

# About New York

## A .44-Caliber Cloud of Fear

By RICHARD F. SHEPARD

It takes no very deep probing to pry expressions of fear and pessimism from New Yorkers. Even in the happiest of times and the best of circumstances, caution is a way of life. Even a haphazard meeting of the eyes on a street is avoided lest some latent hostility should explode.

Small wonder, then, that the .44-caliber killer, with his shocking and mysterious mayhem, had riveted public attention with his latest atrocity and heightened the perceptions of a people already disposed to expect the worst.

These are traditional attitudes, even poses. In public appearances, shopkeepers are about to go out of business because of crime and oppression, citizens are afraid to walk streets for fear of assault, teachers and police officers and firemen all speak of dismal situations within their departments. Off-duty, however, people have a capacity for enjoying their lives from day to day, at least until an event comes along that seems to cast a fearful shadow as far as one's own doorstep.

Few such incidents have struck the deep chill that the latest, the eighth attack by the murderer who calls himself "Son of Sam," has done. The murder in Brooklyn of Stacy Moskowitz and the wounding of Robert Violante have preoccupied the minds and conversations of many New Yorkers to a degree that the previous seven attacks did not. It has become a staple of conversation particularly among women, in neighborhoods far from the scene of the crime.

In an age where random murder is an everyday occurrence, where the police blotter daily moans a litany of violence, it is almost phenomenal how the .44-caliber killer has seized the public imagination and fears.

Fresh Meadows is in north-central Queens, a large middle-class community of private homes and a large housing development. It is a relatively peaceful neighborhood of gardens and trees and grass. There are car thefts and, sometimes, burglaries in homes.

In June, the killer struck in Bayside, only a short drive away, and there was apprehension expressed in the neighborhood. But the faraway attack in Brooklyn seems to have made an even stronger impact on the people here.

There is a row of stores along 69th Avenue, at 195th Lane, and during the day, they become ad hoc community centers where neighborhood shoppers gossip and talk about prices, local incidents and news that affects them. The talk rarely dwells on national or international matters, but news of the city is assessed: parking rules, rents and taxes, the blackout, the new one-way street in the area. The assessments in the last few days have almost entirely been about the strange murders.

Why has the Brooklyn murder of the blonde-haired young woman and the wounding of her escort provoked such deeply felt reaction? There is perhaps no one certain answer, but there are a number of indications.

"This has been the topic," Mary Ann Boroz said in the beauty parlor on the block. "Even I felt safe until now. After the two were shot in Bayside, we were bombarded with brown-haired women who wanted haircuts. Now I am waiting for blondes to call. This was not a Christian girl, and you don't have to have long dark hair to be shot."

"It keeps going on," a woman customer in the candy store said. "People are getting desperate. There's no beginning and no end, no formula."

"This is like a time bomb," another woman in the store observed. "It's the impact. Everybody is waiting. Even an old lady like me, I look at everyone carefully from my car. Everyone's all keyed up."

In the Waldbaum's supermarket, the shoppers were waiting in line at the checkout. A young man, one of the store's supervisors (like others, he did not want his named used) said:

"The customers are talking about it. The part-time help is getting picked up by friends and relatives when they leave at night. Why is it so talked about? Because they are publicizing it so much."

Another man, a customer, agreed that it was the publicity that had heightened the inroads the murder had made into the people's concern, and, possibly, the danger.

"It is overpublicized," he said, "The people know about it, and he knows about the killer. It makes him feel better, to know that he's being talked about."

In Hair Touch, the barber shop, a woman was getting a haircut. She said she was a psychiatric nurse at Long Island Hospital. She speculated on the impact of the murder.

"I think the publicity played a part," she said. "But this one really did it. Girls are staying home and you know it could be anyone. It's the pattern that has been changed. You just don't know what he's going to do next."

"I wouldn't say that all this makes you more fearful, it just makes you more nervous," a woman customer at the Waldbaum's checkout commented, while the woman clerk just shook her head and said: "I can't believe it. It keeps going on."

A young man who had gone into the barber shop for a trim gave an analysis.

"This murder is no more tragic than any of the others, but it makes a kind of statement," he said. "It is frightening because it shown he's in control. He went to Brooklyn, killed a blonde girl. He can go to Nassau, anywhere."