

CASE REPORT

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Paths to Destruction: The Lives and Crimes of Two Serial Killers*

ABSTRACT: Although research into the phenomenon of serial murder has revealed that serial killers frequently do not fit the initially described paradigm in terms of their physical and psychological profiles, backgrounds, and motives to kill, the media continues to sensationalize the figures of such killers and the investigators who attempt to analyze them on the basis of aspects of their crimes. Although the so-called "typical" profile of the serial murderer has proven accurate in some instances, in many other cases the demographics and behaviors of these killers have deviated widely from the generalized assumptions. This report details two unusual cases in which five and eight murders were committed in upstate New York. The lives and crimes of these offenders illustrate the wide spectrum of variations in the backgrounds, demographics, motivations, and actions witnessed among serial murderers, and highlight the limitations and dangers of profiling based on generalities.

KEYWORDS: forensic science, serial killers, profiling

The phenomenon of serial murder has become a fascination in this country, in part due to sensationalization by the news media and the entertainment industry. The 1988 book *Silence of the Lambs* by Thomas Harris (1) and the 1991 movie romanticized the figure of the serial killer "Hannibal the Cannibal" Lecter. Subsequently, the figure of the serial killer, based superficially on a few highly publicized cases, has been glamorized by the media. Since the 1950s, attempts have been made at predicting the demographics and behaviors of serial killers. This process was initially termed "profiling" and later referred to as "criminal investigative analysis," intended as an adjunct to other criminal investigative tools. In the popular media, however, the profiler has evolved in fiction into the ultimate investigative weapon, even to the immensely popular present-day television series *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*. In reality, though, doubt has been raised regarding the validity of attempts to profile serial murderers. It has been widely recognized that there are far greater variations in the backgrounds, motivations, and in the nature of their crimes than are typified in fiction (2,3). Despite this, the popular media continues to dramatize the "profiler" as an individual who is able to analyze the serial killer based on his or her crimes (3-6).

The "profile" of the serial killer as is frequently presented by the popular media is that of a white male in his late 20s or 30s of middle-class origins who suffered abuse as a child, who kills strangers, and who has been characterized as a "sexual sadist" (4). We have had the opportunity to participate in two unusual cases in which five and eight murders were committed in upstate New

York. The perpetrators of these serial murders differed in a number of ways from the stereotype of the serial killer and illustrate some of the many dimensions among which serial killers differ from one another.

Case 1

In June of 1998 Gary Evans, a 43-year-old white male from South Troy, NY, was arrested in Vermont on a federal probation violation warrant stemming from the theft of a rare book. He was brought to Albany, NY, where another warrant had been issued linking him to stolen cufflinks. Evans had a long history with the law enforcement agencies of upstate New York and had many prior incarcerations, predominantly for the burglary of antiques. He was the ringleader of a loosely knit group of friends who sometimes joined together to commit burglaries. He had also been a police informant, and had even been planted in jail to elicit information and provide testimony leading to the conviction of the killer of a young woman. Evans agreed to do this because he "loathed men who attacked women and child molesters." He also claimed to despise homosexuals, although homosexual pornography was later found in a trunk belonging to him. However, when it was realized that three of his friends had disappeared without a trace over a period of 13 years, it was suspected that Evans might have played a role in their disappearances.

Evans was born on October 7, 1954. He grew up in Troy, NY. As is the case with many budding criminals, his childhood was less than perfect. Both of his parents were alcoholics and he was physically and emotionally abused. Evans was not a loner as a child; his charisma had gained him many childhood friends, some of whom would later remember his keen interest in astrology and the cosmos. He was considered very intelligent as a child, but was never interested in school. He graduated from high school with high marks, and attended some community college courses. He also made money by writing school papers for college students.

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Evans was something of a daredevil as a youth and was known to kill neighborhood cats. He left home at age 13, and was first jailed at age 16 for petty larceny. He had a number of girlfriends, and he claimed to be a homophobe, although he was later found to have homosexual pornography. Evans eventually became locally famous as a career burglar of jewelry and antiques, and his legend was well known in the Northeast. Because of his ability to disguise himself, he was able to occasionally rob the same store more than once.

Evans was also well known to the New York State Police, in particular to Senior Investigator James Horton. Horton began playing a game of cat and mouse with Evans in the early 1980s and they had had a long relationship, which has been well chronicled in the book *Every Move You Make*, by M. William Phelps (7). At times, Horton would use Evans as an informant and on other occasions he would arrest him. Horton even went so far as to try and find Evans legitimate employment, but Evans would always say that crime paid better, and revert to his old way of life.

Evans had almost 2 dozen felony arrests, but in spite of his familiarity with incarceration, the prospect of being behind bars terrified him. He had, in fact, lived out in the wild at times and in a local cemetery where he felt most comfortable and free. Evans had a particular hatred for handcuffs, related to the abuse he sustained at the hands of his father. He once confessed to Horton that he always had a handcuff key on him, even when incarcerated. If Evans believed that he was going to be apprehended by the police, he would swallow the key and “recycle” it later. Horton knew better than anyone how crafty Evans could be. He used to say that Evans would “find his way through a straw if he needed to.”

Evans served time in several New York State prisons. He had befriended the “Son of Sam” killer, David Berkowitz, in 1987. They wrote many letters to each other while incarcerated, some with sexual innuendoes, until Evans finally angered him by calling him David “Berzerkowitz,” and their friendship ended. Evans passed his time in prison exercising and reading books on astrology, antiques, and alarm systems. He even obtained his high school diploma in prison, in addition to 1½ years of community college work. He was always in top physical shape, never ate meat, fish, or chicken, and never smoked or used drugs or alcohol, which he considered weaknesses. However, he was not a health nut, as his diet consisted of potato chips and cookies.

Finally, in a setup orchestrated by New York State Police investigators in collaboration with a sometimes girlfriend of Evans’, he was apprehended when he attempted to rendezvous with the woman in Vermont. The girlfriend was the former lover of one of the men Evans had killed. Although the woman knew that Evans had killed the father of her child, she begged for one more opportunity to have sexual relations with him.

On his return to Albany, Evans waived his constitutional rights, and stated that he would only speak with Horton, outside the presence of counsel. He subsequently confessed to the killing of his three partners over a 13-year period between 1985 and 1998, and led investigators to their buried bodies, one of which he had transported to Florida. He also confessed to two other murders of coin and jewelry shop owners. His first known killing was at the age of 30. All of the victims had been killed as a result of multiple 0.22 caliber gunshot wounds to the head. The body of his last victim was dismembered with a chainsaw. Horton had eventually elicited Evans’ confessions to the murders by pleading for compassion for the 9-year-old son of one of his victims. Evans later admitted that Horton “pushed the only button that would get to him.” Although Evans felt no empathy for his victims, he stated that “you have to protect kids at all costs.”

While jailed, Evans blamed the murders on the criminal justice system, stating that nothing would have happened to his victims had he not had to worry about receiving a lengthy prison sentence for stealing, which he believed would be more than he could bear. He had killed his three friends because he feared that they would be apprehended and provide the police with evidence against him. In the meantime, the Rensselaer County District Attorney’s office was considering capital punishment, which brought extensive publicity. Local newspapers referred to Evans as a serial killer and compared him with Ted Bundy, John Wayne Gacy, and other high-profile serial murderers. During a newspaper interview, Evans stated that he never wanted his life to turn out as it had, and that the crimes that he had committed were related to business. He did not like being compared with serial killers and did not want to be thought of as a monster. He wanted to be viewed as a career criminal who occasionally committed murder when necessary. During his incarceration, he spoke to Horton about finding “a way out” of jail, stating, “If I die in here, they win. If I die out there, I win.”

On August 12, 1998, Evans was formally charged with three of the murders. The next day, Horton visited Evans in the Rensselaer County Jail, finding him very depressed and tearful. Two days later, Evans had a hearing at the U.S. District Court in Albany to answer a prior parole violation. Six armed U.S. Marshals escorted him from the jail to the courthouse in a Chevy Astro minivan. He was handcuffed at the wrists and shackled at the ankles, but was not put in a waist chain and he was not scanned with a metal detector, in spite of Horton’s repeated admonitions that Evans was a high risk for escape. Inside the van, a “security cage” constructed of Plexiglas directly behind the front seat separated the marshals from Evans, who was alone in the back seat. When Evans left the courthouse that morning, he passed a note to one of his capital defenders. While returning from the hearing, the marshals crossed the Troy-Menands Bridge, which spans 62 ft above the Hudson River water line. Evans managed to kick out a window of the van, exit the van, and jump off the bridge and landed on rocks at the river’s edge. He was found with one handcuff unlocked.

Post-mortem examination revealed multiple blunt force injuries. In addition, a handcuff key was found in his nose, which he had apparently used to unlock his handcuffs before exiting the van. Additionally, pieces of a razor blade wrapped in hair were found in his nasopharynx, a razor blade was found between his cheek and upper gum, and a razor blade and a paper clip were located in one sock. Evans had numerous tattoos, including one stating “True Love Never Dies” and one representing the eye of Horus, the Egyptian sun god. There was a large complex tattoo on his back representing several dragons sitting on the shoulders of a man who had a sun and a half moon tattooed on his shoulders, as Evans had on his own shoulders. There were four skulls tattooed at the man’s feet. Evans had told Horton at one point that the tattoo on his back had never been finished, and indicated that he had killed more individuals than five to whom he had admitted murdering.

The day after Evans’ death, Horton received a letter the day that stated “Thank you, Jim, for everything—this has to be one of the strangest friendships in history.” Evans also left instructions for Horton to receive one-third of Evans cremated remains in a box with an angel on the cover. The letter Evans had handed to his capital defense attorney was also clearly a suicide note. In that note, he wrote, “My lessons here are learned—on to a better place now. My friends are happy, and I’m already there. With Canis Minor and a beautiful blue moon. With a smile—stars surround me and peace and love are mine. They can’t be taken or touched. I WIN.”

Case 2

Poughkeepsie, New York, is a historic city of 28,000 people on the banks of the Hudson River. However, drugs and prostitution have troubled the city. A local prostitute was reported as missing in October 1996. In the early part of 1997, law enforcement officials became aware that a number of local prostitutes had simply disappeared, most from the area of Main Street. A multiagency task force was formed that included members of the City and Town of Poughkeepsie Police Departments, the New York State Police, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Police warned area prostitutes that they might be in danger. By August of 1998, eight prostitutes were missing. Seven were petite white women between the ages of 25 and 51. All had dark brown hair. The eighth missing woman was a 26-year-old African American.

In early September 1998, a prostitute reported to police that a man had solicited her for sex and taken her to his home. When the woman requested payment, the man had become enraged and attempted to strangle her. She managed to calm him down, and he drove her back to her pickup point. The woman then led the police to Kendall Francois.

Francois was a 27-year-old, 6 ft 4 in. African American who weighed more than 300 pounds. He was born in Poughkeepsie on July 26, 1971, and was one of four children. His mother was employed as a nurse and his father was a factory worker. Francois graduated from high school in 1989. He had been considered an average student. He was also a high school varsity football player and wrestler. Following high school, he joined the Army. Initially, he was based at Fort Sill in Oklahoma before being transferred to Honolulu. He was discharged from the Army under unknown circumstances and returned to Poughkeepsie at age 23 to live with his parents, his younger sister, and several pet cats in his childhood home. Francois was never known to have had girlfriends or even to have dated. He sporadically attended community college and worked as a janitor and a hall monitor in a middle school. Later, he was employed at a school for the developmentally disabled where he was described as being very good with the students. However, he began to receive complaints about his personal hygiene and was called "Stinky" behind his back by some students.

Kendall Francois was well known to the Poughkeepsie prostitutes and to the local police. He had a reputation for being rough with the women he hired. His name had been given to the Missing Women Task Force when local prostitutes were asked for assistance in helping to solve the mystery of the missing women. In January 1998, he had been questioned by police and given a polygraph examination, which he passed. At one point, a prostitute even wore a wire and attempted unsuccessfully to obtain incriminating information from Francois. Later that month, he took a prostitute back to his house for sex, during which time he squeezed her neck to the point that she lost consciousness. However, she regained consciousness and managed to convince Francois to return her to Main Street. The woman filed a complaint and Francois was arrested. He pled guilty to the assault and was sentenced to 15 days in the county jail, although he was released after only 7 days. Four weeks later, another prostitute disappeared.

Francois was again questioned by police following the assault on the prostitute in September 1998. He waived his rights and asked to see pictures of the prostitutes missing since 1993. This startled the task force, as they were only aware of disappearances beginning in 1996. He also asked to speak to a prosecutor. Francois divided the pictures into several piles, calmly informing the police which of the women he had killed and which he was uncertain. He readily confessed to police and to a district attorney

that, over a period of several years, he had solicited eight prostitutes for sex and then strangled them with his hands, leaving the bodies in the house that he inhabited with his parents and younger sister. Francois' family was apparently unaware of the murders. He claimed that in each case he had stalked the women and solicited them only intending to have sexual relations with them, but that they had all betrayed him by asking for money and by not giving him the services that he felt he had paid for. Some of the women were killed in his bedroom, others in his car in the garage, and several in a chair in the basement adjacent to a crawl space. After killing each woman, Francois washed her body in the only functioning bathtub in the residence before concealing the body from his family.

A search warrant was obtained for the house where the Francois family had lived since 1975. The house was located on a quiet residential street one block from the prestigious Vassar College. Francois had drawn diagrams for the police, indicating where the bodies would be found. A decomposing body was readily visible in the crawl space beneath the house. The body was removed and was identified by fingerprint comparison as that of a prostitute who had been missing for only 1 year. Francois was charged that day with a single count of murder.

The 28-day search of the house and grounds led to the recovery of eight bodies in varying degrees of decomposition. Two additional bodies were recovered from the crawl space. The house, which the media dubbed the "House of Horrors," was a squalid, cluttered residence strewn with trash and garbage. When the forensic team searched the attic, they found a plastic bag containing decomposing and largely skeletonized human remains in plain view. Additional remains were found in a child's wading pool and in a plastic bag within a garbage can. Francois explained that he had told his unsuspecting family that the odor in the house came from a decomposing family of raccoons in the attic that he was unable to physically locate and remove. A nextdoor neighbor also stated that she had noticed an unusual odor but that she had attributed it to her own toilet. Francois' sister indicated that at one point, the house had had a problem with maggots and mentioned a ceiling "raining maggots." Also found among the rubble were the driver's licenses of several of the missing women, in addition to used condoms.

Identification of the bodies of the prostitutes was a collaborative effort between the forensic pathologists, Dr. Lowell Levine, a forensic odontologist with the New York State Police, and forensic anthropologists Drs. Thomas Holland and Robert Mann of the Central Identification Laboratory in Hawaii. Three bodies were identified by fingerprints, four by comparison of the dentition with antemortem dental records and one by comparison of a post-mortem radiograph of the skull with an antemortem film. The bodies were identified as those of seven of the known missing prostitutes and an additional woman whose disappearance had never been reported. All of the women were white, small in stature, and had dark hair. The remains of the missing African American woman were not found, in spite of the extensive search of the house, bulldozing of the yard, and jack hammering of the cement floor of the garage that had recently been poured. Indeed, Francois stated that he would not "kill a sister." The bodies in the crawl space were intact, while the remains in the attic were extensively co-mingled. Several of the remains had evidence of binding with duct tape. Owing to decompositional changes and skeletonization of many of the bodies, evidence of strangulation was found in only two cases, which showed fractures of the laryngeal structures.

Many of the bones in the plastic bag appeared to have been severed, and showed toolmark evidence. These bones were

analyzed by Dr. Steven Symes, currently of the Mercyhurst Archeological Institute, who identified hand-powered hacksaw cuts on 11 femoral shafts and five forearm bones.

Kendall Francois was charged with eight counts of first-degree murder, eight counts of second-degree murder, and one count of assault over his 2-year killing career. The Dutchess County District Attorney announced that he would seek the death penalty. Francois initially pled not guilty but subsequently changed his plea to guilty to avoid the death penalty. He received a sentence of 25 years to life for each murder charge, to be served consecutively, and 1½ to 3 years for the assault. He was required to state in court that he was guilty to each charge and that no one else had been involved in committing the crimes. His attorney was also required to inform the court that he was HIV positive. Francois remains incarcerated in Attica Prison in New York.

Discussion

A serial killer is defined as someone who has murdered three or more victims, with the murders having common characteristics to suggest the reasonable possibility that the crimes were committed by the same individual or individuals (8), although some investigators have required only two murders (3,4). Subsequent murders occur at different times, with no apparent connection to the initial killing. Some investigators have referred to “cooling off” periods of variable durations between the murders (3,4).

Many attempts have been made to further characterize and classify serial murderers. The FBI has used the dichotomy of organized versus disorganized or mixed, based on such observations as the general attributes of the killers’ modus operandi, crime scene conditions, and pre- and postoffense behaviors (4,5,9). The crime of the organized offender is well thought out and executed, with awareness of investigative methods, while that of the disorganized offender is more likely committed impulsively, without a conscious plan. Serial murderers have been characterized according to their motivations. Examples would include the sexual sadist who has violent sexual fantasies and who derives sexual excitement by the infliction of physical or psychological pain on another person, the “black widow” who repeatedly kills wealthy men for material gain and the “angel of death,” the health care serial killer who kills infirm elderly or otherwise incapacitated individuals, frequently in a hospital setting (10–14). Many are considered to be psychopaths, characterized by Dr. Robert Hare, a pioneer in the field of psychopathy, as having such traits as lack of remorse or empathy, shallow emotions, deception, egocentricity, glibness, low frustration tolerance, episodic relationships, parasitic lifestyle, and the persistent violation of social norms (14,15). On the surface, these serial killers may seem to be unremarkable individuals. Their psychopathic natures are often not suspected by those around them (15). Attempts have been made to characterize serial killers by their modus operandi, the means by which their victims were killed, by the retention of souvenirs, or by characteristic “signature” elements of the killings, such as posing of the victims or other behavioral manifestations of an individualizing personality quirk that emotionally fulfills the offender (3,5,9,14). Kendall Francois’ washing of his dead victims’ bodies is an example of such a signature. The means of killing are usually “hands-on” methods such as asphyxiation or stabbing/cutting, with only rare instances of firearms being used (3,16). Some serial murderers appear to be place specific, while others commit murders throughout different geographical locations (5). Most serial murderers kill alone, although occasionally serial killings are committed by pairs, most often a man and a woman (14).

A criminal investigative profile has been defined as “an educated attempt to provide investigative agencies with specific information as to the type of individual who would have committed a certain crime” (3). Early work by the FBI’s Behavioral Science Unit (BSU) included examination of such aspects of the crime and crime scene as the type of killing, location and position of the body, method of transportation, and the relative position of items at the scene, with the goal of producing a general description of the offender in terms of demographics, habits, possible employment, marital status, mental state, and personality traits (14). The so-called “typical profile” of a serial murderer, as often portrayed by the entertainment industry, is that of a white male between the ages of 20 and 35 from a middle-class background who suffered emotional or physical abuse as a child (16–19). He may have a history of drug and/or alcohol abuse and prior arrests. Some investigators have referred to a “triad” of bed-wetting beyond an appropriate age, fire starting, and cruelty to animals and/or smaller children as being frequent in the background of serial killers (8). According to some authors, serial killers tend to be of average to superior intelligence (16). Many, however, have low-level jobs with minimal responsibility and are dependent on family or on other women for financial support (20). Serial murderers are described as being nonaffiliated loners (21). They are thought to crave power and control and elements of fantasy are believed to be important in the killings of most serial killers (9,13). In contrast, the victims of serial murderers are often vulnerable and easy to control, and therefore include a majority of women, particularly prostitutes, and children (3). They are usually strangers to the offender (3,5,21). Because some researchers believe that serial murders are most commonly intraracial, with perpetrators and victims of the same race, the majority of victims are also white (2,22).

The lives and crimes of Gary Evans and Kendall Francois illustrate the range of variations in the backgrounds, demographics, motivations, and actions viewed among serial murderers. Neither fit the paradigm of the so-called “typical” serial killer. Gary Evans was an intelligent white male who came from the background of a chaotic childhood, although there was no known history of bed-wetting or fire setting. Although as a child he had been known to kill cats, as an adult he claimed to abhor individuals who harmed children and animals. He thrived on control and his murders were organized, well planned, and carefully executed. He did not abuse drugs or alcohol, and was obsessed with fitness. His lack of empathy and remorse, as well as his charisma, deceptiveness, and egocentricity fulfill the criteria for psychopathy (14,15). In contrast to the typical profile, Evans was not a loner and he did not kill strangers, but rather his so-called friends and business partners. His motives were material, and there was no known sexual component to his murders. He killed his victims with a gun rather than with a more intimate hands-on method. His murders cannot be considered to have a so-called “cooling off” period between them as they were not done at a time of high emotion but rather resulted from the calculated decision to kill witnesses to his crimes.

At the other end of the spectrum, Kendall Francois was a nonaffiliated loner as an adult, although he had played team sports as a high school student. He worked at jobs with minimal responsibility and was considered to have a borderline normal intelligence level. More typical than Evans in some ways, he did kill strangers or prostitutes with whom he had minimal prior acquaintance. His murders occurred during or after sexual encounters, and his method of killing was hands on, i.e., strangulation. However, the motive for his murders is not completely clear. In spite of the killings occurring in the context of a sexual encounter, he claimed that he did not intend to kill the women before he experienced the

feeling that he was being cheated. In contrast to the usual media portrayal, Francois was African American and his killings were interracial. Although he did plan to solicit his victims for sex and stalked them, the killings were spontaneous and frenzied, suggesting a disorganized offender. Unfortunately, little is known about his childhood. Although there is no known history of bed-wetting, fire starting, or animal abuse, the condition of the family home at the time of his arrest certainly suggests that his childhood and relationship with his parents may not have been ideal. Additionally, we were unable to obtain the details of his discharge from the Army. Although a serial killer was operating in Hawaii at the time that Francois was stationed there, the victims were blondes and investigation ruled him out as the offender. Perhaps the most unusual thing about Francois was his bizarre decision to keep the bodies of his victims in his own residence, daring to hide the bodies in his home with his family present, further evidence that there is likely more to his upbringing than is currently known. In his statement to law enforcement, Francois gave no explanation for his keeping the bodies of his victims in the family home, or for the dismemberment and co-mingling of the remains in the attic. His only mention of handling the remains after death was his bathing of the bodies. There was no admission of necrophilia.

Much publicity has played into the definitions of a “profile” and a “typical serial killer” in today’s popular press. However, investigators in the field who work directly with cases involving serial murders have debunked many of the myths of the typical serial killer profile. Although an individual serial killer may have some of the “classic” characteristics, each case of serial murder must be approached individually, and those attempting to predict the characteristics of the killer must realize that each offender is unique. The two serial murderers discussed here illustrate some aspects of the spectrum that truly exists in the serial killer profile.

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