

TED BUNDY STORY AS TOLD BY LARRY SIMPSON

I went to Florida State University in Tallahassee, graduating with a major in Government and a minor in Math (thank you, Ms. Wolf). I went to FSU's Law School and graduated in December 1973 with high honors. During the summer of 1973, I interned with the State Attorney's Office in Tallahassee. I accepted a job offer from the State Attorney and was sworn in as an Assistant State Attorney on January 2, 1974. Four years later I was assigned the prosecution of the Theodore Robert Bundy/Chi Omega homicide case.

Ted Bundy was undoubtedly one of the most prolific serial killers in history. He killed at least 30—35 women. Bundy, himself, hinted it could be in the triple digits. Numerous states were involved, including Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Utah, Colorado, and lastly Florida. All of his victims were young, female, white, attractive, and most of them had dark hair parted in the middle. His victims were beaten about the head, strangled, sexually assaulted, and many were buried in remote areas. Bundy went undetected for several years, in part because his crimes were committed in many different jurisdictions and there was no coordinated law enforcement effort to link the crimes together. Even when Bundy was a suspect, witnesses had difficulty identifying him because he often changed his appearance and was described as being “chameleon like.” His beard could be long, short, or he could be clean-shaven. He may have long hair or short hair. His skin color would sometimes be bronze, like he used a tanning bed, and at other times he would appear grayish or almost white. He changed clothes often, wore different hats, and otherwise disguised himself.

The Bundy case was the biggest case ever prosecuted in the State of Florida for good reason. It had everything: a serial killer, horrendous, multiple homicides and assaults, cutting edge forensic evidence, and worldwide media coverage. The case had my full and undivided attention for 14 months—24 hours a day, 7 days a week. I traveled throughout the United States: Seattle, Washington; Salt Lake City, Utah; Albuquerque, New Mexico; New York, New York; Baltimore, Maryland; San Diego, California; Detroit, Michigan; and all over the State of Florida. I talked to hundreds of law enforcement officers and witnesses, hired the best experts available and did everything I could to determine if Bundy committed these murders, and if so, to prove that he was guilty.

Theodore Robert Bundy was born in November of 1946 in Burlington, Vermont. His given name at birth was Theodore Robert Cowell. Cowell was his mother's maiden name and he was born in a home for unwed mothers. Many family members believed he had been fathered by his maternal grandfather, who had a history of violence. When Ted was four years old, his mother left Vermont and moved to Tacoma, Washington, to live with family members who resided in that area. About a year later, she married Johnny Culpepper Bundy, who adopted young Ted, and gave him the name Theodore Robert Bundy. Bundy grew up in the Tacoma-Seattle area and went to high school and college there. After graduating from the University of Washington, Bundy completed one year of law school at the University of Puget Sound and then moved to Salt Lake City, Utah, to attend the University of Utah Law School.

In Salt Lake City, he approached a young telephone operator, Carole Daronch, in the mall. Bundy claimed to be a police investigator and said her car in the parking lot had been burglarized. He insisted she return to the parking lot with him for the investigation. Once at the parking lot, Bundy told her she needed to fill out a police report at the police station. Carole agreed to go and they left in Bundy's VW Beetle. As they drove along, Bundy tried to handcuff her, but could only get a handcuff on one arm. Carole fought Bundy off, jumped out of the car, and was rescued by another motorist. The case went nowhere until about a year later when a highway patrolman saw someone in a VW Beetle driving through a residential neighborhood acting suspicious. Bundy was driving that car and when the trooper stopped and searched it, he found a bag in the back seat containing

handcuffs, an ice pick, a crow bar, a rope, and a panty hose mask. This was Bundy's Death Bag. Carole Daronch subsequently identified Bundy as her assailant which resulted in his conviction for aggravated kidnapping and a sentence of 1-15 years in Utah state prison.

Shortly thereafter, an indictment for murder was brought against Bundy in Colorado. He was extradited to Colorado for the murder of a young nurse who went missing from a ski resort near Aspen. Bundy twice escaped from custody while in Colorado. The second time was December 30, 1977. Apparently, he had help to escape because he had enough money to travel from Colorado to Illinois, Michigan, Atlanta, and ultimately by bus to Tallahassee. Upon arrival in Tallahassee the first week of January 1978, Bundy rented a room at the Oaks Apartments, a few blocks from the front gate of FSU's campus.

During the early morning hours of January 15, 1978, Ted Bundy entered the Chi Omega Sorority House--most likely through a rear door that could be opened with a keypad--which often malfunctioned. Once inside, Bundy went upstairs where the bedrooms were located and killed two sorority girls, Lisa Levy and Margaret Bowman, and seriously injured two others, Karen Chandler and Kathy Kleiner. All of these victims were beaten about the head with a wooden club. The two girls found dead were strangled and sexually assaulted. One of those victims was strangled with a pair of pantyhose cinched tightly around her neck. The other victim had an injury that appeared to be a human bite mark.

About an hour later, a few blocks from the Chi Omega house, Bundy entered one side of a duplex on Dunwoody Street and assaulted a young female, Cheryl Thomas. She was also beaten about the head with a wooden club. Fortunately, she survived, but sustained five skull fractures. A pantyhose mask, similar to the one found in Bundy's Death Bag, was recovered by law enforcement from Cheryl's room.

Before the Chi Omega murders, nothing like this had ever happened in Tallahassee. Every law enforcement agency in the area responded. The crime scenes were utter chaos resulting in interagency conflict and blame among the law enforcement agencies. There was no clear plan in place to control the crime scene, or to investigate the case, and unidentified fingerprints were found in every one of the crime scenes. To this day, the person (or persons) who left those fingerprints has not been identified, a point that seriously threatened the viability of prosecuting the perpetrator.

About three weeks after the Chi Omega homicides, on February 8, 1978, Kimberly Leach, a twelve year old middle school student in Lake City, Florida, disappeared from school. She was last seen talking to a man driving a white van. A couple of months later, her body was found in a remote wooded area in an abandoned hog pen. Investigators would later establish that Bundy stole the white van from the FSU media center and connected Kimberly to that van through a cross match of fibers from her clothing.

Seven days after Kimberly's abduction, on February 15, 1978, Bundy was arrested in Pensacola, Florida, driving a VW Beetle that had been stolen in Tallahassee. The car was loaded with stolen property, stolen credit cards, and stolen IDs, which were traced back to Tallahassee. Bundy was charged with these property crimes and transported to Tallahassee. At that time, we did not know if Bundy had committed the Chi Omega murders. Frankly, if Bundy had taken a Greyhound Bus when he left Tallahassee, it is doubtful we could have connected him to the murders.

I was originally assigned to prosecute the property crimes, while another, more experienced prosecutor was placed in charge of the homicide investigation. When that other prosecutor resigned from the office, I took over the homicide investigation as well. I formed a task force of seven investigators to focus on Ted Bundy and determine whether he committed the homicides.

By July of 1978 it was clear to me Bundy was the perpetrator, and we indicted him for the Chi Omega/Dunwoody murders and assaults. There were several key pieces of evidence in the case, although the strength of each remained in question:

1. **The Bite Mark.** During the autopsy, the Medical Examiner confirmed there was a human bite mark on Lisa Levy's body. Although hundreds of photographs were taken of the autopsy, only one photograph had a ruler placed adjacent to the bite mark. That ruler permitted bite mark experts to enlarge the photograph and recreate the actual size of the bite mark. To determine whether Bundy could have left that bite mark, we obtained a search warrant to search Bundy's mouth and took a model of his teeth. With the bite mark at actual size and a model of Bundy's teeth that was actual size, the experts could do a one-to-one comparison to determine whether Bundy was responsible for the bite mark on Lisa Levy. One of the unique features of this bite mark was that it was a "double bite," i.e., Bundy bit once, then slightly turned his head, and bit again. This meant the experts had two bite marks for comparison purposes. Also, Bundy had a very unique set of teeth, with individual characteristics that were critical to the comparison. I retained four expert forensic odontologists to examine this evidence. They all concluded Bundy had, in fact, left the bite marks on Lisa Levy. There was no precedent for bite mark evidence in the State of Florida and we did not know if the Court would permit us to use it. After a three-day hearing in which I called our experts to testify, the trial judge concluded the evidence was admissible and this became the first case in Florida to rely upon bite mark evidence to establish the identity of a perpetrator.

2. **Head Hairs.** The Crime Lab examined the pantyhose mask found at the Dunwoody residence of Cheryl Thomas and found two Caucasian head hairs. Back in those days, there was no DNA evidence. Instead, the Crime Lab used the technology available (basically high powered microscopes) to conclude those two head hairs were consistent with Bundy's hair. This was far from conclusive proof the head hairs came from Bundy, but it was strong circumstantial evidence.

3. **Eye Witness Identification.** One of the Chi Omega sisters, Nita Neary, was on a date the night of the murders. She came back to the sorority house around 3 a.m. As she entered the foyer, she saw a man coming down the stairs dressed in dark clothing, wearing a skull cap, and carrying a wooden club. He went out the front door and Nita was able to get a profile view of him. Bundy had a very sharp pointed nose. The morning after the murders, Nita sat down with an artist and described the man she saw. The resulting drawing bore a striking resemblance to Ted Bundy. Nita would later identify Bundy in a photo lineup and ultimately identified him in Court. However, her testimony was called into question because she had been hypnotized by the Sheriff's Office (without my knowledge or consent). The Supreme Court later found her testimony admissible in this case, but held that hypnotically-refreshed testimony was inadmissible in future cases.

With his law school training, Bundy decided to represent himself during many of the pretrial proceedings. He also cross-examined one of the witnesses at trial. He assumed the role of a lawyer, spoke legalese, and acted professionally and competently. He filed his own pretrial motions and took depositions. He had a sense of humor and filed a motion entitled a "Motion for a Change of Menu," arguing the jail was serving him grilled cheese sandwiches every day and he needed some variety in his diet. I spent about four months with Bundy while he took depositions from the State witnesses. I would take the witness to the jail so Bundy could question them to find out what they knew about the case. The depositions were held in a secure room at the jail with jail personnel present. While taking the depositions, Bundy would refer to himself in the third person—as if he was a lawyer representing a client—and not a defendant facing possible conviction and a death sentence.

Although we tried to select a jury in Tallahassee, the extensive pretrial publicity precluded finding an unbiased jury in Tallahassee. Venue was changed to Miami and the trial took place during the months of June and July of 1979. This case was one of the first to be tried in Florida with cameras in the courtroom. The trial was aired live all over the country and other parts of the world. Over 250 members of the media were in attendance, packing the Miami-Dade Courthouse which ultimately let them use an entire floor to house their video/audio equipment and support staff.

The jury deliberated a little over six hours before finding Bundy guilty of all charges. A few days later, after additional testimony and argument, the jury recommended the death penalty. The judge then imposed the death penalty, finding a host of “aggravating factors” justified a death sentence, including: 1) the crimes were especially heinous, atrocious, and cruel; 2) Bundy had a prior conviction for use of violence against a person (Carole Daronche); 3) at the time of the crimes, Bundy was under a sentence of imprisonment; and 4) the murders were committed during another offense, i.e., burglary, a qualifying offense under the death penalty statute.

After many fruitless appeals and post-conviction motions, Bundy was executed on Tuesday morning, January 24, 1989, at Florida State Prison. He was 42 years of age. We do not know how many young women Bundy killed. Many victims simply went missing and their bodies were never found. Indeed, there is some evidence Bundy killed his first victim when he was only fourteen years old, a young neighbor girl who went missing and her body never located.

I am often asked what motivated Bundy to kill. We’ll never truly know. Bundy said he was triggered by pornography, but like so many of his so-called “confessions,” I’m not sure you can believe anything he said. Prior to trial, the judge ordered a psychiatric examination to determine whether Bundy was competent to stand trial. I had two preeminent psychiatrists travel to Tallahassee to examine Bundy: 1) Dr. Hervey Cleckly, a forensic psychiatrist from Augusta, Georgia, who wrote the *Three Faces of Eve*, a true story of the life of a woman with multiple personalities; and 2) Dr. Emanuel Tanay, a forensic psychiatrist from Grosse Pointe, Michigan, who was recognized as the world’s leading authority on serial killers. Both psychiatrists found Bundy competent to stand trial and concluded he was a psychopath, i.e., when Bundy killed, he knew what he was doing, but wanted the self-satisfaction of doing it. Bundy definitely exhibited multiple personalities, i.e., one day he could assume the role of a lawyer, another day he could blend in as a student on a college campus. Of course, we also know there were days when he became “Ted the Killer.”

If you met him in a social setting, professional meeting, or class reunion, Bundy would be well dressed, articulate, funny, and would fit in with the crowd. You would never suspect that he was a serial killer or that he had multiple personalities. We should all remember the words of Dr. Tanay, who wrote, “The evil of a psychopath . . . is not readily recognized by the untrained observer . . . A sadistic killer’s success depends on his appearing normal.”

Stay safe and vigilant.