

**PART 4**

**HELTER**



**SKELTAR**

**THE SHOCKING STORY OF  
THE MANSON MURDERS**

**VINCENT BUGLIOSI WITH CURT GENTRY**

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Version 1.0

Epub ISBN 9781473519817

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

First published by Arrow Books in 1992

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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  
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The Random House Group Limited Reg. No. 954009

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

ISBN 9780099975007

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**HELTER  
SKELTER**  
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**THE TRUE STORY OF  
THE MANSON MURDERS**

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



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# **THE SEARCH FOR THE MOTIVE**

## **The Bible, the Beatles, and Helter Skelter**

“If I’m looking for a motive, I’d look for something which doesn’t fit your habitual standard, with which you use to work as police—something much more far out.”

Roman Polanski to Lieutenant Earl Deemer

## January 1970

CONFIDENTIAL MEMO. FROM: Deputy DA Vincent Bugliosi. To: District Attorney Evelle Younger. Subject: Status of Tate & LaBianca cases.

The memo ran to thirteen pages, but the heart of it consisted of a single paragraph:

“Without Susan Atkins’ testimony on the Tate case, the evidence against two out of the five defendants [Manson and Kasabian] is rather anemic. Without her testimony on the LaBianca case, the evidence against five out of the six defendants [everyone except Van Houten] is non-existent.”

That was it. Without Sadie, we still didn’t have a case.

On January 2, I called a meeting of the Tate and LaBianca detectives, giving them a list of forty-two things that had to be done.

Many were repeat requests: Go to the areas where the clothing and the gun were found and search for knives. Has Granado been able to “make” the boots we picked up in November with the bloody boot-heel print on the Tate walkway? SID must have something by now on the wire cutters, also the clothing the TV crew found. Where is the tape Inyo County Deputy Sheriff Ward made with the two miners, Crockett and Poston? Where are the reports on the Tate, LaBianca, and Spahn Ranch toll calls? Telephone company destroys its records after six months; hurry on this.

Many of the requests were elementary follow-up steps that I felt the detectives should have already done on their

own, without our prompting: Get Atkins printing exemplar and compare it with FIG on the front door at Tate. Get same on defendants Van Houten, Krenwinkel, and Watson and compare with printing at the LaBianca residence. Submit a complete report on the stolen credit cards involved in this case (we were hoping to find a sales slip on the rope or the Buck knives). DeCarlo said he was along when Manson purchased the three-strand nylon rope at the Jack Frost store in Santa Monica in June 1969: ask Frost employees if they sold such a rope; also show them the "Family album" to see if they can recall Manson and/or DeCarlo. Also show photos of Manson, Atkins, Kasabian, and the others to employees of the Standard station in Sylmar where Rosemary LaBianca's wallet was found.

After giving the detectives the list, I asked, "I presume that, above and beyond what I've given you, you guys are also conducting your own independent investigations?" The long silence that followed was in itself the answer. Then Calkins complained, "How are we supposed to know to do these things? We're policemen, not lawyers."

"Wait a minute," I said. "These forty-two things have nothing to do with the law. Each and every one pertains to securing evidence and strengthening our case against these people."

"But that isn't our job," Calkins continued to protest.

His remark was so astonishing I came close to losing my temper. "*Investigating a case, gathering evidence, connecting defendants with the corpus delicti of the crime—that isn't a police job?* Come on, Bob. You're the detectives. Aaron and I are the lawyers. Each of us has his own job to do. And if either of us falls down on the job, Manson is going to walk. Think about that."

I could understand if the detectives had other duties, but they were assigned full time to the case.

Unlike Calkins, Mike McGann rarely complained, but he rarely came through either. To a man, the LaBianca