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**Did He Kill 18 Women? Or Has He Been Framed?**

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*by* Cheryl McCall [Read Later](http://www.readability.com/articles/j3e4vq98?legacy_bookmarklet=1)

He was a son any mother would be proud to call her own, a handsome six-footer who became the first in his family to graduate from college, then began studying for a career in the law. Women found him charming, his nieces and nephews adored him. At a Seattle crisis clinic, he was a sympathetic counselor; as an assistant director of the Seattle Crime Prevention Advisory Commission, he wrote a rape-prevention pamphlet for women. When he chased and caught a purse snatcher in a shopping mall, the governor of Washington wrote him a letter of gratitude. "Everything I saw about him would recommend him," says his ex-boss Ross Davis, former state Republican chairman. "If you can't trust someone like Ted Bundy, you can't trust anyone—your parents, your wife, anyone."

Beyond the serenity of Bundy's early years, however, lurked a grisly turn of events. Today, at 33, Ted Bundy has been convicted of two brutal murders in Florida and is scheduled to go on trial next week for a third. In addition, his name has been linked by police and prosecutors with the deaths of 15 other women in three states. The young law student of inestimable promise, authorities suggest, is one of the bloodiest mass murderers in U.S. history. Yet even as Bundy stands convicted and sentenced to die, few of his friends have lost faith in his innocence. They believe he has been caught in a flimsy web of circumstantial evidence and that law enforcement officials have made him the fall guy for a series of killings that could not be solved.

Bundy's bizarre odyssey began in Burlington, Vt., where he was born to 19-year-old Louise Cowell in a home for unwed mothers. Four years later he and his mother moved to Tacoma, Wash., where Louise married Johnnie C. Bundy, a cook at Madigan Army Hospital for the past 28 years. Bundy adopted Ted, and the couple had four more children of their own. "We are a family that has always tried to raise our kids in the right way," says Louise, 53. "We weren't the kind that sent their kids off to Sunday school and then went back to sleep."

Apparently stamped in the all-American mold, Ted was a Boy Scout who had his own paper route, started a small lawn-mowing business with a friend and won a place on the high school track team. "I admired him tremendously," says his sister, Linda Bussey, 26. "I always wished I had some of his brains and his knowledge." Graduating in 1965, Bundy entered the University of Puget Sound near his home and later transferred to the University of Washington. Dropping out in 1967, he took an unpaid position as Seattle chairman of the New Majority for Rockefeller and attended the 1968 GOP Convention in Miami. Re-enrolling at the University, Bundy graduated in 1972 with a degree in psychology.

Although he worked briefly as a counselor in a psychiatric hospital, Bundy's natural vocation was politics. Joining Republican Gov. Dan Evans' reelection campaign in 1972, he infiltrated the camp of Evans' Democratic opponent and later became an aide to Ross Davis. "He was everything you looked for in an assistant," says Davis. "He had a good analytical mind, and he worked well with people. He would have had to be a complete Jekyll and Hyde if what they say is true."

During the summer of 1974 Bundy left his home state and moved to Salt Lake City, where he entered the University of Utah Law School and worked nights as a janitor. In 1975 he was baptized a Mormon, but his troubles had already begun. While he was living in Seattle, eight young women had been murdered. Witnesses told police that on July 14, 1974, the day two of the victims disappeared, the women had been approached, separately, by a man with his arm in a sling. He said his name was Ted and asked for help in hoisting a sailboat onto the roof of his Volkswagen. A police computer check revealed that of 2,877 owners of light-colored Volkswagens in Seattle, one was Ted Bundy.

Nearly five months later, in an apparently unrelated incident, Carol DaRonch, 18, was abducted in Murray, Utah by a man identifying himself as a police officer. When DaRonch began to struggle, the man slapped a handcuff on one of her wrists and threatened her with a pistol. She managed to jump out of the car, but he pursued her with a crowbar until she ran into the street and desperately waved down a passing motorist. Her assailant vanished into the darkness.

Nine months later Ted Bundy was arrested for the first time. Alone in his Volkswagen at 2:30 a.m., he panicked and sped away when a patrol car beamed its lights on him in suburban Granger, Utah. The policeman chased him down and, searching Bundy's car, found a crowbar, a pair of handcuffs, an ice pick and a mask fashioned from pantyhose. Coincidentally, the arresting officer was Bob Hayward, brother of Capt. Pete Hayward, who was investigating the DaRonch kidnapping—and the murders of three other women—for the Salt Lake County Sheriff's Department. When Bob mentioned his encounter with Bundy, the name rang a muffled bell with his brother. In November 1974 a former fiancée of Bundy's, Liz Kloepfer, had called Pete Hayward twice from Seattle, urging him to consider Bundy a suspect in the Utah crimes. Hayward made a routine check, but saw no reason to go any further. Now he began to wonder.

"I keep telling myself—though I don't want to—that Ted is involved," Kloepfer told Det. Jerry Thompson, who investigated the case for Hayward. "Too many things point to him." She said that Ted resembled a composite drawing of the suspect; that he hadn't been with her on the days the Seattle women had disappeared; that he had a fake arm cast in his apartment; that his sex drive dwindled in 1974 after the crimes began; and that once, inspired by a copy of The Joy of Sex she had given him, he had tied her up and nearly throttled her.

Seattle police had taken a similar statement from Kloepfer, but discounted it as a jilted girlfriend's suspicions. She later recanted most of her allegations, and no prosecutor has ever' put her on the witness stand. Thompson, however, was convinced he had found his kidnapper. He showed Bundy's picture to DaRonch three times, but each time she failed to identify him. Then, remarkably, on Oct. 2, 1975 she picked Bundy out of an eight-man line-up. Later, on the witness stand, DaRonch said her assailant had dark, slicked-back hair and a mustache, held his gun and brandished the crowbar in his right hand, drove a light blue VW and wore patent leather shoes. Defense witnesses testified that Bundy, who has light brown hair, never wore a mustache in Salt Lake City and never dressed in patent leather shoes. His VW was sand-colored, and he is left-handed. Taking the stand in his own behalf, Bundy said he had panicked on the night of his arrest in Granger because he had been smoking marijuana and feared a police record would jeopardize his legal career. He pointed out that the handcuffs in his car were rusted and useless and said he had found them while cleaning an apartment. Nevertheless Judge Stewart Hanson found him guilty as charged—Bundy had waived his right to a jury trial—and sentenced him to one to 15 years in prison. "There is no question but that Carol DaRonch could not identify Ted Bundy and that the police worked on her until she could," says Bundy's Utah attorney, John O'Connell. "I have never seen a conviction in a serious case on less evidence."

There was even less evidence in the next case brought against Bundy. Searching his room during the DaRonch investigation, Detective Thompson found a ski brochure and a map of Colorado. The names of two ski lodges were underlined in the brochure; one was the Wildwood Inn near Aspen, where a vacationing nurse named Caryn Campbell had disappeared Jan. 12, 1975. Her battered corpse was found in a snowbank five weeks later. Credit card receipts showed that Bundy had been in the area on the day Campbell vanished. A prosecutor claims that two hairs taken from Bundy's car were indistinguishable from Campbell's, but concedes that "a hair is not like a fingerprint." Perhaps the strongest testimony linking Bundy to Campbell came from a woman who said she had seen him in the Wild-wood Inn the night Campbell disappeared. But during a pretrial hearing, the witness was unable to identify him.

The Campbell case, however, never got to court. Awaiting trial, Bundy escaped by wriggling out of his jail cell through a ventilation duct. He eventually wound up in Tallahassee, Fla., where he moved into a rooming house called the Oak. "He was an eerie person," recalls fellow roomer Russell Gage. "He wanted us to tell him everything, and he would tell us only what he wanted us to know." What Bundy had become, according to police, was an adept car thief who sustained himself by stealing cash and credit cards. Outwardly he seemed one of the more respectable tenants at the rooming house. When two women students at Florida State University were savagely murdered four blocks away, several male residents of the Oak became suspects. Bundy was not one of them.

The killings occurred shortly after 3 a.m. on Jan. 15, 1978 when a man entered the Chi Omega sorority house, beat and strangled Margaret Bowman and Lisa Levy, both 20, and bludgeoned two other women with an oak limb. The two survivors remembered nothing of their attacker, but as he ran down the back stairs the intruder met Nita Neary, who was returning from a date. She told the police he was dark, about 5'8", wearing a blue ski cap and carrying a club. Within an hour another woman, Cheryl Thomas, who lived six blocks away, was bludgeoned and raped in her bed. She survived but remembers nothing.

After the murders Bundy remained at the Oak for nearly a month. Then, on February 9, Kimberly Leach, 12, disappeared from a Lake City, Fla. junior high. Her decomposed body was located eight weeks later. Credit card receipts indicate that Bundy spent the night before the murder at the Holiday Inn in Lake City, about 100 miles east of Tallahassee. At the time, prosecutors charge, he was driving a white van that fit the description of one later found in Tallahassee, near a spot where an orange VW was stolen shortly after the Leach murder. On February 15 a Pensacola policeman noticed the car and gave chase. After a struggle he subdued the driver and found 21 stolen credit cards in his possession. Not until 36 hours later did the police discover that their prisoner, who had given a false name, was a recent addition to the FBI's Ten Most Wanted list—Ted Bundy.

Indicted five months later, Bundy went on trial last June for the Chi Omega murders. The key evidence against him, jurors say, was bite marks on Levy's breast and buttocks, which the prosecution claimed could only have been made by Bundy. "You're not talking about actual dental impressions," objects Lynn Thompson, one of the defense lawyers. "You're talking about a bruise, it's not a science—it's an art, if anything." A hair indistinguishable from Bundy's was found in a pantyhose face mask left at the Thomas apartment, but defense experts testified that the hair was equally indistinguishable from that of four policemen and medical technicians who arrived at the scene soon after the attack. In Bundy's behalf, his defense offered a powerful but esoteric piece of evidence. Analysis of a semen stain on Thomas' sheet and chewing gum in Levy's hair indicated that the women's assailant was a "nonsecretor"—part of the 20 percent of the population whose bodily secretions do not reveal blood type. Bundy, on the other hand, is a proven secretor. Curiously, members of the jury either disregarded that testimony or misunderstood it. "To me, the evidence said he was a nonsecretor, and it fit right in," juror Dave Alexander Brown told PEOPLE. Commented another juror, Mary Russo: "Evidently the defense was trying to prove that the blood or whatever they could prove out of the semen was not his. I really didn't pay too much attention to that." Many jurors, apparently unaware that Bundy had been a fugitive, felt his suspicious behavior the night of his arrest was proof of his guilt. "You don't normally just run from a policeman," said juror Vernon Swindle. "That kind of made me think he did what they said."

After only six hours of deliberation, the jury found Bundy guilty of the attack on Thomas and of murdering Bowman and Levy. Judge Edward Co-wart sentenced him to die in the electric chair. Many courtroom observers, however, believed that the defendant had been unfairly convicted. Among them was Ruth Walsh, a television anchorwoman for Seattle's ABC affiliate, KOMO. "I still don't know if he's guilty," she says, "but I don't think it was proved. The prosecution admitted they had a weak case. I just want to see a fact, a fingerprint, something that can't be disputed."

Previously, while researching a five-part series on Bundy, Walsh discovered that seven other men could be linked circumstantially with some or all of Bundy's alleged crimes. "There are five possible 'Teds' in the Seattle area alone," she says. The list includes a convicted sex offender who was living in Seattle at the time of the murders there. He then moved to Aspen, where he took a job at Snowmass, the resort where victim Caryn Campbell was staying. His co-workers remember him as violent, especially toward women. He didn't show up for work on the day Campbell was murdered; the next day he picked up his paycheck and left town. (Subsequently he was given a lie detector test and passed.)

Walsh also learned that another suspect in the Seattle slayings was living in Salt Lake City at the time of the DaRonch kidnapping. Later convicted of shooting a woman to death, the suspect owned a gun and handcuffs and matched DaRonch's description of her abductor—dark, slicked-down hair and a mustache. "The thing that makes me want solid proof against Bundy is that we have uncovered these other people," says Walsh. "They fit the pattern of evidence and description in an almost uncanny way."

Perhaps more substantial evidence against Bundy will be introduced at his trial for the murder of Kimberly Leach, in Orlando. The case is expected to focus on the recovered white van that Bundy is said to have stolen. Last February 8 a 14-year-old girl was stopped in Jacksonville by a man driving such a van. The man identified himself as a fire department official, but fled when the girl's older brother appeared. Suspicious, they copied down the van's license number, and that plate was found on the floor of the orange VW that Bundy was driving when he was arrested. The girl and her brother have identified Bundy from photographs as the van's driver, and credit card receipts show he was in Jacksonville that day. In the van police say they found bloodstains of the same type as the murdered girl's, and leaves and soil matching those at the site where she was buried.

Whatever the outcome of his latest trial, only one man knows the truth about Ted Bundy, and he has never wavered in proclaiming his innocence. (Psychiatrists who examined him have disagreed on his capability for such violence.) Alone in his state prison cell, Bundy amuses himself by leaving food on a paper plate at night and watching the mice scamper and nibble. "So I'm going a little bit crazy," he says. "Maybe it's something you expect to read in some novel about someone living in the Bastille—but it's real." He says he often thinks about home and "a big cold pitcher of beer," but insists he will never give in to despair. "I've survived this long," he says firmly. "I'm sure I can survive indefinitely. I won't let it get me down. I won't let it break me. I won't let it grind me into dust."