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David R. Berkowitz, left, with lawyers, Ira Jultak, center, and Leon Stern, at Brooklyn court session

Berkowitz Pleads Guilty to Six 'Son of Sam' Killings

By ANNA QUINDLEN

David R. Berkowitz pleaded guilty yesterday to the six murder charges against him, and publicly affirmed that he was the gunman known as "Son of Sam," the .44-caliber killer.

Three State Supreme Court justices questioned the 24-year-old postal clerk closely about the yearlong shooting rampage in New York City that left six young people dead and seven wounded. In a clear and even voice, Mr. Berkowitz, who said he was "an excellent shot," admitted each murder and all other crimes connected with the shootings, and when he had finished, his guilty pleas were accepted by the justices in a courtroom in Brooklyn.

Sentencing on all charges was scheduled for May 22. Mr. Berkowitz has been charged with second-degree murder—first-degree murder applies only to the

killing of police and correction officers—and is therefore liable for concurrent sentences of 25 years to life.

He also faces a maximum of 25 years in prison for the attempted murders of the seven wounded. Under state law, his cumulative sentence cannot exceed 30 years to life, therefore making him eligible for parole at age 54. Although in some states life sentences are administered consecutively, in New York they are not, the rationale being that a defendant has, in fact, only one life.

Reference to 2,000 Fires

The only surprise in the proceedings came when Mario Merola, the Bronx District Attorney, rose to inform the court that a diary found among Mr. Berkowitz's possessions suggested that he might have set 2,000 fires, most in the Bronx, between 1974 and Aug. 10, 1977,

when he was captured. Mr. Merola said his staff was still investigating the log of blazes. [Page 35.]

The closely guarded defendant, wearing a blue suit and striped shirt, told the Supreme Court justice several times that his nighttime forays from his studio apartment in Yonkers had one purpose: "to kill somebody."

"Did you have any particular person in mind?" asked Justice Joseph R. Corso, who was hearing Mr. Berkowitz's plea in the death last July of Stacy Moskowitz of Brooklyn.

"No," Mr. Berkowitz said simply, and when later he was asked what he thought would be the consequences of firing his .44-caliber Bulldog revolver into the car where Miss Moskowitz sat on her first date with Robert Violante, he said some-

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what testily, like someone explaining something to a child: "That they would die."

The outcome of the unusual hearing, in which three judges from each of the boroughs where the crimes occurred heard guilty pleas in a single spot, was forgone when he stocky young man was whisked in a Correction Department caravan yesterday morning to the Supreme Court Building. He had indicated that he would plead guilty.

Except for Mr. Merola's statement about the fires, all proceeded as expected. The defense attorneys, Leon Stern and Ira Jultak, rose before each section of the three-part session to express for the record their belief that their client was not competent to stand trial and that he was defying their advice to plead not guilty by reason of insanity.

"This plea of his is of his own choosing," Mr. Stern said three times before the bench.

But all three judges—Justice Corso of Brooklyn, Justice William Kapelman of the Bronx and Justice Nicholas Tsoucalas of Queens, who took the bench in that order—accepted the guilty pleas by the defendant after questioning him about whether he had been coerced into his action and fully understood its import.

To ascertain that Mr. Berkowitz understood what sentencing meant, Justice Corso asked: "Do you know what the maximum penalty is for murder in the second degree?"

Mr. Berkowitz shot back: "Twenty-five years to life."

Parents of Victims Weep

In all, it was something of an anticlimactic finish to a crime wave and manhunt that had galvanized an entire city and had frightened many teen-age girls into staying at home and out of parked cars.

Rose and Michael Lauria, the Bronx couple whose daughter Donna became the first victim of the murderer on July 29, 1976, were present. The couple wept as they heard Mr. Berkowitz admit to gunning down their daughter at close range, and during a recess in the court proceedings Mr. Lauria said: "Justice is not going to be done. He should go to the chair like he's supposed to."

Also present were the parents of Miss Moskowitz, the killer's last victim. The mother, Neysa Moskowitz, remained impassive behind dark glasses throughout the morning. But when Justice Corso concluded, "This court is satisfied that on July 31, 1977, in the Bensonhurst area of Brooklyn, the defendant fired a .44-caliber revolver into a car in which Stacy Moskowitz was seated and that he did so with the intention to cause her death and did cause her death," Jerome

Moskowitz put his head down on the bench in front of him and wept.

There was no talk yesterday of the demons that Mr. Berkowitz had previously mentioned as the motivation behind his crimes—or of Sam Carr, the Yonkers man who, Mr. Berkowitz said, had led the demonic hordes and whence the nickname "Son of Sam" came.

Mr. Berkowitz appeared self-assured and eager to get on with the business at hand. At one point he told Justice Tsoucalas, "I just want to plead guilty."

And while his lawyers hammered home their argument that he was incompetent, Justice Tsoucalas said he had reviewed the psychiatric reports that had been the basis for Justice Corso's previous ruling that the defendant was competent to stand trial. In his opinion, Justice Tsoucalas said, Mr. Berkowitz was indeed

competent to enter his guilty pleas.

At only one point did the defendant appear ready to upset his chances of entering guilty pleas to all charges against him. After admitting the murders of Miss Moskowitz, Miss Lauria, Christine Freund, Virginia Voskerchian, Valentina Suriani and Alexander Esau, he was questioned by Justice Tsoucalas about the evening when he approached the porch of Joanne Lomino's home in Queens and shot her and Donna DiMasi.

"Did you intend to cause serious injury to them," the judge asked.

"Oh, no, sir," the defendant replied as the judge visibly started.

"You didn't?"

"No, sir," Mr. Berkowitz said as Donna DiMasi, wearing a neck brace, stared woodenly at him from the front row. "I wanted to kill them."