

**PART 3**

**HELTER**



**SKELTER**

**THE SHOCKING STORY OF  
THE MANSON MURDERS**

**VINCENT BUGLIOSI WITH CURT GENTRY**

This ebook is copyright material and must not be copied, reproduced, transferred, distributed, leased, licensed or publicly performed or used in any way except as specifically permitted in writing by the publishers, as allowed under the terms and conditions under which it was purchased or as strictly permitted by applicable copyright law. Any unauthorised distribution or use of this text may be a direct infringement of the author's and publisher's rights and those responsible may be liable in law accordingly.

Version 1.0

Epub ISBN 9781473519800

[www.randomhouse.co.uk](http://www.randomhouse.co.uk)

First published by Arrow Books in 1992

Copyright © 1974 by Curt Gentry and Vincent Bugliosi

The right of Curt Gentry and Vincent Bugliosi to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by them in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988

First published by W. W. Norton in 1974

Arrow Books

The Random House Group Limited  
20 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 2SA

Addresses for companies within The Random House Group Limited can be found at:

[www.randomhouse.co.uk/contact/contact-us](http://www.randomhouse.co.uk/contact/contact-us)

The Random House Group Limited Reg. No. 954009

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the  
British Library

ISBN 9780099975007

1 1 1 1  
**HELTER  
SKELTER**  
1 1 1 1 1 1

**THE TRUE STORY OF  
THE MANSON MURDERS**  

---

**VINCENT BUGLIOSI**  
**PROSECUTOR OF THE TATE-LA BIANCA TRIALS**  
**WITH CURT GENTRY**



arrow books

# **THE INVESTIGATION- PHASE TWO**

“No sense makes sense.”

Charles Manson

## **November 18, 1969**

---

BY NOW THE reader knows a great deal more about the Tate-LaBianca murders than I did on the day I was assigned that case. In fact, since large portions of the foregoing story have not been made public before this, the reader is an insider in a sense highly unusual in a murder case. And, in a way, I'm a newcomer, an intruder. The sudden switch from an unseen background narrator to a very personal account is bound to be a surprise. The best way to soften it, I suspect, would be to introduce myself; then, when we've got that out of the way, we'll resume the narrative together. This digression, though unfortunately necessary, will be as brief as possible.

A conventional biographical sketch would probably have read more or less as follows: Vincent T. Bugliosi, age thirty-five, Deputy District Attorney, Los Angeles, California. Born Hibbing, Minnesota. Graduate Hollywood High School. Attended the University of Miami on a tennis scholarship, B.A. and B.B.A. degrees. Deciding on the practice of law, attended UCLA, LL.B. degree, president graduating class 1964. Joined the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office same year. Has tried a number of highly publicized murder cases—Floyd-Milton, Perveler-Cromwell, etc.—obtaining convictions in all. Has tried 104 felony jury trials, losing only one. In addition to his duties as deputy DA, Bugliosi is a professor of criminal law at Beverly School of Law, Los Angeles. Served as technical consultant and edited the scripts of two pilot films for Jack Webb's TV

series "The D.A." Series star Robert Conrad patterned his part after the young prosecutor. Married. Two children.

That's probably about how it would read, yet it tells nothing about how I feel toward my profession, which is even more important

*"The primary duty of a lawyer engaged in public prosecution is not to convict, but to see that justice is done ..."*

Those words are from the old Canon of Ethics of the American Bar Association. I'd thought of them often during the five years I'd been a deputy DA. In a very real sense they had become my personal credo. If, in a given case, a conviction is justice, so be it. But if it is not, I want no part of it.

For far too many years the stereotyped image of the prosecutor has been either that of a right-wing, law-and-order type intent on winning convictions at any cost, or a stumbling, bumbling Hamilton Burger, forever trying innocent people, who, fortunately, are saved at the last possible minute by the foxy maneuverings of a Perry Mason.

I've never felt the defense attorney has a monopoly on concern for innocence, fairness, and justice. After joining the DA's office, I tried close to a thousand cases. In a great many I sought and obtained convictions, because I believed the evidence warranted them. In a great many others, in which I felt the evidence was insufficient, I stood up in court and asked for a dismissal of the charges, or requested a reduction in either the charges or the sentence.

The latter cases rarely make headlines. Only infrequently does the public learn of them. Thus the stereotype remains. Far more important, however, is the realization that fairness and justice have prevailed.

Just as I never felt the slightest compunction to conform to this stereotype, so did I rebel against another.

Traditionally, the role of the prosecutor has been twofold: to handle the legal aspects of the case; and to present in court the evidence gathered by law-enforcement agencies. I never accepted these limitations. In past cases I always joined in the investigation—going out and interviewing witnesses myself, tracking down and developing new leads, often finding evidence otherwise overlooked. In some cases, this led to the release of a suspect. In others, to a conviction that otherwise might not have been obtained.

For a lawyer to do less than his utmost is, I strongly feel, a betrayal of his client. Though in criminal trials one tends to focus on the defense attorney and his client the accused, the prosecutor is also a lawyer, and he too has a client: the People. And the People are equally entitled to their day in court, to a fair and impartial trial, and to justice.

The Tate-LaBianca case was the farthest thing from my mind on the afternoon of November 18, 1969. I'd just completed a long trial and was on my way back to my office in the Hall of Justice when Aaron Stovitz, head of the Trials Division of the District Attorney's Office, one of the top trial lawyers in an office of 450 deputy district attorneys, grabbed me by the arm and, without a word of explanation, hurried me down the hall into the office of J. Miller Leavy, director of Central Operations.

Leavy was talking to two LAPD lieutenants I'd worked with on previous cases, Bob Helder and Paul LePage. Listening for a minute, I heard the word "Tate." Turning to Aaron, I asked, "Are we going to handle it?"

He nodded affirmatively.

My only comment was a low whistle.

Helder and LePage gave us a sketchy résumé of what Ronnie Howard had said. As a follow-up to Mossman and Brown's visit the previous night, two other officers had gone to Sybil Brand that morning and talked to Ronnie for

a couple of hours. They had obtained considerably more detail, but there were still huge gaps in the story.

To say that the Tate and LaBianca cases had been “solved” at this point would be a gross overstatement. Obviously, in any murder case finding the killer is extremely important. But it’s only a first step. Neither the finding, the arresting, nor the indicting of a defendant has evidentiary value and none are proof of guilt. Once the killer is identified, there remains the difficult (and sometimes insurmountable) problem of connecting him with the crime by strong, admissible evidence, then proving his guilt beyond a reasonable doubt, be it before a judge or a jury.

And as yet we hadn’t even made the first step, much less the second. In talking to Ronnie Howard, Susan Atkins had implicated herself and “Charles,” presumably meaning Charles Manson. But Susan had also said that others were involved, and we lacked their actual identities. This was on Tate. On LaBianca there was virtually no information.

One of the first things I wanted to do, after reviewing the Howard and DeCarlo statements, was to go to Spahn Ranch. Arrangements were made for me to go out the next morning with several of the detectives. I asked Aaron if he wanted to come along, but he couldn’t make it.<sup>1</sup>

When I returned home late that afternoon and told my wife, Gail, that Aaron and I had been assigned the Tate case, she shared my excitement. But with reservations. She had been hoping that we could take a vacation. It had been months since I’d taken a full day off. Even when I was at home in the evenings, I was either reading transcripts, researching law, or preparing arguments. Although every day I made sure I spent some time with our two children, Vince, Jr., three, and Wendy, five, when I was on a big case I totally immersed myself in it. I promised Gail I’d try to take a few days off, but I honestly had to admit that it might be a while before I could do so.

At that time we were, fortunately, unaware that I would be living with the Tate-LaBianca cases for almost two years, averaging one hundred hours per week, rarely, if ever, getting to bed before 2 A.M. seven days per week. And that the few moments Gail, the kids, and I had together would be devoid of privacy, our home transformed into a fortress, a bodyguard not only living with us but accompanying me everywhere I went, following a threat by Charles Manson that he would “kill Bugliosi.”

1. Although Aaron was my superior in the office, we had been assigned the case as co-prosecutors, each of us having an equal say in its handling. Though neither of us could have foreseen that months later Aaron would be yanked off the case, leaving me to go it alone, I did realize from the start that owing to his other duties as head of the Trials Division his participation would be limited.

## **November 19-21, 1969**

WE'D PICKED A hell of a day for a search. The wind was incredible. By the time we reached Chatsworth, it was almost buffeting us off the road.

It wasn't a long drive, well under an hour. From the Hall of Justice in downtown Los Angeles it's about thirty miles to Chatsworth. Going north on Topanga Canyon Boulevard past Devonshire for about two miles, we made a sharp left onto Santa Susana Pass Road. Once heavily traveled but in recent years bypassed for a faster freeway, the two-lane road winds upward a mile or two. Then, suddenly, around a bend and to the left, there it was, Spahn's Movie Ranch.

Its ramshackle Main Street was less than twenty yards from the highway, in plain view. Wrecked automobile and truck bodies littered the area. There wasn't a sign of life.

There was an unreality to the place, accentuated by the roaring wind and the appearance of total desertion, but even more so by the knowledge, if the Atkins-Howard story was true, of what had begun and ended here. A run-down movie set, off in the middle of nowhere, from which dark-clad assassins would venture out at night, to terrorize and kill, then return before dawn to vanish into the surroundings. It might have been the plot of a horror film, except that Sharon Tate and at least eight other real human beings were now dead.

We pulled off onto the dirt road, stopping in front of the Long Branch Saloon. In addition to myself, there were Lieutenant Helder and Sergeant Calkins of the Tate team; Sergeant Lee of SID; Sergeants Guenther, Whiteley, and

William Gleason from LASO; and our guide, Danny DeCarlo. Danny had finally agreed to accompany us, but only on one condition: that we handcuff him. That way, if any members of the Family were still around, they wouldn't think he was voluntarily "flapping to the fuzz."

Though the sheriff's deputies had been to the ranch before, we needed DeCarlo for a specific purpose: to point out the areas where Manson and the Family target-practiced. The object of our search: any .22 caliber bullets and/or shell casings.

But first I wanted to obtain George Spahn's permission to search the ranch. Guenther pointed out his shack, which was to the right and apart from the Western set. We knocked and a voice, that of a young girl, said, "Come right on in."

It was as if every fly in the area had taken shelter there during the storm. Eighty-one-year-old George Spahn was sitting in a decaying armchair, wearing a Stetson and dark glasses. In his lap was a Chihuahua, at his feet a cocker spaniel. A hippie girl of about eighteen was fixing his lunch, while a transistor radio, tuned to a cowboy station, blared "Young Love" by Sonny James.

It seemed as staged as the setting itself: according to DeCarlo, Manson called his girls "young loves."

Because of Spahn's near blindness, Calkins handed him his badge to feel. Once we had identified ourselves, Spahn seemed to relax. Asked for permission to search, he magnanimously replied, "It's my ranch and you're welcome to search it any time you want to, day or night, and as often as you like." I explained his legal rights. Under the law, no search warrant was required, only his permission. If he did give permission, however, it might be necessary at some later date for him to testify to this in court. Spahn still agreed.

There was no mention of Manson and his Family. But Spahn must have known that they were in some way the

reason for our being there. Although on other occasions I would interview George at length, our conversation at this time was brief and confined to the search.

Once we went back outside, people began appearing from almost every building. There must have been ten to fifteen, most of them young, most in hippie-type clothes, although a few appeared to be ranch hands. How many, if any, were actual members of the Family we didn't know. While looking around, I heard some odd sounds coming from a doghouse. Leaning down and looking in, I saw two dogs and, crouched in the corner, a toothless, white-haired old woman of about eighty. I later checked with one of the ranch hands to see if she needed help, but he said she was happy where she was.

It was a very strange place.

About a hundred yards behind the main cluster of buildings there was a drop down to a creek, then, beyond it, the hills rose up and became a part of the Santa Susana mountain range. Rocky, brush covered, the area looked far more rugged than it actually was. I wondered how many times as a boy I'd seen this scene in B-grade cowboy films. According to Lutesinger and DeCarlo, it was here, in the canyons and gullies behind the ranch, and across the road, in Devil's Canyon, that the Family hid out from the police. Here, too, somewhere in this area, if the various accounts were correct, were the remains of Donald "Shorty" Shea.

Charlie's favorite firing spot, DeCarlo said, was in the creek bed, well out of sight from the road. As targets he used fence posts and a trash can. Under the direction of Sergeant Lee, we began searching. Though no shell casings had been found at 10050 Cielo Drive—the Buntline being a revolver, which doesn't automatically eject its shell casings—we wanted to collect both in case the gun or additional evidence was found.

While we were searching the creek bed, I kept thinking about George Spahn, alone and almost defenseless in his

blindness. I asked, "Anybody bring a tape recorder?" Calkins had; it was in the back of his car. "Let's go back and get Spahn's consent on tape," I said. "Between now and the time we go to trial, I don't want some s.o.b. putting a knife to Spahn's throat, forcing him to say he didn't give us permission." We went back and taped Spahn's consent. It was for his protection as well as our own; knowing the tape existed could be discouragement.

DeCarlo indicated another area, about a quarter of a mile up one of the canyons, where Charlie and the men sometimes target-practiced. We found a number of bullets and shell casings there. Because of the wind and dust, the search was less thorough than I'd hoped for; however, Sergeant Lee promised to return at a later date and see what he could find.

Altogether, that day we found approximately sixty-eight .22 caliber bullets (approximate because some were fragments rather than whole slugs) and twenty-two shell casings of the same caliber. Lee put them in envelopes, noting where and when found, and took them back to the police lab with him.

While looking around the corral area, I spotted some white nylon rope, but it was two-strand, not three.

Guenther and Whiteley had made their own find, in Danny DeCarlo. That afternoon they interviewed him on the Hinman murder and Beausoleil's confession. The only problem was that the Beausoleil trial had been going on for a week now, and both the prosecution and defense had rested.

Against the objections of Beausoleil's attorney, a continuance was obtained until the following Monday, at which time the prosecution hoped to reopen its case to introduce the confession.

It was agreed that if DeCarlo testified in the Beausoleil trial, LASO would drop the motorcycle engine theft charge

against him.

On my return to the Hall of Justice there was a meeting in the office of the then Assistant District Attorney, Joseph Busch. Present in addition to Busch, Stovitz, and myself from the DA's Office were Lieutenant Paul LePage (LaBianca) and Sergeant Mike McGann (Tate) representing LAPD.

The police wanted to wrap up the case, Lieutenant LePage informed us. The public pressure on LAPD to solve these murders was unbelievable. Every time Chief Edward M. Davis encountered a reporter, he was asked, "What, if anything, is happening on Tate?"

LAPD wanted to offer Susan Atkins immunity, in exchange for telling what she knew about the murders.

I was in total disagreement. "If what she told Ronnie Howard is true, Atkins personally stabbed to death Sharon Tate, Gary Hinman, and who knows how many others! *We don't give that gal anything!*"

Chief Davis wanted to rush the case to the grand jury, LePage said. But before that he wanted to break the news that we had caught the killers in a big press conference.

"We don't even *have* a case to take to the grand jury," I told LePage. "We're not even sure who the killers are, or if they're free or in custody. All we have is a good lead, but we're getting there. Let's see if, on our own, we can get enough evidence to nail all of them. If we can't, then, as a last resort—a very, very last resort—we can turn to Atkins."

I could sympathize with LAPD; the media were blasting the department almost daily. On the other hand, it would be nothing compared to the public response if we let Susan Atkins walk off scot-free. I couldn't forget Susan describing how it felt to taste Sharon Tate's blood: "Wow, what a trip!"

LePage was firm; LAPD wanted to make a deal. I conferred with Busch and Stovitz; they were far less adamant than I. Against my very strong objections, Busch