



JONATHAN RIGNALL

**SERIAL KILLERS
WHO WERE NEVER
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THE ALPHABET MURDERS

The Alphabet Murders are an unsolved series of child murders which occurred between 1971 and 1973 in Rochester, New York. The first victim was ten year-old Carmen Colón. Carmen was a Puerto Rican child who was reported missing after running an errand to a pharmacy for her grandmother. She was last seen getting into a car. Two days later her body was found twelve miles away in Churchville. She had been raped and strangled. There was evidence of horrendous injuries on the murdered child - including a fractured skull.

It transpired that some people had seen a partially clothed Carmen Colón trying to flag down motorists along Interstate 490 the day she vanished. One eyewitness said a man (who was obviously the killer) calmly got out and led her back to his car. When this incident came to light there was a lot of public anger that not a single motorist had stopped and attempted to help the child. Those driving past obviously had no idea that the child had been abducted by a serial killer but, even so, one would have thought that at least one person might have stopped to see what was bothering the girl.

New York newspapers and local businesses banded together to offer a large reward for anyone who might have information relating to the murder of Carmen Colón but the killer remained elusive and there was no significant breakthrough. About a year and a half later, eleven year-old Wanda Walkowicz vanished after running an errand to a store in Rochester. The next day Wanda's body was found by a police officer near State Route 104 in Webster. She had been raped and strangled. The police believed that Wanda's

body was thrown from a moving car after her death. Wanda was found clothed and the police presumed that the killer must have redressed her after the assault and murder.

An examination of Wanda's clothes and body found white cat hairs. Wanda's family did not own a cat with white fur so this was possibly something to go on for investigators. There were eyewitness reports that Wanda was seen getting into a brown car before she vanished. The police at this time dismissed connections between the murders of Carmen Colón and Wanda Walkowicz but it was obvious they shared a number of similarities. Each girl's first and last name started with the same letter and they were both left in a place that began with the same letter as their names.

Despite significant police resources thrown at these harrowing murder investigations, there was no breakthrough in the case. Sadly, this killer would soon strike again. Seven months later eleven year-old Michelle Maenza went missing after failing to come home from school. Michelle Maenza's body was found two days later in a ditch in Macedon (which was about fifteen miles from Rochester). She had been raped and strangled. As with the last murder, white cat hairs were found on the victim and as before the victim had names that began with the same same letter and had been dumped in a town which began with that letter. As a consequence of this, the murders would become known as The Alphabet Murders.

An eyewitness later reported that he had sighted Michelle Maenza standing with a man by a brown vehicle and that she seemed distressed. The motorist said he had stopped to inquire if there was a problem but the man was so terrifying and unfriendly that he drove off. He had not even been able to get the licence plate. Michelle Maenza was also sighted in a fast food diner with the man before

her death. A post-mortem showed that she had eaten some hamburger about an hour before she was killed. The police investigated a possible 800 suspects in these murders but the killer was never found.

The three victims had a number of obvious similarities besides their names. They were of a similar age, from poor backgrounds, from a Catholic family, and had problems at school. For this reason it is speculated that killer might even have had a social services background and may potentially have known these girls. The theory that the victims knew the killer would explain why they got into a vehicle with him. Of course it could just as well be the case that they were forced into the vehicle and didn't know the killer. The fact that these girls all had names which both began with the same letter was suggestive of them being chosen. This would appear to have been a very strange coincidence if they were not specifically chosen - especially when you factor in that the victims bodies were all left in a town that began with the same letter as their names.

Suspects in this case included Carmen Colón's uncle Miguel Colón. He had a brown car and was seen driving in the vicinity of Interstate 490 just before Carmen was murdered. He also (suspiciously) had just cleaned the inside of his car with chemicals when the police spoke to him. However, nothing substantial linking Miguel Colón to this or any other murder could be found. Dennis Termini was also a suspect in this case. Termini was a Rochester firefighter who was a prolific rapist and abductor of teenage girls. In 2007, Termini's body was exhumed to see if there was a match with DNA found on Wanda Walkowicz's body. There was not match and so Termini was clearly not The Alphabet Killer.

The most recurring suspect in this case was Kenneth Bianchi - he of The Hillside Stranglers. The Hillside Strangler

(later upgraded to The Hillside Stranglers) was seemingly a serial killer who targeted women in Los Angeles from 1977 to 1978. It turned out though that this was not a solitary killer. The Hillside Stranglers were actually cousins Kenneth Bianchi and Angelo Buono Jr. They are believed to have killed ten people as a duo and brought terror to Hollywood and Los Angeles in the late 1970s. The pair would pretend to be undercover policemen and target vulnerable woman. This was a sadistic and sick duo who would rape, torture, and inject their victims with strange drugs. Around 25% of serial killers murder with a partner or accomplice as opposed to killing alone. Such was the case with these two evil men.

Kenneth Bianchi was born in New York in 1951. Bianchi was said to be quite intelligent but he was also lazy. His mother described him as a compulsive liar. He dropped out of college and took a number of low-wage jobs. He supplemented his income by theft. Bianchi moved around a lot and eventually relocated to Los Angeles - where he became close to his cousin Angelo Buono Jr. Angelo Buono Jr was born in New York in 1934. He was a pimp and criminal. Angelo Buono Jr persuaded his cousin Kenneth Bianchi to join him in pimping out some women that he held hostage and from there their crimes began to spiral into even more serious and disturbing territory. Serial killers who operate as a duo nearly always have a dominant partner. In the case of The Hillside Stranglers it was the older Angelo Buono Jr.

This was a very sadistic and depraved duo. Their victims had terrible sexual injuries when their bodies were found. Bianchi and Buono Jr seemed to enjoy experimenting with methods of torture. They used lethal injections and electric shocks on the victims before they strangled them. Their youngest victims were two twelve year-old girls. One victim was put in the boot of her car after she was killed and then

had the car pushed over a cliff. The Hillside Stranglers once let the daughter of the actor Peter Lorre go though because they calculated that murdering the relative of a celebrity would bring too much unwelcome attention to their activities.

After ten murders, Buono Jr decided that they should stop killing before they got caught (as you might imagine, there was now a big police operation underway to find the killers of these women). In 1978, Buono Jr ordered Bianchi to move to Bellingham, Washington, and threatened to kill him if he didn't comply. Bianchi did as his crazy cousin requested. Kenneth Bianchi unsuccessfully applied to join the Bellingham Police Department in Washington after completing the tenth murder of The Hillside Stranglers. He knew a number of police officers. He would chat to them sometimes during The Hillside Strangler case.

The irony was that these two posed as cops (complete with fake ID badges) to rape and kill women. Bianchi's admission that he had spoken to police officers made Angelo Buono Jr jumpy and nervous. Buono Jr feared that the police were suspicious of Bianchi and might start asking him questions that might implicate him or make him a suspect. He knew that if Bianchi was ever arrested it wouldn't be too long before they came knocking on his door. When Buono Jr decided he didn't want to kill anymore, Kenneth Bianchi felt lost and dismayed.

After The Hillside Stranglers went their separate ways, Kenneth Bianchi killed two more women alone. Bianchi got a job as a security guard at Western Washington University. Two young women named Diane Wilder and Karen Mandic were lured to a house Bianchi was guarding and both strangled to death. Kenneth Bianchi was an incompetent killer with no one to guide him and left a number of clues.

He was apprehended the next day. When he was captured, Bianchi confessed that Buono was involved in the murders and tried to use his former partner in crime to get a less severe sentence. Both of these men escaped a death sentence and got life in prison. Bianchi unsuccessfully tried to defend in court himself by claiming multiple personality disorder but experts deduced he was faking this.

Angelo Buono Jr died in prison of a heart attack in 2002 at the age of 67. Bianchi is still in prison and is next eligible to apply for parole in 2025. The chances of this being successful are fairly close to zero you would imagine. Around the time of the Alphabet murders Bianchi lived in Rochester and had a light brown vehicle. His car was allegedly seen near one of the locations where the girls vanished. For what it's worth, Kenneth Bianchi has always denied that he was The Alphabet Murderer. The police investigation into this case is still open and following up new leads. Hopefully, one day the identity of this awful killer will finally be revealed.

THE ARDENWALD AXE MURDERER

The Hill Ax Murders of Ardenwald was a grisly case in 1911 where a family were killed in Ardenwald-Johnson Creek, Portland, Oregon. The victims were William Hill, his wife Ruth, and Ruth's two children from a previous marriage, Philip and Dorothy. The killer murdered this family with an axe but he was never caught and this most gruesome true crime case remains a mystery. The family lived in a rural cabin they had built for themselves. On the morning of the 9th of June a neighbour of the Hill family decided to go and check on them because William Hill had not left for work that day as he usually did. The neighbour saw Dorothy, one of the young children, dead on the floor when she spied through a window.

The police were called in and it soon became apparent that the whole family had been killed. William and his wife Ruth were found murdered in bed. They had both been struck with an axe. Philip, the eight year-old boy in the family, was also beaten to death with an axe. It was calculated by the police that Dorothy had been the last to die. Dorothy, who was four years-old, had also been sexually assaulted. There was some evidence too that Ruth had been sexually abused. This was certainly all evidence for the theory that the killer primarily had a sexual motivation for these murders. Ruth was raped after her death while Dorothy was raped prior to her murder and possibly after it too. This obviously indicated that the killer was a necrophile.

The injuries on the victims were horrendous. They had skull fractures and the faces of William and Ruth were destroyed beyond recognition. Philip was the only one of the four victims who received the blunt end of the axe. The

others were all killed by the sharp end. Although there was evidence that some of Ruth's jewellery had been taken, a sum of money and a few other valuables were still the cabin when the bodies were discovered. This indicated that a financial motive for the robbery was secondary at best.

The cabin was very small with only two rooms. The killer hung clothes and clothes over the windows so that he could kill (and sexually abuse) the family in private. There was ample evidence that the killer had used the wash basin to clean himself up after these bloody murders. It is believed that the murders took place after midnight at around 12:45 a.m. This is because a neighbour told the police that his dogs started barking at something around this time. The police sent bloodhounds out to see if they could pick up a scent but nothing came of this. The police were equally frustrated when they questioned all the people that lived near the Hill family but failed to extract any sightings or details of suspicious strangers in the area in previous days (or indeed hours).

Many of the 'hobos' and transients in the immediate area fled for fear of being arrested in connection with these murders. Armed posses and vigilantes soon arrived in the area determined to track down this deranged axe murderer. The murders had understandably turned this community upside down and left everyone both shocked and angered. The main suspect in this case was Nathan Harvey. Harvey lived near the Hill cabin and had been on bad terms with William Hill because of a dispute over land rights.

Nathan Harvey was found to have a potentially dark past. Several years previously a teenage girl had been found murdered in a fruit field he owned. There were also a number of suspicious deaths within the Harvey family. The police gathered evidence that Harvey was something of a

lech who often often made improper and crude sexual advances. They also got an eyewitness account that Harvey had been seen in the area the night of the murders. In the end though, Nathan Harvey was not charged with the axe murders and let free. One of the reasons for this (besides lack of evidence) was that Harvey's friends protested at his arrest and even put together a large petition which people signed to confirm their belief that Harvey couldn't possibly be a murderer.

Another suspect was a man named William Riggin. Riggin claimed that on the night in question he had robbed the Hill cabin with a Mexican man named Brown. Riggin claimed he had waited outside while Brown robbed (and unknown to him MURDERED the family). However, Riggin then changed his story and gave another version of what had happened. Riggin was basically a very unreliable narrator who had some obvious mental health problems. The police ultimately didn't believe any of his confessions. A couple of local vagrants who lived in the woods in the local area briefly came under suspicion in this case but in the end nothing came of this and there was no evidence against them. The Hill Ax Murders of Ardenwald was an unsolved mystery and remains so to this day. Given how long ago these murders occurred it appears that the identity of the killer might never be known.

THE ATLANTA LOVER'S LANE MURDERS

The Atlanta Lover's Lane Murders were unsolved shootings that happened in 1977 in Atlanta. Three people were left dead and three injured by the attacks. The first victims were 20-year-old LaBrian Lovett and 26-year-old Veronica Hill. Their car ran out of control and hit a street sign. When the police arrived they found the couple dead in the car from multiple gunshots. The theory is that the couple had gone to a local park where sex takes place (this would be known as 'dogging' today) and had been shot by a stranger while in their car. LaBrian Lovett had tried to drive away to flee the assailant and reach a hospital but at some point his injuries were too much and he crashed the car.

Less than a month later there was another attack when 18-year-old Dennis Langston and 17-year-old Deitira Tatum were shot at while they had sex in a parked car. Although both of them were hit with at least one bullet they were lucky enough to escape and survive their injuries. They were saved by the fact that the doors were locked. The attacker tried to open the doors but when he couldn't do this he fled. The victims of this attack told the police that the gunman was a tall black man. The police connected these shootings with the murders from a month before. The same gun had been used in both attacks.

Exactly one month after the second attack, there was a third incident when 20-year-old Diane Collins was with her fiancée in Adams Park and shot while in their car. They had just been to the cinema and were about to go home. Diane Collins was killed in the attack but her fiancée survived. The gunman fired his shots from the passenger side of the car so Diane Collins bore the brunt. The police were rather

perplexed by these crimes because they seemed so random and it was hard with any degree of accuracy to say what the motivation was. The gunman killed both men and women. There seemed to be no sexual motivation in the crimes because the female victims were never assaulted, raped, or abducted - they were merely shot.

The most logical theory was that the killer was someone who had been unlucky in love or felt rejected by women and so therefore was venting his frustration on couples. The police decided that as the killer seemed to strike around once a month in parks they would set a trap. So, three weeks after the last attack, they began secretly staking out the local parks. Undercover officers disguised as civilians lay in wait for the killer. However, to the frustration of the police, the killer never struck again. The identity of this killer was therefore doomed to remain a mystery and he was never caught. The police never even managed to find any plausible suspects. The Atlanta Lover's Lane Murders are now classified as a cold case. It seems very unlikely that this mystery will ever be solved.

THE ATLANTA RIPPER

The Atlanta Ripper was a killer who is believed to have killed around fifteen (and probably) more women in Atlanta in 1911 and 1912. However, this killer was never captured or identified. All the victims were young black women and the killer had a grisly habit of slashing the throats of his targets. The killer had a rather strange habit too of removing the clothes of the victim and then stacking them in a neat bundle next to the body. Emma Lou Sharp, who survived an encounter with the killer, described him as a tall dark skinned man who wore a black hat.

The killer was very brutal. One victim was nearly decapitated and another had part of her skull crushed. A coupling pin from a train was used to bludgeon one victim. It is said that the Ripper cut the heart out of one victim and left it by the body. Strangely though, it seemed to take a while for the local press and authorities to even deduce that a serial killer might be at large. One of the deaths was (wrongly) assumed to have been a result of a drugs overdose. In another case, the husband of one of the victims was mistakenly arrested for her murder (although this mistake was apparently rectified).

It became pretty obvious in the end that a killer was at large. It was surely no coincidence that the victims were young black women who were killed in similar fashion and also bore the same sort of mutilation on their bodies. Another woman who survived an encounter with the Ripper was a young cook named Mary Yeldell. Mary said a large black man whistled at her in an alley and began stalking her. She managed to race back to the house of her employer - who went out to investigate with a revolver.

However, the Ripper managed to evade Mary's employer and so his identity remained a mystery.

Even though this was still a time of racial segregation, the police put black detectives on the case because these officers would naturally be expected to earn more trust and cooperation from the black community. The police eventually arrested several black men for the murders but none of these were ever conclusively proven to be the Ripper. In fact, in most cases they were either victims of police injustice or involved in a murder that had nothing to do with the Ripper case.

Because no one was ever proven to be the Ripper the local press even started to wonder if this bogeyman killer was a myth. The police felt it was possible that these murders were done by a range of different people and that the Ripper theory might be a case of paranoia based on the (then fairly recent at time) Jack the Ripper murders in London. The evidence for The Atlanta Ripper seems more than ample though despite the fact that he was never captured and never identified. Who the Atlanta Ripper really was though remains a puzzling mystery that is in no danger of being solved any time soon.

THE AXEMAN OF NEW ORLEANS

The Axeman of New Orleans was an American serial killer active in New Orleans, Louisiana, in 1918 and 1919. There were six people killed and six injured during his bloody spree of violence. The killer was never identified and seemed to target the local Italian community. The killer used an axe or razor to kill the victims. Sexual sadism was the most likely motive as the killer never seemed to rob the victims. Because the victims were Italian-Americans some sort of Mafia link was suspected but this was never proven. The identity of the killer remains a mystery.

There were some male victims but this is presumed to have been as a consequence of them being in the wrong place at the wrong (to put it mildly) when the axeman broke into a house. Those who are unconvinced by the Mafia theory think the axeman was simply a sexual sadist obsessed with killing. On March 13, 1919, a letter supposedly written by the Axeman was published in the newspaper. The letter read:

'They have never caught me and they never will. They have never seen me, for I am invisible, even as the ether that surrounds your earth. I am not a human being, but a spirit and a demon from the hottest hell. I am what you Orleanians and your foolish police call the Axeman. When I see fit, I shall come and claim other victims. I alone know whom they shall be. I shall leave no clue except my bloody axe, besmeared with blood and brains of he whom I have sent below to keep me company.

'If you wish you may tell the police to be careful not to rile me. Of course, I am a reasonable spirit. I take no offense

at the way they have conducted their investigations in the past. In fact, they have been so utterly stupid as to not only amuse me, but His Satanic Majesty, Francis Josef, etc. But tell them to beware. Let them not try to discover what I am, for it were better that they were never born than to incur the wrath of the Axeman. I don't think there is any need of such a warning, for I feel sure the police will always dodge me, as they have in the past. They are wise and know how to keep away from all harm. Undoubtedly, you Orleanians think of me as a most horrible murderer, which I am, but I could be much worse if I wanted to. If I wished, I could pay a visit to your city every night. At will I could slay thousands of your best citizens (and the worst), for I am in close relationship with the Angel of Death.

'Now, to be exact, at 12:15 (earthly time) on next Tuesday night, I am going to pass over New Orleans. In my infinite mercy, I am going to make a little proposition to you people. Here it is: I am very fond of jazz music, and I swear by all the devils in the nether regions that every person shall be spared in whose home a jazz band is in full swing at the time I have just mentioned. If everyone has a jazz band going, well, then, so much the better for you people. One thing is certain and that is that some of your people who do not jazz it out on that specific Tuesday night (if there be any) will get the axe. Well, as I am cold and crave the warmth of my native Tartarus, and it is about time I leave your earthly home, I will cease my discourse. Hoping that thou wilt publish this, that it may go well with thee, I have been, am and will be the worst spirit that ever existed either in fact or realm of fancy. he Axeman'

As you might imagine, everyone who read that letter made sure to play jazz music on the night in question! It obviously worked as there were no murders. Whether or not the letter really was from the Axeman is open to debate. It is

certainly not unknown for crackpots or time wasters to pretend to be serial killers (look at the case of Wearside Jack in the Yorkshire Ripper murders). The terror spree of the axeman seemed to end rather abruptly and the true identity of this deadly killer was never established. It has been speculated that the Axeman could have been Joseph Momfre. The story goes that Momfre was shot to death by the widow of the Axeman's last victim in an act of revenge. However, the evidence for this theory is vague and has never been verified. As a consequence of this the Axeman's identity remains elusive and mysterious.