

## Chapter 10

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# The Myth of the Serial Killer

*“It’s more of a shadow than anything else. You know it’s a human being, but yet you can’t accept it. The killin’ itself, it’s like say, you’re walkin’ down the road. Half of me will go this way and the other half goes that way. The right-hand side didn’t know what the left-hand side was going to do.”*

—Henry Lee Lucas, describing how he perceived his victims before killing them

Most Americans are probably familiar with what is considered the classic serial killer ‘profile.’ This was a notion first put forth by the venerable FBI, which coined the term ‘serial killer,’ and pioneered the concept of ‘profiling,’ in an alleged attempt to understand the phenomenon of mass murder. It appears to be the case though that the concept of the ‘serial killer profile’ was put forth largely to misinform the public.

In the case of Henry Lee Lucas, few if any of the elements of the serial killer profile apply. For instance, serial killers are said to act alone, driven to do so only by their own private demons. So far removed from ordinary human behavior are their actions that they would not, indeed could not, share their private passions with others. In Henry’s case, this is a patently false notion. It has been officially acknowledged that Lucas worked with not just one, but at times as many as three accomplices (as previously noted, Toole’s pre-teen niece and nephew were frequently brought along to witness—and at times participate in—the crimes of Henry and Ottis). It is also claimed that serial killers target a particular type of victim, similar in age, gender, race, hairstyle, attractiveness, and other physical attributes. Again, in Henry’s case, this simply does not fit the known facts. Henry’s victims in fact had little, if anything, in common with one another. The victims’ ages ranged from children to the elderly. Both genders and all races were

also well represented. As Lucas himself once stated: “They’s been a mixed breed of people, as far as the killings themselves.”

It is further claimed that serial killers follow a readily identifiable *modus operandi*, with the means of obtaining victims and the trajectory of the crime following a well-defined pattern. Again, that was clearly not the case with Lucas, whose victims were obtained in a variety of ways, and who inflicted death by a variety of means—including bludgeoning, stabbing, strangulation, shooting, and suffocation. Some were killed in their homes, while others were abducted and taken to remote locations. Some were sexually abused, both before and after death, while others were not. Some were cannibalized. Some were left on display—for maximum impact upon their discovery—while others were left so as not to be discovered at all. In other ways as well, Henry Lee—the consummate serial killer—did not even come close to matching the profile of what he was supposed to be. Strangely enough though, perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the Henry Lee Lucas story is that it is not actually remarkable at all. In reviewing the case histories of more than two-dozen other alleged serial killers, it becomes readily apparent that few—if any—fit the supposed profile.

The victims of Resendez-Ramirez, for instance, ranged in age from 21 to 88 years, with a mix of males and females. The cause of death varied as well, with most being bludgeoned, though one was shot in the head, another stabbed, and yet another had a pick-ax buried in her head. Though not readily apparent, almost all of the weapons used for inflicting death—by both Lucas and Ramirez—had one thing in common: they are what are termed “weapons of opportunity.” In other words, they are weapons that were acquired at the crime scene immediately before the murders were committed. Notably, this precisely mirrors the means by which the CIA has historically taught its assassins to kill. A CIA training manual entitled *A Study of Assassination* advises the would-be killer: “the simplest local tools are often the most efficient means of assassination. A hammer, axe, wrench, screwdriver, fire poker, kitchen knife, lamp stand, or anything hard, heavy and handy will suffice...All such improvised weapons have the important advantage of availability and apparent innocence...the assassin may accidentally be searched before the act and should not carry an incriminating device if any sort of lethal weapon can be improvised at or near the site.” This advice has been taken to heart by a good number of ‘serial killers.’

The Mafia assassination service known as Murder, Inc.—the brainchild of the Lansky/Luciano syndicate, which had extensive connections to U.S. intelligence agencies—had a remarkably similar philosophy. As Jay Robert Nash notes in *Bloodletters and Bad Men*: “Like most of Murder, Inc.’s assassins, Pittsburgh Phil never carried a weapon in case the local police picked him up on suspicion. He would cast about, once he had selected his murder spot, for any tool handy that

would do the job.” It should probably be noted here, while we’re on the subject, that the man identified as Pittsburgh Phil, whose real name was Harry Strauss, was credited with killing at least 500 people in this manner from the late 1920s through 1940. This feat should put him at or near the top of any self-respecting serial killer list.

Henry Lee recounts in *The Hand of Death* that his training by the Hand of Death cult followed the same time-honored tradition. Of course, the FBI assures us that satanic cults and satanic crime do not exist in modern-day America. To put this assertion in its proper context, however, it is important to remember that this is the very same FBI that, during the reign of Murder, Inc., and for several decades thereafter, refused to acknowledge the existence of organized crime in America. It is also the same FBI that for years ignored and denied the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan in the early part of the twentieth century. The FBI, in other words, has a long history of denying the existence of indigenous groups devoted to terrorizing American society.

Other than utilizing weapons of opportunity, the most common means by which professional assassins carry out their ‘contracts’ is with a small caliber bullet fired at point-blank range to the head—typically with either a .22 or .25 caliber handgun. Inflicting such a wound is quick, efficient, relatively quiet, reasonably clean and, most importantly, highly lethal. Contrary to conventional wisdom, a small caliber round to the head is more often fatal than a larger caliber bullet, because the smaller projectile has enough velocity to make the initial penetration into the dense skull bones, but not enough to make an exit wound. Once inside the brain cavity then, the slug will tend to ricochet around the curved inner bone surfaces, causing considerable damage to the brain in the process. A larger caliber round, on the other hand, is much more likely to penetrate clean through the skull, making much more of a mess, though doing less damage to the brain. The smaller weapon then, when fired from very close range, is a much more efficient killing device. Such weapons are also very easy to conceal and are the easiest weapons to silence. And even without a silencer, the report from a .22 automatic is relatively quiet. Especially to a generation raised on a steady diet of sensationalized and highly stylized violence in the media—where every gun sounds like a cannon—a small-caliber gun report can easily be mistaken for any of a number of everyday big-city sounds.

There is another reason that these are often the weapons of choice for contract ‘hits.’ Small caliber slugs, particularly those from a .22 caliber weapon—are virtually impossible to trace or to match up to any particular gun. Literally millions of .22 caliber weapons are in homes all across the country, and it is far-and-away the most popular, mass-produced ammunition on the market. And a .22 caliber bullet that has punched through the skull and careened around the skull cavity is

virtually guaranteed to be deformed to such an extent that a ballistics match will be impossible. Matching a flattened slug dug out of some victim's head to any particular gun then is something akin to finding the proverbial needle in the haystack. For this reason, and for those previously cited, a small caliber contact wound to the head—usually to the side of the head—has long been the mark of a professional assassin.

It is a most remarkable fact then that the vast majority of the victims of the 'serial killers' profiled herein were killed either by means of a weapon of opportunity, or they were shot in the head with a small caliber weapon—execution style. And far more often than not, there is no specific type of victim that is targeted, nor is there a pattern as to how the killings are carried out.

Take, for example, the other serial killing Ramirez—Los Angeles' famed "Night Stalker." Most of the Night Stalker victims were killed with contact wounds from a small caliber handgun to the left side of the head while they slept. Both .22 and .25 caliber weapons were used. The remaining victims were bludgeoned or stabbed to death with household items—including a hammer and a lamp/vase. Some of the victims were mutilated to varying degrees, including two that were hacked with machetes. Others were subjected to electrical torture. Their ages ranged from young adults to a pair of octogenarians, with both men and women well represented. And there was certainly no discrimination shown as to the race/ethnicity of the victims.

In what were dubbed the 'Sunset Strip Murders,' also in Los Angeles, the victims were also dispatched with a .25 caliber contact wound to the head—except for one victim who was shot in the chest and sliced open. Two of the victims were also beheaded. One of the dead—who had likely been an accomplice—was male, with the rest females of various ethnicities.

Santa Cruz's Herb Mullin must surely have been—if he was actually guilty of the murders attributed to him—the most creative serial killer in the annals of modern crime. The seemingly randomly assembled set of crimes credited to Mullin stands as perhaps the most ludicrous use of the term 'serial killer' on record. The first victim was a homeless man beaten to death with a baseball bat, for no apparent reason, on a lonely stretch of road. The next was a girl who was repeatedly stabbed, then sliced open, mutilated, and generally made a mess of—in what most people would think of as a typical serial killing. The next five victims were all killed in a single night at two different residences—both occupied by known drug traffickers and their families. In one house, all three victims, two of whom were children, were shot once in the head with a .22 and then stabbed a few times for good measure. At the other home, a slightly less professional job was done. The two victims at that address, who were close friends of the victims at the other crime scene, were shot multiple times with a .22 in various parts of

the body, and then stabbed. The next four victims were a group of teenage boys on a camping trip, who were each shot once in the head and multiple times in the body. Interestingly enough, the boys had their own .22 caliber rifle, within arm's reach of where they were killed. All four were allegedly killed by a lone assailant before they could reach for the gun, despite the fact that Mullin would have had to reload his six-shot .22 automatic at least once to complete the slaughter. Following the mass execution of the teenagers, Mullin next allegedly decided to test his skills as a sniper, picking off an ex-boxer as the victim strolled across his front yard.

In nearby Sacramento, California, Richard Chase got his sniper killing out of the way right off the bat. His first victim was dropped in front of his home with a .22 round fired from a parked car, just the way Mullin had allegedly done it. The rest of the Sacramento victims were killed with a .22 caliber contact wound to the left side of the head, sometimes followed by a second shot. Some were then mutilated. Ages ranged from twenty months to fifty-one years, with both males and females targeted.

Chicago's 'Ripper Crew' killed a string of women, both black and white, by a variety of means before then adding something new to the serial killer repertoire—a gang-style drive-by shooting of known drug dealers. It is always good practice, for any aspiring serial killer, to throw at least one obvious drug 'hit' into the mix. Charles Manson and Richard Ramirez understood that, as did various other serial killers, although such troublesome facts are routinely ignored in most press accounts, lest anyone catch on that 'serial killings' are not necessarily random acts of violence. Consider, for example, the case of Charles Ng and Leonard Lake. At least a few of their known victims were deeply involved in drug trafficking. Other than that, the victims had little in common. Excavated from the pair's compound were the remains of seven men, five women, and two babies—though there were likely many more undiscovered victims.

How the pair's victims were killed was impossible to determine, as was largely true of the cases of other killers who fall into the 'Collectors' category—including Jeffrey Dahmer, John Wayne Gacy, Bob Berdella, Gary Heidnik and Herb Baumeister. In all these cases, all that remained of the unfortunate victims were various bones and, in some cases, genitalia, internal organs and slabs of flesh. It is within this group that the most consistency is shown in the targeting of victims. The known victims of Gacy, Berdella, Baumeister and Dahmer were all young men—frequently gay or bisexual men. Even so, there was not necessarily a specific victim profile in all these cases; Dahmer's victims, for instance, ranged in age from fourteen to thirty-one and were of various races.

Even in those cases where the alleged killer is given a catchy moniker that supposedly reflects a distinctive 'signature' to the slayings, there is rarely a consistent

*MO* that is followed. The victims of the ‘Boston Strangler,’ for instance, ranged in age from nineteen to seventy-five, were both black and white, and varied considerably in physical attractiveness. And they were not, contrary to popular mythology, all strangled in the same manner. In some cases, it was done manually, in others with ligatures acquired at the scene. In addition, some were stabbed, mutilated and/or sexually assaulted as well. Most of them were left on display, though one was discretely covered with a blanket.

In the other strangler case—Los Angeles’ ‘Hillside Stranglers’—victims ranged in age from twelve to twenty-eight, and varied considerably by height, weight, race, skin tone and hair color. In addition to strangulation, various other techniques were utilized, including electrocution, lethal injection and lethal gas—all methods improvised with materials at hand and, strangely enough, all methods used by the state to perform judicial executions.

Though Edmund Kemper was dubbed the ‘Coed Killer,’ his victims were definitely not all coeds. Two of them were his grandparents, and another was his mother. Yet another was several years too young to be a coed. His victims were killed with a combination of point-blank bullet wounds to the head, and stabbing, strangulation, suffocation and bludgeoning with weapons of opportunity.

In the case of Ted Bundy, it is frequently claimed that all of his purported victims were remarkably similar in appearance. Many of the books chronicling Bundy’s alleged exploits reinforce this notion by including a carefully selected set of photos of the slain women who did resemble one another to a limited degree. Overall though, the victims varied widely in height, weight, build, attractiveness, hair color and style, and various other physical attributes. As for the manner in which they were abducted and killed, that is largely a matter of speculation. Many were never found, and of those that were, frequently only the skull was recovered. In those cases where the cause of death could be determined, it was by means of weapons of opportunity. In the infamous attack at the Chi Omega sorority house, for instance, the crimes were committed with a club acquired immediately before entering the property. The Chi Omega bloodbath, by the way, was in marked contrast to Bundy’s previous alleged crimes, which involved the abductions and killings of single victims. This crime instead seemed to borrow heavily from the rampage allegedly perpetrated by Richard Speck. Bundy’s final alleged murder before his capture, the killing of a twelve-year-old child, also did not match his supposed *modus operandi*.

As for Richard Speck, he showed no consistency in the means by which his victims were killed, other than that all died from wounds inflicted with weapons improvised at the scene. Death came by way of various combinations of strangulation, stabbing, slashing of the throat, and breaking of the neck. And so it goes for virtually all serial killer cases. New York’s ‘Son of Sam’ targeted men and

women of various ages. Arthur Shawcross, the ‘Genesee River Killer,’ killed two young children—one a boy—along with a string of women of various ages. Most were strangled and/or bludgeoned with weapons acquired at the scene, though one was drowned. Most were mutilated, cannibalized and sexually assaulted. The ‘Gainesville Ripper’—purportedly Danny Rolling—included one male among his five victims. All were stabbed and slashed to death; some were posed and one was beheaded. Finally, lest we forget, the Manson Family’s victims ranged in age from teenaged Steven Parent to middle-aged Leno LaBianca and included both men and women killed with various weapons, including a .22 caliber handgun.

Clearly then there are any number of serial killer cases in which there is no defining *modus operandi*, and in which the deceased don’t fit any kind of specific ‘victim profile.’ In fact, it is difficult to find a case study of *any* serial killer who does leave a distinct ‘signature’ at each crime scene.

And what of the notion of the serial killer as a lone predator? Was Henry and Ottis’ partnership an aberration? Not at all. There are any number of serial killer cases where it is officially acknowledged that there was more than one perpetrator. The Manson Family, of course, is probably the most well known case of multiple-perpetrator ‘serial killing.’ Less well known is the case of the ‘Ripper Crew’ in Chicago in the early 1980s. Described by authorities as a four-man satanic cult, the Rippers—led by charismatic Robin Gecht—allegedly killed as many as seventeen women in as many months. Then there is the case of Charles Ng. Though Ng was the only one to stand trial for the series of killings in Northern California, it is acknowledged that the crimes were committed with the assistance of Leonard Lake, who committed suicide upon his arrest. And evidence strongly suggests that there were others involved as well, most notably Lake’s ex-wife.

Many other serial killers have worked in pairs, including the Hillside Strangler team of Kenneth Bianchi and Angelo Buono. Working the same Los Angeles-area turf just one year after the Stranglers were stopped was the team of Roy Norris and Lawrence ‘Pliers’ Bittaker. And a few years after they were caught, the team of Douglas Clark and Carol Bundy was working the very same L.A. streets committing a series of killings dubbed the ‘Sunset Strip Murders.’ The year after they were caught, another serial killer took over the L.A. market—the notorious ‘Night Stalker.’ Media coverage to the contrary, evidence in that case clearly pointed to multiple perpetrators. It also strongly suggested that some of the killings were contract hits. As implied earlier in this chapter, much the same can be said of the evidence in the Herb Mullin case.

As will be seen as we take a more in-depth look at our illustrious roster of serial killers, evidence almost always indicates multiple assailants. With very few exceptions, that evidence is routinely ignored or rather improbably explained away by law enforcement authorities and those who chronicle the exploits of high-profile

criminals. Maury Terry, as previously mentioned, has done an excellent job of arguing the case that the 'Son of Sam' killings were carried out by multiple cult members, despite the media portrait of David Berkowitz as the proverbial lone killer. Susan Kelly has likewise done a great job of exposing the 'Boston Strangler' killings as the work of several killers. Even before the release of Kelly's *The Boston Stranglers*, there had long been speculation that the killings were not the work of one man. Most of the officials involved in the investigation, in fact, never believed that a single killer was responsible. Of the eight members of the psychiatric panel convened to develop a 'profile,' seven believed that there were at least two perpetrators.

Even in those cases that seem to come closest to matching the classic serial killer profile, such as the John Wayne Gacy and Jeffrey Dahmer cases, there is a compelling case to be made that there were others involved. That evidence will be examined in later chapters. First, we will look at the cases of two high-profile, alleged serial killers/mass murderers who were said to have acted alone. The first is a very recent case, that of Yosemite killer Cary Stayner. The other dates all the way back to 1966, the year Richard Speck allegedly went berserk in a home filled with young nursing students in Chicago, becoming the first mass murderer of the television age.