

Chief Detective Asks Reporters to Stop Going After Witnesses to .44 Slayings

By DEIRDRE CARMODY

Chief of Detectives John L. Keenan appealed to reporters yesterday to stop tracking down witnesses in the .44-caliber killings and to "let the police interview such people."

Chief Keenan said in an interview that the police were encountering reluctance on the part of some potential witnesses to talk about the killings because other witnesses were being tracked down at their homes and at their jobs by reporters—sometimes even before the police get to them.

"We feel that this may be inhibiting to these and other witnesses," Chief Keenan said.

The police have mixed feelings about the newspaper and television coverage of the so-called "Son of Sam" killings.

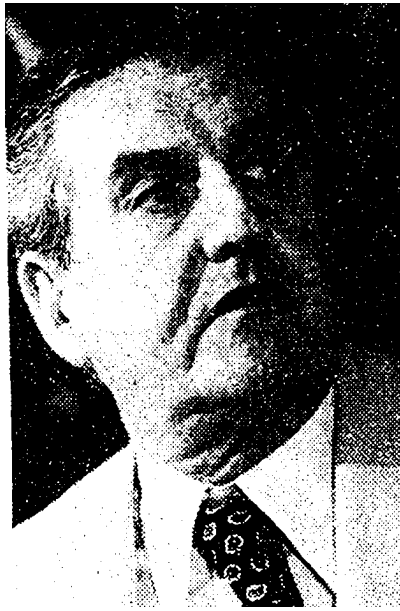
On one hand, it has given the police an opportunity to publicize what they think they know about the killer and his methods and to appeal to the public to call in details on the special telephone line that has been set up.

Detectives Followed

On the other hand, the coverage by newspapers, radio and television has been so extensive that reporters have sometimes got to witnesses before the police, according to Deputy Commissioner Francis J. McLoughlin, who is in charge of public information.

He said that there were times when detectives leaving the investigation's headquarters in Flushing, to Queens to interview potential witnesses had been followed by reporters. When the detectives finished interviewing the witnesses in their homes, the reporters would rush in and do their own questioning.

"This is interfering with the investigation," Commissioner McLoughlin said. "Other witnesses say, 'Who needs these



John L. Keenan

news guys at my house?' and then don't call in to the police."

One of the star witnesses is "Tommy Z," who was sitting in a parked car in front of Stacy Moskowitz and Robert Violante early Sunday morning when the killer fired at them, killing Miss Moskowitz and blinding Mr. Violante. Newsmen found Tommy Z, who had seen the shooting in his rear-view mirror, and interviewed him. They did not reveal his identity.

Ron Tindiglia, news director of WABC-TV, which interviewed Tommy Z on its

Eyewitness News program, said: "It is our job to find out what happened and to bring that information to the public. We are all aware of our responsibility in reporting this story and we have been very careful not to exaggerate and not to guess.

"We were very careful in the selection of information we broadcast not to give any clues whatsoever to Tommy Z's identity. He was interviewed with his back to the camera in the dark."

The more profound question about the huge coverage by the news media of the .44-caliber killings is whether it encourages the killer. Some psychologists studying the case agree that he wants publicity and is enjoying his cat-and-mouse game with the police.

Moriarty Stalking Holmes

"What he's doing is playing a game with the police—he visualizes himself as Moriarty killing Sherlock Holmes," said one psychologist who has been watching the case closely but asked not to be identified. "He's proving to them that he's more of a man than they can ever be."

The psychologist said he thought that if there were no publicity, the killer might be forced into doing something even more dramatic to draw attention to himself.

Thomas Burke, coordinator of psychology of the College Accelerated Program for Police at the New York Institute of Technology, teaches a course for police officers, some of whom have been involved with the .44-caliber case.

"We know he reads the papers and follows the case carefully," Professor Burke said, referring to a letter sent by the alleged killer to Jimmy Breslin, the Daily News columnist. "One thing about the paranoid personality is that it tends to be very ego-involved."

He said that the tension had probably built up in the killer until it was unbearable and that the only release was to murder. The question, Professor Burke said, is: If the killer feels he is being challenged, does this speed up the tension or does it not?

He said that articles that have described the killer as someone who hates women and who is sexually impotent might have had the effect of making the killer say, "I'll show you who is not impotent."

"We might speed it up by demeaning him, but we're not going to start or stop his killings, Professor Burke said. "These would have gone on regardless. There's no guilt to be thrown on the media for that."

According to Dr. David Abrahamsen, psychiatrist and author, the killer has the same personality as someone who hijacks a plane.

"The publicity feeds his self-esteem and it is very hard to gauge how much or how little you should write about this," Dr. Abrahamsen said. "He enjoys it very much."

In his letter to Mr. Breslin, the killer pointed out that the anniversary of his first murder would fall on July 29. A barrage of publicity followed, speculating on whether he would strike again on that date.

One psychologist said that he thought that once the killer had sent the letter to Mr. Breslin, he had committed himself to a murder on that date. (He actually struck again early the morning of Aug. 1.)

For the first few months, the police were readily available to the press for details in connection with the murders. Now, however, Commissioner McLoughlin said that a news conference would probably be held every day so that reporters could ask their questions, but that any other information would have to go through the information office and not from the detectives working on the case.