

CULT

Continued from page one
all its good furnishings, defaced the walls with bizarre slogans and left the apartment a shambles in an attempt, successful at the time, to make police believe he was a lone, deranged assassin who killed at the command of barking dogs.

Berkowitz says he was "always sane," that his confession in 1977 was contrived to "feign insanity," and that the cult's plan to set up his apartment "clearly shows advance planning. But it wasn't all my idea and I'm certain you know this," he writes.

Berkowitz's written admissions, and specific details contained in them, have been independently investigated by these newspapers and investigators of Queens District Attorney John Santucci, who is now aware that Berkowitz provided the information. Santucci has been able to substantiate Berkowitz's visit to the animal shelter and has found supporting evidence for the assertion that his apartment's bizarre appearance was a set-up.

Despite Berkowitz's refusal to name other accomplices besides John Carr, evidence has been uncovered pointing at a half dozen possible conspirators whose names have been turned over to Santucci for further investigation. The total cult membership may number more than 20.

If Santucci moves on the matter, it would be a continuation of a case he reopened late in 1979 following publication of an investigation by these newspapers.

The newspaper probe demonstrated Berkowitz apparently acted with members of a cult and revealed new evidence as well as other crucial information that had been withheld by New York City Police and the Brooklyn District Attorney's Office.

Berkowitz's admissions were made to

this reporter over a six-month period last year, 18 months after the Gannett investigation began. They were withheld until now in an unsuccessful attempt to persuade Berkowitz to name other conspirators besides John Carr. He refused to do so and from the outset insisted that his cooperation remain secret.

Berkowitz has refused to talk to the authorities. His position was that he would help to a degree because he wanted the truth to come out. "Keep me out of it publicly," he said. He has not approved the publication of this correspondence.

Berkowitz says he remains in fear of other cult members and their ability to harm his family, which he had been told would happen if he betrayed the group. Its leaders, he says, have photographs and addresses of his family and other members' families.

"My father has been urging me to cooperate fully. Cooperate, cooperate, cooperate," he says. "But he has no idea of the dangers to him (from the cult) if I do. . . . In order to get a reduced sentence I'd have to go over each detail, each occurrence, each victim step by step and explain just what my role was. . . . My father means well but he doesn't understand what that would mean for him."

Berkowitz, who avoided a trial by pleading guilty to all the shootings, says he will not testify against any of his accomplices, even if he ultimately remains the only conspirator sent to prison for the killings.

"I am not a stool pigeon and I cannot, no matter how heinous the crime, testify against another individual," Berkowitz writes. "Even if a given individual has wronged me, still I must keep silent because



David Berkowitz

this is the code — this is our code — the inmates of Attica."

"I know this sounds like something out of a gangster movie, but this place (Attica) is my home now and I will live by the rules and by the oath. . . ."

"Neither do I want to go back to court and go through this circus routine again. This was disgusting and stupid so I just refuse to even consider this," he says in reply to an attempt to convince him to testify.

"I mean I'm not really talking, but I don't want the 'wrong people out there to think that I am, because I'm not," he writes.

"I could talk tomorrow," Berkowitz says. "I'm aware that it wouldn't be easy to substantiate some of the things I'd say. They (the authorities) need witnesses, etc., to agree with each other as to certain facts, times, dates, etc. There is also the matter of which district attorney is willing — none are. I'm sure Santucci realizes by now that he's taken on more than he can handle. So I'm staying put."

Accountant was probed as suspect in 'Sam' case

In the late summer of 1979, the New York City police reopened the Son of Sam case, acting on information that linked a Manhattan accountant to both Berkowitz and John Carr.

The accountant was identified as being with Berkowitz days before his arrest, and was said to have visited Carr in North Dakota in 1976. Carr had told his friends there that he feared the man.

Capt. John Plansker, the detective officer in charge of the investigation, informed his superiors that the accountant:

— bears a "remarkable resemblance" to one of the police sketches of "Son of Sam;"
— had worked in the same lower Manhattan building as Christina Freund, killed in the fourth Son of Sam shooting Jan. 30, 1977;

— owned a small green auto believed to be similar to one observed near the site of the Freund shooting in Forest Hills;

— lived near the scene of two of the shootings;

— had been identified by Carr's acquaintances as having visited Carr several times in North Dakota.

Plansker wrote to his superiors Aug. 31, 1979, that "(It) appears that we will be able to draw an association with (the suspect), Berkowitz and Carr. . . . This would raise the possibility that Berkowitz did not act independently or operate alone as previously believed."

"I fully realize the implications and ramifications of this report and I also understand the need for discretion in this

matter. However, I do believe that we must pursue this investigation to the point where we have eliminated any element of conjecture."

After two months, the investigation was ended, over Plansker's objections, when the source of information — a Queens woman known for "unorthodox" religious practices — was deemed unreliable.

Plansker had argued that the probe had borne fruit independent of the tainted source and should continue. "Despite this reversal," he wrote to his superiors, "we have developed information and circumstances that almost demand resolution. I believe that this investigation should be continued if only for the sake of being able to say the Department has never ignored or overlooked any information connected with the 'Son of Sam' killings."

This last request by Plansker was denied. The eight-week investigation was over.

The accountant's name, however, had also surfaced independently in North Dakota at the time of John Carr's death, and languished in police files there for more than a year.

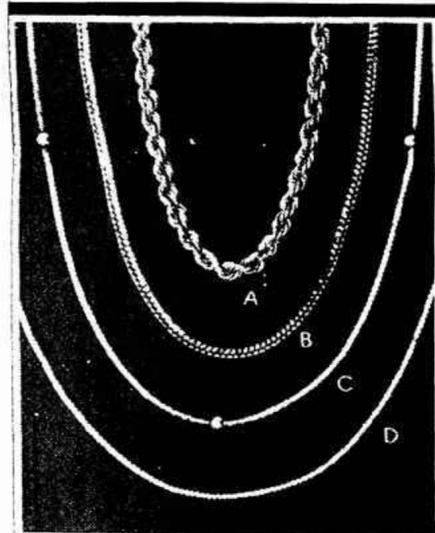
A detective, Henry Cinotti, was soon brought up on departmental charges stemming from his refusal to divulge the name of his original source — the Queens woman — and for working with a newspaper reporter during the investigation.

Cinotti, a 17-year veteran with a number of departmental awards and commendations, was fined 30 days of vacation time and placed on probation.

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