



**ABSOLUTE
CRIME**



Table of Contents

The Scary Bitch Next Door The Monster of Old New Orleans: Delphine LaLaurie	pg. 4
In Love or Murder The Strange Death of Arturo Gatti: Was it a Crime of Passion or Suicide?	pg. 6
My Dad, The Crazy Evil Dictator Stalin's Children: Being a Dictator's Kids Doesn't Pay Off	pg. 8
The HTTP Murders From Med Student to Craigslist Killer: the Philip Markoff Story	pg. 10
Deadly Darlings Joshua Phillips: The 14-Year Old Killer Next Door	pg. 12
You've Been Hacked The Man behind the Great Cyber Heist: Albert Gonzalez	pg. 14
Unsportsmanlike Conduct From Mr. Universe to Double Murder: Bertil Fox	pg. 18
No Guns Allowed On Casual Friday Did Pornography Provoke a Work Place Rampage? The Charles Allaway Story	pg. 20
Murder Under the Rising Sun From Spoiled Child to Sexual Predator and Serial Killer: Kiyoshi Okubo	pg. 22
Dirty Cops Police Colonel and Mass Murderer: Ubiratan Guimarães	pg. 24
How to Steal a Million They Got Away with Two Van Goghs worth \$30 Million: The Vincent Van Gogh Museum Heist, December 2002	pg. 26
The Funny Side of Crime James Phillips	pg. 28
Book Excerpt Slaves of Berkeley The Shocking Story of Human Trafficking In the United States By Tim Huddleston	pg. 29

The Scary Bitch Next Door

The Monster of Old New Orleans: Delphine LaLaurie

No American city seems to have more legends or ghost stories than New Orleans. None of the stories of old New Orleans are more terrifying than those of a socialite named Delphine LaLaurie. If the legends are to be believed, Madam LaLaurie not only imprisoned and tortured her servants, she may have murdered two husbands.

LaLaurie's behavior was so brutal that it outraged the citizens of a city where slavery was considered an acceptable institution. Her actions laid bare the ugly atrocities that often went underneath the gentility and refinement of the old south.

Madam LaLaurie's wickedness became so infamous that her mansion at 1140 Royal Street is now regarded as a prominent New Orleans landmark and tourist attraction. Almost two centuries after Madam LaLaurie committed her crimes, people still come to visit her house and her story.



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From Social Prominence to Infamy

Delphine LaLaurie was born in 1775 when New Orleans was still part of the Spanish Empire. Her parent's family, the Macartys, was a prominent one in the city's ruling classes. Delphine Macarty was prominent enough to marry important Spanish official Don Ramon Lopez y Angullo. On a trip to Spain in 1804, Delphine was even presented to that nation's Queen.

Don Ramon died in Havana and Delphine returned to New Orleans, which was now part of the United States because of the Louisiana Purchase. She married Jean Blanque, a banker, lawyer, and important local politician. Delphine had four children by Blanque, who died in 1816. After his death, Delphine married a much younger man, a doctor named Leonard Nicolas LaLaurie.

It was LaLaurie who helped Delphine build the mansion at 1140 Royal Street, which would later be revealed as a house of horrors. Delphine LaLaurie had become one of the city's most prominent socialites. The house she built was a three-story mansion, complete with slave quarters.

A Private House of Horrors

Details of exactly what was going on at 1140 Royal Street in the early 19th century are hard to find. What is known is that the brutalities inflicted on LaLaurie's slaves were so terrible that they inspired generations of ghost stories, pulp novels, and legends.

It is known that around 1832, a slave girl named Lia jumped from the mansion's roof to avoid punishment. The punishments being inflicted on the slaves were so brutal that Lia preferred suicide to her mistress's "care." Witnesses claimed that they saw Madame LaLaurie chasing Lia before her jump. Delphine apparently took after Lia because the girl had done a poor job of combing her mistress's hair.

The incident with Lia prompted authorities to investigate and eventually remove nine of LaLaurie's slaves from the home. The reason given for this action was the mistreatment the slaves were receiving. Stories began circulating that LaLaurie kept her cook chained to the stove (which must have been unbearable in the heat of New Orleans). Madame LaLaurie also reportedly beat her own daughters when the girls tried to feed the slaves.

The Fire and the Lynch Mob

The real exposure of the horrors came in 1834 when a slave, the cook who had been chained to the stove, set the LaLaurie mansion on fire. It isn't clear why the slave did this – she may have been trying to cover an escape attempt, get revenge, or commit suicide.

The fire caused a crowd of onlookers to enter the house to try and rescue the residents. The rescuers wondered why LaLaurie's slaves didn't flee the burning structure. They soon found their answer – all the slaves were chained up on upper floors of the building. Another slave told the police who came to investigate that LaLaurie often took slaves to a room from which they never returned.

In the room from which slaves never returned authorities found seven horribly mutilated African Americans. LaLaurie was deliberately chaining slaves up and torturing them.

Some of the slaves said that they had been chained up for months. The slaves were taken to the city jail and put on display for everybody to see.

The slaves were so badly mauled that they inspired the formation of a lynch mob. A large mob gathered near LaLaurie's house and started talking about stringing her up – in other words, hanging her.

Escape and the Beginning of a Legend

The members of the mob never got to hang Madam LaLaurie. Having heard the lynch talk, she jumped into her carriage and drove to a waiting schooner as fast as she could. The schooner sailed away and the Madam was never seen again. Rumor had it that she fled to Mobile, Ala., and later to Paris, where she died at some unknown date. A grave with her name was discovered in a Paris cemetery in 1888.

Madam LaLaurie entered the world of folklore when writers learned of her story. They embellished the cruelty with claims that flesh had been sliced away, brains had been sucked out, and voodoo rites held in the house. Some writers have claimed that LaLaurie was really a vampire who was feeding on her slaves.

The real horror though was slavery itself. Madam LaLaurie's brutalities were typical of the tortures inflicted on slaves in the Old South. What made her atrocities different was that they occurred in the heart of a large city, rather than on an isolated plantation. Even though Madam LaLaurie was gone, the slaves of New Orleans would not see freedom until the Union forces occupied the city during the Civil War almost 30 years after Madam LaLaurie's house of horrors had exposed the truth about slavery for all to see.

In Love or Murder

The Strange Death of Arturo Gatti: Was it a Crime of Passion or Suicide?



Crimes of passion are often messy affairs in which no easy answers or clear motives are available. Sometimes it isn't even possible to tell if an actual crime took place or not. Such a case involves the death of welterweight and featherweight world champion boxer Arturo Gatti in 2009.

Gatti's body was found in a hotel room in Porto de Galinhas, Brazil, on July 12, 2009, when he was reportedly on a second honeymoon. Brazilian authorities concluded that Gatti, who had a history of suicide attempts, mental health problems, and substance abuse, had hanged himself. Gatti's friends and family contend that he was murdered by his wife, Amanda Rodriguez, or somebody working with her in order to inherit his estate.

The case was clouded by feuding over Gatti's estate; at the time of his death, he reportedly had two wills. One left all of his money to Rodriguez and her son Arturo Gatti Jr., while another left the money to Gatti's mother and other family members.

A Crime of Passion or Cold-Blooded Murder?

Gatti's death might have been a crime of passion because he and Amanda had apparently been fighting the night before. It might have been a cold-blooded murder because it is difficult to see how an average-sized woman could have hanged a professional boxer. Gatti reportedly pushed Rodriguez to the ground in the street outside the hotel on the night of July 11.

Gatti's marriage was a tumultuous one; friends reported that he and Amanda were constantly arguing. She often sent him long text messages filled with angry rants. There were also documented cases of physical abuse.

Yet the death might have been a cold-blooded murder because Gatti might have been planning to cut Rodriguez out of his will at the time of his death. Gatti's family was trying to get him to leave Amanda at the time of the murder. Rodriguez might have lured Gatti to Brazil (her native country) in order to murder him there.

Conflicting Accounts and Confusing Police Reports

Part of the reason for the mystery is the confusing behavior of Brazilian police. Investigators first concluded the death was a murder and arrested Rodriguez. Then they released her and declared it a suicide.

Gatti's manager, Pat Lynch, wasn't convinced by the police claims. He hired a private detective named Paul Ciolino to look into the matter. Ciolino issued a 300-page report that concluded the investigation of Gatti's death was "inadequate". Like the police, Ciolino was unable to conclusively determine the cause of Gatti's death, although they told the press that it was a homicide. Brazilian authorities ignored the private investigation.

A second autopsy performed in Gatti's hometown of Montreal further clouded the situation. The Canadian coroners concluded that Gatti had suffered injuries that the Brazilian investigators had ignored.

A Crime of Passion or a Broken Heart?

Another possible motive for Arturo Gatti Sr.'s death was proposed by sportswriter Chris Jones. Jones believes that Gatti simply had nothing left to live for after the end of his boxing career. Gatti's last fight was on July 14, 2007, less than two years before his death. The fight took such a toll on Gatti that he announced his retirement in his dressing room right after the match.

Gatti's boxing career was certainly a brutal one that took a terrible toll on his body. He won fights and the admiration of fans by boxing with broken hands and swollen eyes.

Gatti may have suffered head injuries as well; his face was often covered with blood after fights.

The "fight to the bitter end" attitude that made Gatti a fan favorite may have led to his death. Gatti was most famous for his three fights against Micky Ward, the boxer made famous by Mark Wahlberg's movie *The Fighter*. Media reports indicate that Wahlberg is planning a sequel to that film that will feature Gatti as a character.

Mental Problems and Crimes of Passion

A strong possibility is that Arturo Gatti might have suffered brain damage in the ring. It is known that professional fighters can suffer brain damage that leads to suicide and other violent behaviors. Arturo Gatti fought in 49 professional fights and he suffered technical knockout (TKO) losses in his last two fights.

Outside the ring, Gatti had a long history of heavy drinking and drug abuse. The drinking and drug abuse might have increased the brain damage. Gatti also threatened to commit suicide in 2004 and may have attempted suicide by overdosing in 2006.

An Unsolved Mystery

The death of Arturo Gatti will probably remain an unsolved mystery. None of the investigations have been able to determine a conclusive cause of death, although circumstantial evidence points to suicide. It is unclear if the dispute over the wills and Gatti's estate was ever resolved. Gatti's fame will live on; he was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 2012.

My Dad, The Crazy Evil Dictator

Stalin's Children: Being a Dictator's Kids Doesn't Pay Off

Being the child of one of history's most powerful and bloodthirsty dictators doesn't automatically pay off. At least that's what the children of Soviet tyrant Joseph Stalin discovered. Instead of fame and fortune, they achieved obscurity, and at least one of them ended up defecting to the United States.

Family Life in the Kremlin

Even though he was one of the best known public figures of the 20th century, we don't know that much about Stalin's personal life. Stalin was married twice to Ekaterina (or "Kato") Svanidze and Nadezhda Alliluyeva. What we do know is that Stalin was very bad to his kids and family members. He treated them just as badly as he treated everybody else in the Soviet Union.

Stalin's first wife, Ekaterina (or "Kato") Svanidze, died in 1907 when Stalin was just a small-time bank robber and revolutionary. The couple had one son, Yakov, who apparently used the family's real name Jughashvili (or Dzhugashvili), instead of Stalin (a pseudonym that actually means "Man of Steel" in Russian).

Betraying his Son to the Nazis

Yakov didn't benefit much from having a famous father. During World War II, Yakov, who was fighting to defend Stalin in the Red Army, was captured by the Nazis. Hitler offered to exchange Yakov for German field Marshal Friedrich Paulus, who had been captured at Stalingrad. Stalin refused, and he even made vicious jokes about his son.



Legend has it that Yakov died when he ran into an electric fence at a Nazi concentration camp. There is no proof of this story, but another possibility is that Yakov might have been murdered by other Russian prisoners who hated Stalin.

Killing his Own Family

Yakov wasn't the only one of Stalin's family members who was killed because of his loving father. Historical reports indicate that much of Ekaterina Svanidze's family was murdered by Stalin's secret police during the Great Terror of the 1930s. It isn't known whether Stalin ordered their murders or not, but he probably did kill his wife.

Stalin's second wife, Nadezhda Alliluyeva, died under mysterious circumstances in 1932. She might have committed suicide or been murdered by Stalin or one of his thugs. A popular Russian legend has it that Stalin liked to throw lit cigarettes at Nadezhda, so the great dictator was also an abusive husband. The Russian public was told that Mrs. Stalin had died of an "illness."

Stalin's Grandchildren

Nadezdha had two children, Vasily and Svetlana. Vasily served in the Red Air Force and won some medals during World War II. Vasily became an alcoholic and died in 1962 under mysterious circumstances.

It isn't known if Vasily died of alcoholism or if he was murdered, possibly on the orders of Stalin's successor, Nikita Khrushchev.

Abusing his Daughter

Stalin's daughter, Svetlana Aliluyeva, didn't think much of the utopia her father created in 1967 – she immigrated to the United States. It is easy to see why Svetlana didn't like Communism – Stalin had her first boyfriend sent to the Gulag because he was Jewish. Stalin later forced her to divorce her first husband and marry flunky politician Andrei Zhdanov.

After Stalin's death, Svetlana left Zhdanov and had an affair with an Indian Communist named Brajesh Singh. She had a child with Singh, but couldn't marry him.

Svetlana defected to the U.S. in 1967 and lived in New Jersey, where she married American architect William Peters and took the name Lana Peters. She had a daughter by him, but divorced and later moved to England. She returned to the Soviet Union in 1984, just as Mikhail Gorbachev was launching reforms that would bring the Communist empire down.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Svetlana lived in Bristol, England until 2009. She moved back to the United States where she died in 2011 in Wisconsin. Even though her father was an atheist who persecuted and murdered people of all faiths, Svetlana was a very religious woman. She was baptized into the Russian Orthodox Church in 1963 and converted to Catholicism in 1982.

Stalin has a number of grandchildren in Russia and the United States, at least some of whom keep their grandfather's true identity a secret. In 2001, a man named Yuri Davydov told Russian TV that he was Stalin's grandson. Davydov said his father had told him to keep the family's connection to Stalin a secret, possibly out of the fear that they would face reprisals from Stalin's many victims or their relatives.

Another grandson, Yevgeny Dzhugashvili, who is apparently Yakov's son, actually went to court to defend the man who caused his father's death. In 2009, Yevgeny sued the Russian newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* for calling Stalin a bloodthirsty cannibal and reporting that the dictator had signed execution orders, but a court threw out the lawsuit. He also sued a radio station called *Echo of Moscow* over claims that Stalin had ordered the murder of children. Dzhugashvili, a former colonel in the Russian air force, lives in Georgia and has also campaigned for a political party called the Stalin Bloc. The Stalin Bloc wants to re-establish Stalinism and the Soviet Union.

Stalin has at least one grandchild who lives in the United States, Svetlana's daughter, who now goes by the name Chrese Evans and reportedly lives in Portland, Ore. It isn't known how many descendants Stalin has in the former Soviet Union, because some of them apparently hide their connection out of fear of retaliation from the many people who hate Stalin.

It's easy to see why as recently as 2010 a statue of Stalin in Russia was beheaded. They might also be ashamed of having a connection to a man who probably caused the deaths of 40 million people. That's a family legacy nobody would want.

The HTTP Murders

From Med Student to Craigslist Killer: the Philip Markoff Story



The hugely popular online want ad service Craigslist has earned the dubious distinction of becoming a popular hunting ground for cyber killers. One of the most unusual killers to troll Craigslist for victims was sexual predator and robber Philip Markoff.

The strangest thing about Markoff was his life outside of crime. When he wasn't searching Craigslist for prostitutes to rape and rob, Markoff was a second-year medical student. He lived in a nice apartment in Boston with his fiancée, and he came from a good family. His father was a dentist in Syracuse, N.Y.

Like many internet users, Markoff led a double life – good student, fiancé, and aspiring doctor by day, predator by night. A true child of the 21st century, Markoff turned to Craigslist to locate easy victims and prey on women that advertised their services as prostitutes.

A Nice Catholic Boy from a Good Family

Philip Markoff didn't look like a stereotypical sexual predator; he was young, handsome, and fresh faced. Markoff had been a good student in high school; he was even a member of the National Honor Society and the school's history club.

During his pre-med studies at the State University of New York, Markoff even volunteered in an emergency room. He met his fiancée, another pre-med student named Megan McAllister, while doing volunteer work. On the surface, Markoff seemed to be a nice Catholic boy from a good family.

Yet there was something very wrong with Markoff. Reports indicate that he was a gambling addict who had run up huge debts.

Some stories claim that Markoff may have owed money to bookies and loan sharks. By his second year in med school, Markoff was desperate for money, and he may have turned to crime to pay off the leg breakers.

Medical Student and Armed Robber

Like many people in need of money, Markoff turned to Craigslist, but he didn't sell anything or look for a job. Instead, Markoff began looking over the ads for adult entertainment for victims. He decided to start robbing prostitutes, figuring that they would have money.

Markoff's modus operandi was simple. He would pretend to be a rich john (or customer) and lure call girls to a hotel room. The medical student would be waiting in the hotel room with a gun and then he would rob them. The first victim was Trisha Leffler, whom Markoff tied up, gagged, and robbed at the Westin Copley Place Hotel in Boston.

The second victim was Julissa Brisman, who met Markoff at the Copley Marriott hotel in Boston on April 14, 2009. This time, the robbery escalated into murder when Brisman tried to fight back. Markoff shot her several times and left her body in the motel room.

Markoff struck again two days later in Warwick, R.I., where he tried to rob Corinne Stout, a lap dancer, at a Holiday Inn Express motel. Stout, like Leffler, was lucky to escape with her life.

Caught on Camera

Even though he was smart enough to attend medical school, Philip Markoff wasn't a very bright criminal. He wasn't smart enough to realize that his face had been recorded by security cameras at the hotels where he met his victims. Nor did he realize that police could trace the emails he had sent to the women back to him.

Police were also able to ascertain that Markoff was using one of his victims' credit cards.

Markoff was heading out to indulge his gambling habit at the Foxwoods Resort Casino in Connecticut when police pulled over his car on I-95 south of Boston. Markoff's fiancée, Meagan McAllister, was riding in the car when officers stopped it and took him into custody. Officers stopped Markoff's car because an all-points bulletin with his license plate number on it had been issued.

Boston's Craigslist killer had been caught by his own arrogance and clumsiness. Even though Markoff's horrendous activities were a secret from his fiancée, his life was an open book to the police. Investigators had no problem tracking him down by using modern technology.

Death by His Own Hand

Philip Markoff was charged with armed robbery, kidnapping, murder, and gun charges on April 21, 2009. Police searched his apartment and discovered the automatic pistol, duct tape, and other tools he had used during his crime spree. He was later charged with armed robbery in Rhode Island.

Not surprisingly, McAllister soon broke off her engagement with Markoff and announced she wanted nothing to do with him. Markoff began trying to kill himself almost as soon as he was in custody. Among other things, he tried to strangle himself with shoelaces and slit his wrists with a sharpened spoon handle.

Markoff succeeded in killing himself on Aug. 15, 2010 by wounding and suffocating himself. When jailers searched his cell, they discovered that he had written his fiancée's name on the wall in his own blood. Experts think that Markoff probably killed himself to spare his fiancée and his family from the embarrassment of a trial. The Craigslist killer of Boston simply couldn't live with the guilt of his actions.

Deadly Darlings

Joshua Phillips: The 14-Year Old Killer Next Door

Murder cases involving young suspects often take very bizarre turns. One of the strangest is that of 14-year-old Joshua Phillips, who stabbed, strangled, and beat a little girl to death, then hid her body under his bed for a week. The case is made even stranger by Joshua's claims that he accidentally killed 8-year-old Maddie Clifton during a baseball game. Even though the murder occurred in 1998, Phillips' case is not going away anytime soon. In another strange twist, a recent U.S. Supreme Court decision has brought the bizarre affair back into the headlines. Some child-killer cases never seem to go away.

Looking in all the Wrong Places

When 8-year-old Maddie Clifton vanished from her neighborhood in Jacksonville, Fla. in November 1998, nobody suspected that her body was under the bed of a 14-year-old boy.

The boy's name was Joshua Phillips and he had no history of violence, yet a little girl's body was hidden under his bed for a week.

Police and others had been searching everywhere, including dumpsters and nearby woods. Nobody thought to look under Joshua's bed or consider him a suspect. Instead, cops investigated another neighbor who had been investigated for sex crimes in the past. Joshua didn't even appear on their radar, even though he was the killer.

Authorities, including the FBI, were baffled by the case. Search parties that included 400 volunteers were sent out. Chillingly, one of the volunteers was Joshua Phillips, the actual murderer, yet nobody connected him to the case.

The Dead Little Girl under the Bed



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Maddie's body wasn't discovered by the police or search parties; it was discovered a week later by Josh's mother, Melissa Phillips. Melissa went into Josh's room because she thought a waterbed was leaking. Instead, she discovered the little girl's body. The mother immediately ran from the house and came back with the police.

Incredibly, Joshua had been acting normally in the week since the murder. He returned to school and acted like just another teenaged boy. That changed when police took him out of class and placed him under arrest.

Joshua then told the police a story that nobody seemed to believe. Incredible as it was, he claimed the girl's death was an accident, although it's hard to believe those claims because of the brutality of the crime.

Did a Baseball Cause a Little Girl's Death?

Joshua claimed that he had hit Maddie in the head with a baseball, which caused her to collapse. Instead of seeking help, he carried her to his room, and she began to cry. Fearing that his dad would punish him, Joshua admitted to

trying to silence Maddie by hitting her with a baseball bat and stabbing her. He then shoved her body under the bed to cover up the crime.

Phillips' story sounds incredible; a normal 14-year-old would have called for help. A more likely scenario is that Joshua lured Maddie to his room and killed her. What he did the next week was particularly disturbing. He simply forgot about the body and ignored it for a week. Those who examined Joshua claimed he was living in a fantasy world.

An autopsy revealed that Joshua had stabbed Maddie 11 times and tried to strangle her with a telephone cord.

Another version of the story in which Josh hit Maddie in the eye with a baseball bat, then dragged her up to his room, has also come to light.

Was the Crime Sexually Motivated?

The abduction and killing of Maddie Clifton might have been sexually motivated. Police reportedly found violent pornography in Joshua's possession. The nature of the pornography has never been divulged to the public.

No evidence that Maddie Clifton was actually assaulted has ever come to light. One possibility is that Josh tried to assault her and ended up killing her in the process.

A Mother's Battle for her Son

In a controversial move, Joshua Phillips was charged and tried as an adult. That enabled prosecutors to file first-degree murder charges against him. Even though he was charged as an adult, Phillips could not receive the death penalty under Florida law because the crime was committed when he was 14.

Phillips was convicted of first-degree murder in August 1999, and he was sentenced to life in prison without parole. Since then, his mother has

been fighting to have his sentenced reduced to second-degree murder. If Phillips' charges are reduced, he might one day be eligible for parole.

Melissa Phillips has done numerous media interviews in her efforts to free her son. In her talks with the media, Melissa admits that her son is guilty, but seems to believe the accident story. Incredibly, Melissa remains on friendly terms with Sheila DeLongis, Maddie Clifton's mother.

The fight over Joshua Phillips continues in cyberspace, where a website devoted to freeing Josh and a website honoring Maddie exist. It is unclear if Sheila DeLongis and Maddie Clifton are connected with these websites or not.

The Supreme Court Might set him Free

Joshua Phillips is still serving his sentence in the Florida state prison system, but a 2012 ruling in a case called *Miller v. Alabama* might give him a chance at freedom. In that case, the court ruled that it is unconstitutional to sentence juveniles to life in prison without parole.

Phillips' attorney, Tom Fallis, told the press that he thinks the case will enable him to appeal his client's sentence. If the appeal is successful, it is unclear if Phillips will get released. Even he is eligible for parole, Phillips would still need a parole board's approval to get out. It is doubtful that the state's parole board will ever release him.

Interestingly enough, the prosecutor who won the life sentence against Joshua Phillips now regrets it. Harry Shorstein, a former state attorney, told the media that he now thinks it was wrong to sentence a teenager to life in prison without parole. Shorstein has changed his mind because he thinks that recent scientific discoveries prove that teenagers' brains are not fully developed, so they are less responsible for their actions. Whether the courts will ever buy this argument or not remains to be seen.

You've Been Hacked

The Man behind the Great Cyber Heist: Albert Gonzalez

No criminal has done more to demonstrate the power of the internet for larceny than Albert Gonzalez. The Miami hacker figured out how to steal from 180 million victims at once through one of the biggest identity thefts in history. He did it while working as an informant for the U.S. Secret Service, who was supposed to be helping the feds catch other cyber crooks.

A Life of Cyber Crime

Albert Gonzalez's life story reads like a history of cybercrime over the years – he went from high school hacker to hardened criminal. Like many hackers, Gonzalez started out stealing information, but eventually figured out how to commit cyber theft on a massive scale.

Gonzalez grew up in Miami, and his father, Alberto Gonzalez Sr., was a first generation American, a refugee from Castro's Cuba who worked as a landscaper. Gonzalez bought his first computer when he was 12 and got interested in hacking and security when his computer got infected by a virus he had downloaded.

Within a few years, Gonzalez had graduated to black hat hacking (or stealing information).

He hacked a NASA computer when he was just 14 and had the experience of being visited at his high school by the FBI. The incident made Gonzalez famous. He organized his own gang of hackers and gave an interview to ZDNET under the name "Soupnazi" after the popular character from Seinfeld. In the interview, Gonzalez bragged about defacing websites.



Hacking for Fun and Profit

Even though Gonzalez tried to portray himself as a fun-loving hacker out to “stick it to the man,” he was already an experienced identity thief. When he wasn't vandalizing sites, Gonzalez was stealing credit card numbers and using them to order CDs and other items. He had the items delivered to empty houses in his neighborhood to cover his tracks. Since he was too young to drive, Gonzalez had a friend drive him over to pick up the loot during lunch period at his high school.

Albert Gonzalez was definitely a genius – he taught himself how to hack internet service providers (ISPs) by reading technical manuals. He was one of the first to figure out how to hack Wi-Fi and one of the first Wardrivers (hackers that log on through wireless networks).

After dropping out of college, Gonzalez stumbled onto a treasure trove of data for a hacker: computers belonging to executives such as IT managers. The computers contained such valuable information as network diagrams and system architecture.

Working for and Against the Secret Service

By 2003, Albert Gonzalez had left Miami for the New York City area, and once there he worked as a security consultant at an internet company in New Jersey. That was only one of many activities Gonzalez engaged in – he also liked to cash out. Gonzalez would steal debit card numbers and make his own debit cards and PIN numbers, then go to ATM machines and use them to clean out all the cash in an account.

A New York police detective caught Gonzalez cashing out a Manhattan ATM in July 2003. That led to his first arrest and the attention of the Secret Service. The Service and the U.S. Attorney were looking for an informant that would help them infiltrate Shadowcrew.com, a network of hundreds of cyber criminals all over the world.

In exchange for not being prosecuted, Gonzalez was able to identify a dozen members of the Shadowcrew to the Secret Service. Gonzalez was so helpful to the agency and a federal anti-hacking program called Operation Firewall that he was even asked to speak to conferences of federal agents. Operation Firewall involved a sort of discussion board for hackers where Gonzalez served as administrator.

The hackers didn't realize that federal agents were monitoring their chat until they were arrested.

What the Secret Service didn't realize was that Gonzalez was still an active criminal who was organizing a massive identity theft ring. He wasn't planning to steal hundreds of credit card numbers, he was planning to steal millions and he almost got away with it.

Get Rich or Die Trying

Even as he was turning in some hackers,

Gonzalez was recruiting his own elite gang of hackers for one of the biggest cyber thefts in history. Gonzalez reportedly recruited some big-name hackers to help him, including Jonathan James, Stephen Watt, and Christopher Scott.

Gonzalez also recruited a number of confederates overseas, including the Ukrainian mastermind known as Maksym Yastremski, who was known as the internet's top fence for stolen credit and debit card information. From 2004-2006, he reportedly made \$11 million selling the stolen cards. Other hackers were recruited in Belarus, the Ukraine, Estonia, and China.

The gang called themselves "Operation Get Rich or Die Trying." Gonzalez certainly did his best to achieve the get rich part. He stayed at expensive hotels and once reportedly spent \$75,000 on a birthday party.

Stealing from 250,000 Businesses at Once

The way Operation Get Rich or Die Trying worked was simple – the crooks placed malware in the networks of large corporations. The targets included Heartland Payment Systems, which processed credit card payments for 250,000 businesses and some of the biggest names in American retail. Boston Market, OfficeMax, TJ Maxx, Dave & Buster's, Barnes & Noble, Target, and DSW were among the targets.

The malware they used consisted of sniffer worms designed to detect and capture credit card numbers. The sniffers were created by Stephen Watt, a legendary hacker from the 1990s who had a reputation as a good guy.

The sniffers were placed by members of the ring who would drive up and down highways on the East Coast. They would use wardriving equipment to scan various businesses until they found a network that they could place a sniffer in, and when they could place a sniffer, the haul was

usually massive. They stole 5,000 card numbers from a Dave & Buster's restaurant in Islandia, N.Y. alone and used the numbers to steal \$600,000.

Let's Go Shopping

The gang also succeeded into getting into the network at the headquarters of TJX through one of its subsidiaries, Marshalls. At TJX, they hacked the server that contained old credit transaction data and installed a sniffer that would seek out and capture the most recent transaction data, then send it to Gonzalez's computer in Miami.

Another method Gonzalez and his gang pioneered was to simply steal cash registers from stores like OfficeMax. They took the registers apart and cracked the computers inside to learn how they worked. They also hacked Micros Systems, which manufactured cash registers in order to locate passwords for point of sale systems that accepted credit card transactions at stores.

Federal agents learned that a massive identity theft ring was at work when TJX executives contacted them in 2006.

The owner of the department stores TJ Maxx and Marshalls had discovered that hackers had been stealing card numbers from its database for over a year. In 2007 the Secret Service got a similar complaint from Dave & Busters. Even though the Service knew that a massive identity theft ring was at work, they didn't know who was behind it, nor did they realize that their star informant was the mastermind.

Capturing the Mastermind

The Secret Service finally tracked Gonzalez down through Maskym Yastremski, the credit card fence. Agents managed to hack the fence's laptop and learn he was buying large numbers

of card numbers from a mysterious provider in America, yet they learned he didn't know who the provider was.

When the Ukrainian was arrested in Turkey in July 2007, police learned he had been asked to procure a fake passport for one of the American provider's henchmen. The henchman needed to get out of the U.S. because he had been arrested with \$200,000 in cash and 80 blank debit cards. The cash came from ATM machines. By checking with cops around the U.S., the Secret Service identified the henchman as Jonathan Williams. When agents checked Williams' possessions, they found a thumb drive that contained the address of Gonzalez's sister, yet they still had no direct connection to Gonzalez.

That changed when an agent turned up an email address belonging to the criminal mastermind that Yastremski was trading instant messages with. The address was soupnazi@efnet.ru. The Secret Service recognized it as Gonzalez's address and moved against him and his gang in Miami. Agents knew he had been using the name Soup Nazi for many years. Now that they knew who they were after, agents knew exactly where to find Albert Gonzalez in Miami.

End of the Line

Gonzalez was arrested in an expensive suite at the National Hotel in Miami Beach in May 2008. Gonzalez started cooperating with authorities and even led authorities to a barrel buried in his parents' backyard that contained \$1.2 million in cash. In 2009, he pleaded guilty to 19 charges of hacking. In March 25, 2010, Gonzalez was sentenced to 20 years in prison. He later tried to withdraw his plea bargain.

Gonzalez is currently serving his sentence at a federal prison in Michigan. If he behaves himself, he'll be released in 2025. It isn't known how much cash he has stashed on the outside, but it's doubtful that Albert Gonzalez will be a poor man when he walks out of prison.

New Crime Books Published This Month

ABSOLUTE CRIME PRESENTS

YOUNG, QUEER, AND DEAD:

A BIOGRAPHY OF SAN FRANCISCO'S MOST OVERLOOKED SERIAL
KILLER, THE DOODLER

ABSOLUTE CRIME PRESENTS

FRUITVALE BART STATION SHOOTING

www.absolutecrime.com

Unsportsmanlike Conduct

From Mr. Universe to Double Murder: Bertil Fox

Strangely enough, the sport with the highest rate of murderers in it might be professional bodybuilding. There have been several infamous murders involving professional weightlifters and bodybuilders.

Brutal Fox

The most notorious is Bertil Fox, a two-time former Mr. Universe – the sport’s highest honor. Fox is imprisoned for life in his native island of St. Kitts in the Caribbean for the murder of his girlfriend and her mother. Fox, who once had the disturbingly prophetic nickname of “Brutal” Fox, had once been one of the most honored bodybuilders in the world.



Born in St. Kitts but raised in Northampton, England, Fox took up bodybuilding as a teenager. He was named Junior Mr. Britain at the age of 18, and over the next decade won every major bodybuilding title, including Mr. Universe. When he retired, Fox returned to St. Kitts and opened Fox’s Gym.

On Sept. 30, 1997, Fox’s world changed forever when he went to a dress shop owned by the mother of his former girlfriend, Leyoca Browne. At the shop, Fox shot both Browne and her mother Violet. He then surrendered to police and faced a four-day trial. Fox avoided death by hanging, but he was imprisoned for life in St. Kitts’ only prison. Today, the one-time Mr. Universe works out in prison with homemade equipment, such as buckets full of rocks. His physique has deteriorated, although not as badly as his reputation.

The Trainer in Prison

The disturbing thing is that Brutal Fox isn’t the only murderous bodybuilder around. In 1998, Sports Illustrated found that there were at least three professional bodybuilders doing time in California prisons for murder. One of them, Gordon Kimbrough, was reportedly still training clients via telephone from the prison.

Kimbrough, an amateur bodybuilder who used so many steroids that he was known as the “chemical machine”, stabbed and strangled his longtime girlfriend, Kristey Ramsey, who was also Kimbrough’s partner in some bodybuilding contests. Kimbrough was reportedly angry that Ramsey was planning to leave him. Police arrested Kimbrough shortly after the killing; he was the only suspect.

Many observers blame Kimbrough and Fox's actions on steroids and other performance enhancing drugs that bodybuilders and other athletes use. It isn't clear how such drugs cause violence, but they might lead to brain damage.

The Bodybuilder on Death Row: John Riccardi

Bodybuilder John Riccardi spent time on California's death row. Riccardi, who was also a common criminal, raised money for steroids by burglarizing homes, and he stalked and killed his girlfriend, Connie Navarro, and her friend, Susan Jory. Riccardi also took the time to rob Navarro's house, and during the crime spree, Riccardi handcuffed Connie's 13-year-old son, future Red Hot Chili Peppers guitarist Dave Navarro, to a toilet during the robbery.

After the crime Riccardi fled to Texas, where he lived for eight years, had plastic surgery to change his appearance, and applied for a passport to leave the country. The efforts didn't do any good because Riccardi was featured on an episode of the popular TV show America's Most Wanted. An attentive viewer recognized Riccardi and told local police where to find him.

Riccardi was arrested and returned to California, where he was convicted of both murders and sentenced to death in 1996. Riccardi stayed on death row until 2012 when the California Supreme Court threw out his death sentence. Riccardi is still in prison waiting to see if officials will keep pursuing the death penalty against him or not.

Killer Sally becomes a Real Killer

There's also at least one case of a female

bodybuilder who became a killer. Sally McNeil, who went by the name "Killer Sally" on the bodybuilding circuit, really became a killer.

Sally used a 12-gauge shotgun to blow a hole in the chest of her husband, Ray McNeil, another bodybuilder, on Valentine's Day, 1995.

The catalyst for the murder was the fact that Ray came home late and Sally suspected that he had been with another woman. Incredibly, Ray survived the first shotgun blast and tried to crawl out of the apartment, but Sally reloaded the shotgun and gave him another blast for good measure.

After the shooting, Sally called 911 and said "Why, oh God, why?" to the operator. The confused operator dispatched police, who found a horrifying sight; Ray McNeil with his liver, tongue, and jaw blown away. Killer Sally was convicted and sentenced to 19 years to life in prison.

The Bloody World of Bodybuilding

Professional bodybuilding appears to be one of the bloodiest sports around. The reasons for this are unclear; it might be that the sport attracts aggressive individuals who are more prone to violence. Another popular though unproven theory is that steroids and other performance enhancing drugs cause brain damage that leads to violence.

No matter what the cause, several professional bodybuilders are now doing their workouts in the prison weight room. They'll probably be there for a very long time because of the horrific nature of their crimes.

No Guns Allowed On Casual Friday

Did Pornography Provoke a Work Place Rampage? The Charles Allaway Story



Many things have been blamed for workplace rampages over the years. One of the strangest motives for such a killing spree was pornography. Janitor Edward Charles Allaway claimed that screenings of porno movies drove him to kill seven people in the library at California State University (Cal State) in Fullerton in 1976.

After the killings, Allaway claimed that he had committed the outrage because he thought that his wife was being forced to appear in pornographic movies. The staff at the university library regularly watched such movies before and after work in the mid-1970s. Police investigators also found proof that some of Allaway's co-workers were planning to make their own pornographic movie.

Allaway also had a history of mental illness, reportedly from delusions. The delusions included fantasies about Allaway's wife and porn.

He Bought the Murder Weapon at Kmart

Like many workplace spree killers, Allaway had a long-time grievance with some of his co-workers. Evidence indicates that he had filed a complaint with a union representative. The representative, Bruce Jacobsen, was the first person that Allaway shot in his rampage.

Two days before the shootings, Allaway went to a Kmart discount store in Buena Park, located in Orange County, and purchased a rifle. On the morning of July 12, 1976, Allaway drove to the library to meet with Jacobsen. He brought the rifle and shot Jacobsen, then roamed through the library's basement where his co-workers worked.

Whether Allaway was targeting those involved with the porn or not is hard to say. His co-workers described him as a quiet man who would occasionally lash out against them.

There was no indication that he was capable of violence, although Allaway had undergone treatment for mental illness in the past. That treatment included shock therapy.

He Had a Grudge Against His Co-workers

The shooting rampage in the library's basement took less than five minutes, but when it ended, seven people were dead. Incredibly, the first thing that Allaway did after he was done shooting was to pick up the phone and call the police. He told officers that he had gone berserk and committed a terrible act. Allaway also assured cops that he was unarmed.

When he was arrested, Allaway was at the Anaheim Hilton Inn near Disneyland where his wife was working. He had driven over there and asked his wife for a glass of water and a dime so he could call the police. It was 1976, so most callers away from home had to use payphones.

The man who had methodically gunned down his co-workers quietly and calmly surrendered to the police. Once he was in custody, Allaway became embroiled in longstanding arguments over mental illness and criminal violence.

The Pornographic Delusion Defense

Those who examined Charles Allaway found that he had completely lost touch with reality. Among the weird delusions he entertained was that his co-workers were planning to murder him and film it as pornography.

This delusion seems to be based on a popular urban legend of the 1970s about snuff films,

which were supposed to be films of people being murdered. Even though legends about them have circulated for decades, none has ever actually been uncovered.

Not surprisingly, jurors found Allaway not guilty of murder by reason of insanity when he went to trial in 1976. Instead, he was sentenced to spend the rest of his life in California state mental hospitals. Interestingly enough, jurors never heard about the pornography being filmed in the library basement. Prosecutors felt that the knowledge would prejudice them against the victims.

Still in the Mental Hospital After 37 Years

Charles Allaway is still in a California state mental hospital, nearly 37 years after his shooting spree. Over the years, he has made several appeals for release, arguing that he has been cured and is now sane. Authorities have rejected his appeals, the latest of which was in 2012.

News stories indicate that Allaway is far from cured. A 2001 Los Angeles Times news brief indicates that Allaway was agitated and made violent by a screening of the classic zombie film *Night of the Living Dead*. It seems likely that Charles Allaway will die in a state mental hospital for the workplace rampage that he committed. The spree killer is still living in his bizarre fantasy world nearly four decades later.

Murder Under the Rising Sun

From Spoiled Child to Sexual Predator and Serial Killer: Kiyoshi Okubo

Kiyoshi Okubo grew up a spoiled brat and a social misfit, and as an adult he managed to go on one of the most frightening killing sprees in Japanese history. For two months in 1971, Okubo drove around Japan kidnapping, raping, and killing eight women.

Like Akira Nishiguchi, Okubo's case proved to be a major embarrassment for Japan's police. Even though the cops had a description of the Mazda Okubo was driving and the vehicle's license plate number, they were not able to find him for nearly two months.

Spoiled Brat, Social Misfit, and Sexual Predator

Kiyoshi Okubo had a very difficult childhood; he grew up one quarter Russian in a very racist society—Japan of the 1930s and 1940s. As a boy, Okubo was mercilessly teased and tormented at school and spoiled by his mother at home. The teasing intensified because of World War II, which increased hatred of white people in Japan.

Okubo's situation was made worse by his lack of discipline in a society that values discipline and order. He got poor grades at school and regularly found himself in trouble with teachers.

At a very young age, Okubo started showing signs of being a sexual predator. He attempted to rape a four-year-old girl when he was just 11. His interest in sex and girls won him a reputation as “little Kodaira” among his neighbors, after the notorious rapist and serial killer who terrorized Tokyo right after World War II.



A Rapist and Serial Killer

Sadly enough, Okubo's neighbors were right in their comparison of the boy to Kodaira. By the time he was 19, Okubo was serving time in prison for raping a 17-year-old girl. He was released after 18 months but was soon back behind bars for another rape.

After serving a three-year prison sentence, Okubo, then 25, was released. He adopted the fake name of Watanabe Kyoshi and pretended to be a college student. The reason for the masquerade was to get close to female coeds so he could have sex with them.

By 1967 Okubo had married and had two children. Yet he hadn't changed his ways at all. In 1967 Okubo, now 32, was arrested for attacking two women. This time Okubo was sentenced to four-and-a-half years in prison.

A Serial Killer's Road Trip

In March 1971 Okubo was released from prison and ten days later purchased a car—a cream colored Mazda. Using the car, Okubo went on a 64-day road trip that included the rape and murder of eight women.

All of the women were in their late teens or early twenties and most of them were students. After sexually assaulting and killing the women, Okubo dumped their bodies in industrial parks and rural areas as if they were garbage.

The most frightening aspect of Okubo's rampage was that the police were aware of his identity. They knew what his car looked like and even had his license plate number from a victim who got away. Yet he still managed to drive around urban areas and pick up unsuspecting women for rape and murder.

Caught on a Routine Traffic Stop

The details of Okubo's arrest are not clear; he may have been tracked by the brother of a victim or by the police. The arrest, like that of many notorious criminals, may have occurred because of a routine traffic stop. Another possibility is that a vigilant officer on routine patrol recognized the vehicle's description from an all-points bulletin. Officers pulled the Mazda over on May 14, 1971.

The traffic stop probably saved the life of a ninth victim; when officers stopped the car, they found a young woman riding with Okubo. Strangely enough, Okubo treated the woman he probably planned to kill gallantly; he gave her money to pay for a taxi to take her home.

Okubo was initially charged with abduction to commit an immoral act. Later at the police station, Okubo confessed and led detectives to the hidden bodies of his victims.

He Wanted to Be Reborn as a Weed

Kiyoshi Okubo was charged with eight counts of abduction (the equivalent of kidnapping under American law), murder, and abandonment of corpses (which is apparently a crime in Japan). He was convicted and sentenced to die on the gallows.

Like many criminals, Okubo blamed others for his outrages, namely the police. He claimed that he escalated his violence because of mistreatment by the officers investigating his rape charges. He claimed that police brutality had destroyed his humanity and forced him to rebel against authority. In his sick mind, Okubo imagined himself as a rebel and an outlaw rather than a sexual predator.

Before his execution, Okubo made another equally bizarre statement. He told a listener that he would like to be reborn as a weed. The reason for that is that weeds always survive no matter how much they are tread upon. In addition to being a monster, Okubo had lost touch with reality at some point before his rampage.

Dirty Cops

Police Colonel and Mass Murderer: Ubiratan Guimarães

No corrupt policeman seems to have been as murderous or as controversial as Ubiratan Guimarães, a colonel in Brazil's national police force. Guimarães was blamed for the deaths of 102 or 111 people in the world's bloodiest prison riot. He was later convicted, sentenced to 600 years in prison, released, and murdered under mysterious circumstances.

Police corruption and brutality are major problems in Latin America, where militarized police forces hold the power of life and death over citizens. Guimarães was one of many Brazilian police officials that abused this power for his own purposes. His crimes were so great that Colonel Guimarães became a symbol of everything wrong with his country.

From Guerrilla Fighter to Police Chief

Ubiratan Guimarães joined Brazil's state military police at a dark time in the nation's history in the 1970s. A brutal military dictatorship was in power, death squads were murdering suspected leftists, and Communist guerrillas were terrorizing the countryside. One of Guimarães' first assignments was fighting guerrillas in a very dirty kind of warfare.

Guimarães spent his life in a paramilitary organization that blurred the line between police force and army. The police were uniformed and equipped like soldiers. They also had military style weapons, but they were supposed to enforce the law and keep order in cities. By 1992 Guimarães, who had joined the military police at 18, was in command of the police in Sao Paulo state, which included one of Brazil's largest cities.



One of the World's Worst Prison Massacres

Ubiratan Guimarães' infamy began in October 1992 when a riot broke out at Sao Paulo's infamous Carandiru Penitentiary. Carandiru is considered the largest prison in Latin America. Order in the facility quickly broke down, and the guards were unable to maintain order.

What happened next remains a matter of controversy, but one fact is clear: When the smoke cleared, several hundred inmates and others lay dead. On October 2, 1992, Colonel Guimarães ordered troops to storm the prison. Some reports indicate that troops were given orders to shoot and kill rioting inmates.

The situation was made worse by the fact that at least some of the rioting inmates may have been armed. Shootouts erupted between attacking military police and guards, which drove up the body count.

Execution of Unarmed Inmates Reported

The controversy erupted because forensic investigators determined that most of the dead inmates had been unarmed. To make matters worse, some of them were naked or were cowering behind mattresses in their cells for protection. Prisoners that presented no threat to troops were gunned down along with the gunmen.

There is also evidence that at least some prisoners were marched out and shot execution style. A big problem is that there was no way to tell which inmates were killed by other inmates with guns and which were shot by police. Guimarães was originally charged with 111 murders, but nine of the deaths were by stabbing, which indicates those men were killed by fellow inmates.

The methods used against the prisoners were those used in anti-guerrilla warfare in countries like Brazil. Those tactics include summary execution of prisoners and torture.

I Was Only Following Orders

Ubiratan Guimarães was allowed to stay in the police following the massacre, retire, and even run successfully for political office. In 2001 prosecutors, bowing to political pressure, charged Guimarães and put him on trial. The trial was an unusual one for Brazil, where police are rarely held accountable for their actions.

The jury held Colonel Guimarães responsible for 102 of the deaths during the riot. It then sentenced him to an astounding 632 years in prison for the crime. The jurors gave Guimarães six years for each of the deaths and four years apiece for five attempted murders.

Guimarães defense was a classic one that echoed that of the Nazis tried at Nuremberg after World War II: He claimed he was only following orders. He didn't say whose orders he was following. The colonel also claimed the fact that only 111 prisoners died proved he didn't intend to commit a massacre.

Release and Final Justice

Ubiratan Guimarães only spent around five years in prison for his crimes; in February 2006 a Brazilian court annulled his sentence. Despite criticism from human rights groups, Guimarães walked out of prison and stayed controversial.

At the time of his conviction in 2001, Guimarães was serving in the Sao Paulo State Legislature. Ironically enough, he had been elected on a law and order ticket. To make matters worse, he was reelected in 2002 after he had been convicted.

An unknown avenger finally gave Guimarães a dose of his own medicine on September 9, 2006. Somebody entered his apartment and shot the colonel in the chest. The words "what goes around, comes around" were found spray painted on the outside wall of Guimarães' apartment house. An unknown party, possibly an ex-inmate or a relative of an inmate, had turned vigilante and ended the Colonel's life.

The murder of Ubiratan Guimarães is still listed as unsolved, and no suspects have ever been named. It, like the events at Carandiru Penitentiary in 1992, will always remain shrouded in mystery.

How to Steal a Million

They Got Away with Two Van Goghs worth \$30 Million:
The Vincent Van Gogh Museum Heist, December 2002



Vincent Van Gogh has become one of the world's favorite painters, and his works are much sought after by collectors, museums, and art thieves. Not surprisingly, the Vincent Van Gogh National Museum in Amsterdam has been a target for art thieves. The museum has been the scene of two notable heists, both aimed at netting Van Gogh's work.

It's easy to see why thieves target the Van Gogh Museum; it has the largest collection of Van Gogh's works in the entire world. There have been two high profile thefts at the museum: one a miserable failure and one a very notable success.

Paintings Recovered Less Than an Hour Later

The first of the heists was a brazen robbery in April 1991; in that crime, gunmen entered the building, overpowered guards, and took twenty paintings off the walls. They didn't get very far; the paintings were found just 35 minutes later in an abandoned getaway car at a local railroad station.

The robbery was an inside job; the robbers hid in the museum when it closed at 5 p.m. and came out around 3 a.m. The pistol-wielding crooks forced the guards to shut off the alarm systems. They then took 20 paintings off the walls, stuffed them in garment bags, and drove off in a Volkswagen Passat. Police found the Passat with the bags and the paintings still in it at 5:23 a.m.

Low Tech Theft Nets \$30 Million Worth of Van Gogh Paintings

A very successful and low-tech theft occurred at the Van Gogh Museum on December 6, 2002. During that caper, two men simply used a ladder to climb onto the museum's roof and break in through a window.

Even though alarms went off, the thieves had enough time to steal two paintings: *Congregation Leaving the Reformed Church in Nuenen* and *View of the Sea at Sheveningen*. The crime has some similarities to the theft of *The Scream* from the National Gallery in Oslo, Norway, in 1994. The perpetrators in both thefts used the same modus operandi: climbing up a ladder and breaking open a window to get in.

As in *The Scream* theft, the thieves were actually caught on videotape. Unlike the Norwegian crime, the stolen art was never recovered.

The thieves were able to get away because it took police some time to reach the museum. By the time officers arrived on the scene, the criminals and the two paintings were long gone.

Thieves Caught but Paintings Never Recovered

The most unusual aspect of the theft was that the thieves were eventually caught and convicted of the crime. The police were able to use surveillance footage and DNA evidence to link two men identified as Octave B. and Henk B. to the heist. The Amsterdam Appeals Court sentenced both to three years in prison for the theft. The court also ordered each of the two to pay the museum €350,000 (\$467,670 US) in damages.

Even though the suspects were caught, the paintings themselves still have not been recovered.

The crime demonstrates that police, using the latest technology, can catch and convict thieves even if the loot is long gone.

One problem is that the crooks may know where the loot is but they have little or no incentive to reveal its location. They may be afraid of retaliation from organized crime or simply willing to serve a short sentence in a comfortable Dutch prison, particularly if an overseas bank account filled with illicit cash is awaiting them on the outside.

Why the Paintings Have Not Been Recovered

Eleven years later the two stolen paintings have not been recovered despite the conviction and a €100,000 (\$133,620) reward offered by the museum. The case demonstrates how hard it can be to recover stolen art, particularly if the criminals involved refuse to cooperate with police.

Experts estimate that only around 5% to 10% of stolen art work is ever recovered despite the work of elite police units like the FBI's Art Crime Team and Scotland Yard's Art and Antiquities Squad. One reason why art thieves get away with it is that only a few elite detective units target their activities. Another is that those involved in the black market have an incentive not to cooperate with authorities. They could face prison sentences and stiff fines like the Van Gogh thieves.

It is possible that *Congregation Leaving the Reformed Church in Nuenen* and *View of the Sea at Sheveningen* might turn up someday. If they do, it will probably be hard to convict anybody else in the crime because of the statute of limitations.

The Funny Side of Crime

James Phillips



England's dumbest criminal in recent years, James Phillips, chose the worst possible getaway vehicle possible, a moped (or motorized bicycle) with a top speed of around 30 miles per hour. Phillips tried to outrun police cars with a top speed of 150 mph and a police helicopter that moved at 180 mph.

News reports don't indicate why police were chasing Phillips; most likely, they were trying to catch him because he was riding a motorized vehicle through the streets of Bristol without insurance or a license early in February. Phillips' lawyer said his client was simply scared of the police.

It seems a court took Phillips' license away for an earlier dangerous driving incident. During that crime, Phillips was caught driving the getaway car in a burglary. This time, he didn't have a car.

Thinking Skills Needed

The used moped that Phillips was riding had a 50cc engine that was about the same as the engine on a chainsaw or a lawnmower.

Press reports indicate the vehicle has a top speed of 30 mph, but Phillips was only moving at 15 mph. Phillips was moving so slowly that a pedestrian nearly punched him off the motorcycle. He also reportedly slowed down for speed bumps, probably because he would have been knocked off by hitting one.

To make matters worse, he drove the bicycle into traffic and in front of cars as police followed him. There was little chance of an effective getaway because a police helicopter was hovering overhead and keeping track of the moron's movements.

A judge at the Bristol Crown Court gave Phillips a suspended sentence and ordered him to perform 100 hours of unpaid community service. The judge also ordered Phillips to enter a thinking skills program – he obviously needs one.

It'll be a while before Phillips is back behind the wheel – he cannot legally drive again for three years. If police catch him driving, he'll have to serve nine months in jail.

Book Excerpt

Slaves of Berkeley

The Shocking Story of Human Trafficking In the United States

By Tim Huddleston



Chapter 1: An Accidental Death

It was the afternoon before Thanksgiving Day in 1999, and longtime Berkeley resident Marcia Poole was driving down Bancroft Way when she noticed four Indian men hauling what appeared to be a rolled-up rug out of a rundown apartment building. Maybe it was the rushed, nervous manner of the men, maybe it was the way the rug they carried was sagging in the middle, or maybe it was just a gut feeling, but Ms. Poole knew that something about what she was witnessing was very, very wrong. She slowed down and watched the men as they opened the door to a van that was parked at the curb. As they loaded their cargo inside the back of the vehicle, Ms. Poole's suspicions were confirmed when she saw a leg dangle out from beneath the folds of their bundle. At that point, she did what most people in her position never would have done—she stopped her car, got out and walked over to confront the men.

As she marched towards the van, she saw another group of men holding onto a teenage Indian girl dressed in traditional baggy and colorful garb, her black hair pulled into a braid. She was crying and screaming, trying to pull away from the men as she pleaded with them in a language Ms. Poole did not understand. But she didn't need an interpreter to know that the men were trying to force the young girl into the van against her will. Ms. Poole rushed over and planted herself in front of the open doors and demanded that the men stop what they were doing and release the girl. The men froze and looked back at her for a moment in uncertainty. None of them seemed accustomed to taking orders from a woman, especially a woman they didn't know. One of them stepped forward, and the others parted to let him through. He was a heavy-set, round-faced Indian man in his early sixties, and he was clearly the one in charge. He glared at Ms. Poole with the confidence and intimidating demeanor of a man who always gets his way. "Go away," he said. "This is a family affair."

Marcia Poole may have been brave, but she wasn't stupid. She was extremely outnumbered and didn't want her rescue attempt to end up with her being tossed into the back of the van as well. She did as the man commanded and moved away, but not before she noticed that the body the men had thrown inside the van was moving. It was another young Indian girl and Ms. Poole could now see that what she had mistaken for a rug was actually the girl's clothing, and she had been completely wrapped up in it. She must have been knocked out when she was carried out of the building, but now, she was regaining consciousness and trying to untangle herself from her garments, clearly confused and disoriented, but thankfully, alive.

Ms. Poole had no idea what she had stumbled upon, but she had no intention of abandoning these girls to whatever fate this group of men had in store for them. She had to do something, but whatever that something was, she couldn't do it alone. She turned to the streets of Berkeley for help and started trying to flag down cars. Several drivers refused to stop, ignoring her completely or swerving to avoid her. Most of the ones that did stop only paused long enough to tell her that they didn't want to get involved. Finally, she managed to convince a reluctant driver with a cell phone to call 911 and very soon, she heard the glorious sound of sirens in the distance. As the sirens grew louder, the Indian men released the crying girl and most of them seemed to simply vanish, nonchalantly ducking into storefronts and blending into the gathering crowd.

Police and firefighters arrived, and while they were securing the area, a third young Indian girl was found lying in a heap on the floor of the dark stairwell Ms. Poole had seen the men emerge from. The girl was unconscious and unresponsive to any attempts to rouse her. With one witness completely unconscious, one only barely awake and another in hysterics, the police had their work cut out for them in trying to get a handle on the strange situation.

As they attempted to question the hysterical girl, they found that she did not speak English, only Telugu, a language of southern India. Although Berkeley has a large South Asian population and there were many Indian people who had appeared at the scene, the police had trouble finding anyone who was willing to serve as an interpreter. That was when the imposing, round-faced man who had tried to intimidate Ms. Poole stepped forward and offered his services. He introduced himself as Lakireddy Bali Reddy, a name that was well known in the Bay Area.

Lakireddy Bali Reddy was a multimillionaire restaurateur and property mogul, and the living embodiment of the American dream. He had immigrated to the United States from India in 1960 to study chemical engineering at the University of California in Berkeley, but after earning his master's degree and working in that field for several years, he decided to go into business for himself. In 1975, he opened the Pasand Madras Indian Cuisine Restaurant on Shattuck Avenue in downtown Berkeley, just around the corner from where he now stood, talking to the police. The restaurant was a huge and almost immediate success, and while one prosperous business might have been enough for many men, Reddy was far too ambitious to stop there. He used the money he earned from his restaurant to buy cheap, dilapidated apartment buildings in the Berkeley area, then fix them up and rent them out. As his profits increased, so did his empire. He bought building after building until he owned apartments all across the East Bay. Over time, his company amassed more than one thousand apartment units that generated over one million dollars in rent every single month. He became the largest and richest landlord in the city; only his alma mater, the University of California, housed more Berkeley residents than he did. Reddy Reality was a Bay Area institution, and although his company was known for some shady practices, including poor maintenance and refusal to return tenants' security deposits, he made up for it with his generous philanthropy, both in Berkeley and in his home village in India. Reddy was worth over sixty million dollars and was viewed as a pillar of the community, and the police were more than happy to accept his help in sorting out the confusing situation.

Reddy explained to the police that the hysterical girl was eighteen-year-old Laxmi Patati and she was an employee at his restaurant. His realty company owned the apartment building where Laxmi lived with her two roommates, seventeen-year-old Sitha Vemireddy, the girl found in the stairwell, and Sitha's fifteen-year-old sister, Lalitha, the semi-conscious girl the men had thrown into the back of the van. According to Reddy, Laxmi said that she had been out running errands and had returned home to find Sitha and Lalitha lying unconscious in the apartment. Because of her extremely tenuous grasp on the English language, instead of calling an ambulance, she called Reddy's restaurant for help. Reddy said that he and his colleague, Venkateswara Vemireddy, Sitha and Lalitha's father, hurried over to the building right away and were in the process of rushing the girls to the hospital when Ms. Poole intervened.

An ambulance transported Sitha and Lalitha to Alta Bates Hospital where it was determined that the girls had suffered from carbon monoxide poisoning. Lalitha was treated and released the next day, but sadly, Sitha was pronounced dead on arrival. Even worse, an autopsy revealed that the teenage girl had been about ten days pregnant when she died. Keeping with Hindu tradition (even though the girls' parents were Christian), Reddy saw to the funeral arrangements himself and paid to have Sitha's remains cremated.

Investigators discovered that a blocked heating vent had caused the carbon monoxide fumes to leak into the girls' apartment. Reddy had recently had some work done on the roof and the debris the workers left behind had clogged the ventilation system. Further investigation revealed that there were a total of sixty-three leaks in the building, putting almost everyone who lived there in mortal danger. Although landlords are usually held accountable for negligence of such a grand scale, especially when it results in the death of a tenant, Berkeley police absolved Reddy of any guilt or responsibility, and thanked him for his helpful assistance in the matter.

Marcia Poole, however, did not believe Reddy's story. She hounded the police for days, claiming that Reddy had been involved in what she still believed was an attempted abduction and his translation of Laxmi's story should be considered suspect at best. But the Vemireddys didn't seem to agree with Ms. Poole. The girls' father claimed that he didn't blame Reddy for the death of his daughter at all. He blamed his own karma.

Ultimately, the authorities decided that the strange circumstances surrounding the ordeal that had occurred on Bancroft Way could be attributed to cultural differences that Americans simply couldn't understand. Sitha's death was ruled accidental, and the case was closed.

Chapter 2: The Berkeley Jacket

When classes resumed at Berkeley High School after the Thanksgiving holiday, the editing staff of the school newspaper got together to brainstorm about stories for the next edition of *The Berkeley Jacket*. Rick Ayers, the faculty advisor, brought up an article he had read in *The San Francisco Examiner* over the break about Sitha Vemireddy. It was a tragic tale of a young woman who had only arrived in the United States a few months ago and never got the chance to live out her shot at the American dream. The piece had been very moving and well written enough, but there was one question that occurred to Ayers that the reporter who wrote the article had neglected to answer or apparently even ask: why weren't Sitha and Lalitha Vemireddy in school?

The apartment where Sitha died was only a few blocks from Berkeley High School. By all rights, she and Lalitha should have been students there, and Ayers wanted to know why they weren't. He suggested to news editor Iliana Montauk that she have someone on the staff look into it and Iliana assigned the story to fifteen-year-old sophomore, Megan Greenwell.

Megan's initial research did little to clear things up. In fact, it only muddied the waters even more. She could find no good reason explaining why the Vemireddy sisters worked in a restaurant instead of to school or why they lived with an eighteen-year-old girl in a separate apartment—actually, an entirely separate building—from their parents. These were details that seemed to stand out to Megan as red flags and raised a number of obvious questions, but apparently, no one else was bothering to ask them. Apart from some well-meaning follow-up articles about the dangers of carbon monoxide poisoning and the need for detectors to be installed in rental properties, there was nothing more written about Sitha Vemireddy. In a matter of days, she would be completely forgotten. But as Megan pored over what little information she could find, she noticed that there was a name that seemed to be stamped in red ink across Sitha's life and death: Lakireddy Bali Reddy.

Reddy owned the Pasand restaurant where Laxmi Patati, Sitha, Lalitha and the Vemireddy sisters' father, Venkateswara, were employed. The building where the girls had been poisoned and the neighboring building where their parents lived in a studio apartment were both owned by Reddy Reality. Reddy had been there when Sitha died and he had served as the Laxmi's interpreter for the police. He had even taken care of Sitha's funeral arrangements. There seemed to be no part of Sitha's life in America that wasn't in some way connected to the local multimillionaire.

Megan brought what she had learned to Ayers and Iliana. Everyone agreed that there was more to uncover about Sitha Vemireddy's link to Reddy, but it would have to start with a deeper understanding of Indian culture. Ayers introduced them to Dharini Rasiah, a teacher at the high school who worked extensively with South Asian immigrants, especially the young women of the community. After hearing the details that Megan had unearthed, Rasiah explained that it was fairly common for young Indian women to work in the homes or businesses of the people who paid for their transportation into the U.S. Unfortunately, it was also fairly common for this arrangement to be taken advantage of and in some cases, it could even turn into what amounted to indentured servitude.

The idea that there could be a form of slavery existing in modern day Berkeley, arguably the most liberal and progressive city in the country, was more than a little shocking to Megan and Iliana. They needed to know more, so Rasiah arranged for them to speak with some female students from the South Asian community. Over the course of their interviews, they learned that while most of Berkeley may have thought fairly highly of Lakireddy Bali Reddy, the Indian community absolutely idolized him. He was a shining symbol of immigrant success in America, and he had used that success to do so much good back in India. He had donated generously to many noble causes and was believed to have saved hundreds of his people from lives of poverty by helping them get into the United States.

It sounded as if they were saying that Reddy might have been involved in illegally transporting immigrants to the U.S., which was a major story in itself, but it was what happened after they got into the country that Megan and Iliana were most interested in, and that was when their interview subjects stopped talking. As Megan and Iliana tried to pry information out of them, it became clear very quickly that in spite of the love and admiration the Indian girls claimed to have for Reddy, they were also terrified of him. A man with the money and power to give so much is also capable of using that money and power to take things away. Speaking out against him could be very dangerous. The girls were afraid for themselves and they were afraid for their families back home in India.

It took a great deal of coaxing, but with Rasiah's help, Megan and Iliana gained the trust of some of the girls. They promised to keep their identities anonymous and swore that nothing they said would ever be traced back to them. Eventually, the girls began to open up, and most of their stories were very similar.

It was widely known among the Indian-American community that Reddy paved the way for the immigration of many people, mostly young women and girls, from India to the U.S. where they worked in his restaurant, apartment buildings and other businesses, and were usually paid next to nothing. What little money they did make was sent back to their families overseas. Reddy kept them all on a very short leash. Most of the girls he "sponsored" were not allowed to go to school or even permitted to learn English. They relied on him for everything. They had nothing but what he gave them, nowhere to go for help and no way to ask for it even if they did.

Megan and Iliana couldn't help but express how unfair they thought the arrangement was, but the girls they spoke to defended it. The way they saw it, Reddy's actions were well within his rights. He had gotten the girls out of India and into America. He had put roofs over their heads and food in their bellies. They had a shot at a better life in the United States that would not have been possible

without him. Whomever Reddy brought to the U.S. was obligated to do whatever he wanted in order to repay their debt. The two American girls, however, disagreed with that assessment and decided that they had no choice but to expose Reddy's activities.

Megan knew what she had to do next, and was very intimidated to do it, but she wasn't just playing at journalist anymore. Whether she had wanted it or not, she was a real reporter uncovering a real story, and that meant she had to present it from every angle. She had to talk to Reddy himself.

Megan gathered her courage and walked into the Pasand Madras Indian Cuisine restaurant, just around the corner from Sitha and Lalitha Vemireddy's apartment. She approached the host and asked to speak to Mr. Reddy for an article she was writing in her school newspaper about Indian culture. The host raised an eyebrow at her, then excused himself and went into the kitchen. A few moments later, he came back, looked Megan in the eye and said, "You need to leave right now."

Megan left.

The article that Megan and Iliana planned to write was a big story for such a little paper, and Ayers and the Jacket staff began to fear potential legal repercussions if and when it was published. Reddy was a powerful man in Berkeley and if he wanted to, he could sue the school, the faculty and the parents of everyone involved into oblivion. They consulted a lawyer (one of the parents of a Jacket staff member) who advised them on their potential liability, and then Megan and Iliana sat down and got to work. They focused on what they had learned about indentured servitude in the South Asian community and how a cultural class system could be taken advantage of and used to exploit lower-class Indian girls brought into America. They chose their words very carefully, acknowledging their lack of concrete evidence, but at the same time, implying Lakireddy Bali Reddy's involvement in the illegal and immoral practice.

The article was published on December 10th, 1999, two and a half weeks after Sitha Vemireddy's death. The newspaper staff and school faculty braced themselves, expecting a huge reaction from the community.

But there was no reaction. There was no reaction from Reddy, no reaction from the police, no reaction from the greater media and no reaction from the public. Days turned into weeks and the anticipation of the expected storm dwindled down to nothing. It seemed that the article wasn't the bombshell they thought it was, and by the time classes let out for winter break, it had been more or less forgotten.

No one had cared very much about Sitha Vemireddy's death, and apparently, no one cared about her life, either.

Or so it seemed.

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