multiple personality disorder. Kenny got the message and crafted a wonderful scam, using his sprinkling of psychology from college. This was the first step in an insanity defense.

Shortly after Dr. Watkins believed that he had hypnotized Kenny, Kenny went into his evil persona routine. It was *Steve Walker* -- Kenny's supposed alter ego -- who killed the girls in Los Angeles with his cousin Angelo. Steve also "made" Kenny strangle the two women in Bellingham.

Kenny slipped up a number of times when he was pretending to be Steve and referred to Steve as "he" when it should have been "I." Dr. Watkins did not seem to notice. Distressing as it was for the detectives to watch Kenny create this insanity defense, it did have the advantage of implicating Angelo.

Later, Det. Salerno presented a photo lineup to Markust Camden, the man who had seen a victim get into a car the night she died. He picked out Angelo from the photo lineup immediately, but did not recognize Kenny. Det. Grogan had a similar experience when he showed the photo lineups to Beulah Stofer, the woman who had seen another victim abducted. She selected Bianchi and Buono right away.

## **A Change of Mind**

The Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office offered Kenny a deal. If he pled guilty to the Washington murders and to some of the Hillside Strangler murders, he would get life with the possibility of parole instead of the death penalty. In return, Bianchi was to agree to testify truthfully and fully against Angelo Buono. Kenny agreed. He described how he and Angelo pretended to be policemen. They had fake badges to support that charade. With the victims who were prostitutes, it was surprisingly easy for them to convince the victims to get in the car. The "nice" girls were much harder to manipulate.

An important moment in these interviews came when Salerno asked Kenny what type of material was used to blindfold Judy Miller. Kenny thought it was foam that Angelo used in his auto upholstery business. The little piece of fluff that Salerno had found on the dead girl's eyelids could be just the kind of corroborating evidence they needed to nail Angelo.

Salerno also found out that the hillside dump sites for the victims was selected because Angelo was familiar with that area since one of his girlfriends had lived around there. Kenny was ordered to serve two life sentences. He was looking at 35 years in a California prison.

Angelo was arrested on October 22, 1979, shortly after Kenny described his cousin's involvement in the crimes. Later, they found Angelo's wallet, which clearly showed the outline of the police badge he had used to get his victims to cooperate with him. Eventually, Kenny started to feel guilty for implicating Angelo. He began to change his story about Angelo's involvement. His credibility as a witness against Angelo was virtually destroyed.

## **People vs. Buono**

The jury was sequestered during the trial, and they returned guilty verdicts. Angelo Buono was sent to initially to Folsom Prison, where he stayed in his cell, fearing injury from other inmates. Kenneth Bianchi was sent to Walla Walla prison in Washington. Angelo Buono, 67, was found dead on September 21, 2002 of a heart condition. Buono was alone in his cell when he died. There was no indication of any foul play.