

The Suspect Is Quoted on Killings: 'It Was a Command ... I Had a Sign'

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"For more than a year I had been hoping for just one thing—a chance to talk to the 'Son of Sam,' a chance to ask him why," said Detective Gerald Shevlin. He was part of the special homicide task force that had conducted the search for the .44-caliber killer, the largest manhunt in New York's history.

At a little after 2 o'clock yesterday morning, Detective Shevlin had his chance.

Ten detectives, officers who had been

assigned to the task force headed by Inspector Timothy Dowd since its formation after the .44-caliber killer claimed his fourth and fifth murder victims in April, crowded into Room 1312 in Police Headquarters and for one-half hour "fired every question we could think of" at the 24-year-old suspect, David Berkowitz of Yonkers.

"From the beginning I had just wanted 10 minutes with him in a motel room so I could find out about the guy I had been hunting for six months," Detective Shevlin said. "Room 1312 became our motel room. We went in there and wrapped up all the loose ends."

"Berkowitz was very cooperative," said Sgt. Joseph Coffey who, along with Sgt. Richard Conlon, was directing the questioning. "He was talkative and calm and answered whatever we asked."

'It Was a Command'

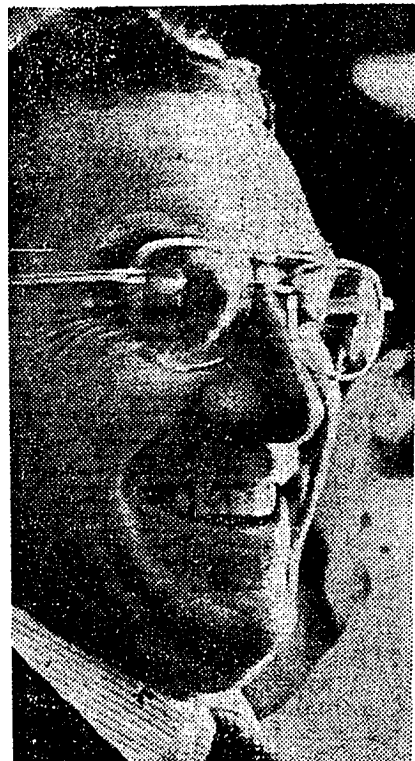
But, as task-force members formed a semicircle around the suspect seated in the chief of detectives's office, an orderly interrogation was abandoned as detectives eagerly tried to find the answers to questions they had been pondering for more than a year.

"Why? Why did you kill them?" a detective asked the suspect.

"It was a command," a detective reported Mr. Berkowitz as responding. "I had a sign and I followed it. Sam told me what to do and I did it."

Sam, the 24-year-old postal worker explained in a passive voice, is Sam Carr, a neighbor in Yonkers, "who really is a man who lived 6,000 years ago."

"I got the messages through his dog," Mr. Berkowitz said. "He told me to kill."



The New York Times/Paul Hosefros

Inspector Timothy Dowd after news conference at Police Headquarters.

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Sam is the devil." Mr. Carr is a neighbor whose dog Mr. Berkowitz is accused of having shot.

At this point in the interrogation, some of the detectives expressed doubt that they were questioning the right man.

"But," said a detective, "when we asked him about the letter he left after the murder of Valentna Suriani [last April 17], he knew things that only Sam could have known."

The suspect was asked how the letter was signed.

"The Monster," he responded.

"What did you call yourself in the note?"

"The Chubby Behemoth."

"Did you say anything about Queens?"

"I wrote that Queens girls are prettier."

Hours later, Inspector Dowd, the commander of the task force, explained the questioning on the latter as detectives gathered around a desk turned into a bar in the chief of detectives' office:

"It's because we always knew tonight would come that I never released the first letter to the press," he said.

Earlier, the detectives had Mr. Berkowitz reconstruct each of the .44-caliber killer's eight attacks.

The suspect, according to officers at the interrogation, said he was "out driving every night since last July [1976] looking for a sign to kill."

"The situation would be perfect," the suspect was quoted as having said. "I would find a parking place for my car right away. It was things like that which convinced me it was commanded."

"Then when I got a calling," he said, "I went looking for a spot."

Mr. Berkowitz, who said a "buddy in Houston" had bought the gun for him, reportedly told the police he had the Charter Arms Bulldog revolver, the .44-caliber weapon the police say was used as the murder weapon, "for about a month" before the first shooting.

As the suspect detailed the attacks, the police learned that many of the theories—and even a few aspects of the investigation that they had accepted as facts—were unsubstantiated. For example, ac-

cording to detectives, Mr. Berkowitz made the following statements:

¶He fired one-handed for the first three attacks, not in the two-hand combat-style position, as the police believed.

¶On at least two occasions, he fired five times, emptying the .44-caliber revolver. He did not keep one bullet in the chamber, as the police believed.

¶He never went inside a discotheque.

¶He never wore a wig.

¶The attacks were totally random, his targets always the young girls.

¶He insisted he was never jilted by a girlfriend. His only explanation for the attacks was that "they were commanded."

Never Shot Through Bag

Speaking in terse sentences, the suspect explained how he always parked about a block and a half away from the scene of each attack "and then ran like hell to my car."

He said he had kept his revolver in a plastic bag, but never shot through it as police had theorized.

Why did he carry his gun in a plastic bag?

"I don't believe in holsters," the police quoted Mr. Berkowitz as stating, his face breaking out in a smirk.

The constant hurling of questions at the suspect was interrupted, however, as Mr. Berkowitz explained what he had planned to do on the night when he was captured.

"I was going out to kill in the Bronx," he allegedly explained. "I was going to look in Riverdale."

And then Mr. Berkowitz for the first time posed a question: "Do you know why I had a machine gun with me tonight?"

"I'll tell you," he said: "I wanted to get into a shootout. I wanted to get killed, but I wanted to take some cops with me."

When the suspect was asked why letters were found in his car addressed to the Suffolk County police, he said he had spent last weekend driving through Westhampton, L.I., searching for a victim. "But," he was quoted by the police, "I didn't get a sign."

Mr. Berkowitz also told the police how

he had visited the sites where he had murdered Donna Lauria in the Bronx on July 29, 1976, and Christine Freund last Jan. 30 in Forest Hills, Queens, a couple of times after the shootings.

Sought Victim's Grave

He also went, the detectives related, to St. Raymond's Cemetery to visit the grave of Miss Lauria, his first victim.

"But," he explained, "the grave was impossible to find."

Why did he want to go to the grave?

"I felt like it," Mr. Berkowitz allegedly responded.

"He also told us that the length of hair, the color—all that had nothing to do with his picking out victims," said a detective.

In fact, Stacy Moskowitz, the last victim, was not even his target that night, the police reported.

"He had planned to get the girl 'Tommy Z.' was sitting with," the detective continued, referring to the young man who had witnessed the murder of Miss Moskowitz through his rear-view mirror. "But when Tommy Z moved his car into a darker spot, Berkowitz told us he changed his target."

Another detective added that Robert Violante, the young man who was seriously wounded when Miss Moskowitz was shot on July 31 in the Bath Beach section of Brooklyn, had told the police about a man who had been sitting on the swings for nearly an hour in the park near where the couple's car was parked.

"It was while we were questioning Berkowitz that we realized he was the guy on the swings," the detective explained. "Robert Violante had been staring at the guy who was going to shoot him all night, except he didn't know it."

The suspect also answered questions about specific attacks.

Why, he was asked, had he murdered Virginia Voskerichian as she walked home alone from the subway on a Tuesday night? She did not fit into the .44-caliber killer's pattern.

"It was commanded," the suspect allegedly replied.

When asked if he had any remorse, he reportedly said, "No, why should I?"