



Charles Joseph Whitman . . .

This Was Charles Whitman

Good Man, Good Husband, Good Citizen,

He Was Everything a Young American Should Be

Until One Sunday Night When He Became an Insane Killer

By CHRIS WHITCRAFT
Staff Writer

Friends who knew Charles Joseph Whitman, 25, as "just one of the guys" at St. Ann's high school at West Palm Beach, Fla., seven years ago were pallbearers when he was laid to final rest Friday in his home town of Lake Worth.

Other pallbearers carried the casket of his mother, Mrs. C. J. Whitman Jr., who summoned her oldest of three sons to move her to Austin five months ago. These pallbearers were friends and business acquaintances of the husband she left.

Two other sons, Patrick, and the youngest, John Michael, 17, were with their father. John had visited Charles in Austin and seen the town with him from the 28th floor of the University of Texas tower on Friday two weeks ago.

John had left the one-story, tan-shingled well-kept family home to live with teenager friends after his mother went to Austin. He drove from New York where he was on Aug. 1 to Florida for the funeral.

The home that spawned a national tragedy has a spacious yard dotted with tropical fruit trees. There is a swimming pool and a big barbecue grill. A large garage has an upstairs apartment.

Outside is a 15-foot outboard motorboat on a trailer and a model-T Ford in top condition. Inside, the house is expensively furnished. Guns hang in every room.

The father at 47 is a self-made man, semi-literate and without an education but wealthy. He is a highly successful plumbing contractor.

His first-born son on March 29 this year on a U.T. personal data sheet had to use an extra line of space to describe his father's occupation as "plumbing and septic tank contractor."

Charles was born in Lake Worth on June 24, 1941, almost six months before the U.S. formally entered World War II. He went to Sacred Heart grade and junior high schools at Lake Worth.

"My son," the father told newsmen at Lake Worth on Tuesday, was an Eagle Scout at the age of 12, the youngest ever around here. He was a concert pianist. He was a brilliant student . . .

Charles graduated from St. Ann's high school in West Palm Beach at the age of almost 18 in the early summer of 1959. Seven years later on March 29 he wrote on a U.T. form asking his high school grade average "7th in class."

Lake Worth and West Palm Beach friends of Charles interviewed this week were unanimous in describing him as "just one of the guys."

Friend and former schoolmate Frank McCarthy of Palm Beach said Whitman was "completely normal."

"Charles was a thinker who never went off half-cocked," McCarthy said. The two often went hunting together in the Florida Everglades, but Charles "wasn't much of a shot then," McCarthy said.

But an exception was the more careful comment newsmen heard from Ray Roy, a former classmate and today a football coach at St. Ann's.

Roy said he remembers Charles best as the guy who "squirted water on bystanders instead of giving it to the players."

He said Charles was well-known for taking dares. He was

football manager but did not play on the team.

"Charles was moderately popular," Roy said, "but he did not chum around with the athletes or the students considered the most popular. That's the reason I think he was always ready to accept a dare."

Charles charmed most people he met but not many paid such close attention as Ray Roy.

Even then, though, came an unexpected break in the pattern of a strong, healthy, bright son of a successful business man. He did not go to college. He enlisted in the Marines on July 6, 1959, and went to Guantanamo Bay in Cuba for a year and a half of his duty.

He stayed in the Marines until honorable discharge on Dec. 4, 1964, and from the Reserves, with which he never affiliated, on July 18, 1965. During his hitch in the service he was a good Marine and became an E-4, the equivalent of a petty officer third class. He qualified as a sharpshooter, scoring 215 out of a possible 250 when he last fired for record in the service.

Charles ranked so far above most Marines in potential that he applied for a special Navy and Marine Corps college scholarship program with the aim of becoming a commissioned officer. He passed a competitive test with flying colors and the review of a selection committee.

"Only the best ones are picked and located at various colleges," said Col. M. H. LaGrone, ROTC commanding officer at U.T.

Charles was sent to a preparatory school at Bainbridge, Md., for a refresher course in mathematics and physics along with other hand-picked Marine college-officer potential. Then he was enrolled at The University of Texas in Austin for an engineering major. He continued on active duty with regular pay plus a civilian allowance with tuition, books and fees paid. On successful completion of college, he would have gone on to Officers Candidate School for a 10-months wind-up before being commissioned.

He entered U.T. in September 1961, two years later than he would have matriculated if he had taken the wealthy man's son route of going to college on an allowance the same year he graduated from high school.

He picked up a new name in the Marines. His buddies called him "Whit." But it was Charles or usually Charles again at 40 Acres. And again he was "just one of the guys."

Charles and two of his new cronies pleaded guilty in Travis County court-at-law on Nov. 20, 1961, on a charge of unlawful possession of a deer. Each was fined \$100 and costs.

He met Kathleen F. Leissner at the University. They married on Aug. 17, 1962, in the rectory of St. Michael's Church in her home town of Needville in the rice country of Fort Bend County west of Galveston. She was a year or so younger, pretty, talented, and vivacious. She stuck with Charles through everything until the very end.

It was obviously such a good match.

Charles was six-feet tall, weighed a husky 198 pounds, had a blond crew-cut, was pleasant faced and easy-going. He liked to kid and joke and got along well with almost everybody. He was ambitious and determined to fulfill the American dream and out-do his father—at everything.

He was a bit of a plunger and liked to gamble in the hopes of making a quick buck. He

wrote later his main interest was "how to make money."

Back at the University he was having scholastic troubles. He had what University officials called "an uneven record."

During the 1961-62 first semester he got an "F" in general chemistry, a "D" in introduction to economics, two credits, three "Cs" and an "A" in college algebra. In the second semester he got no "F" and no "A," but two "Ds," three "Cs" and one "B."

Marriage seems to have occupied the young couple's 1962 summer. Then it was back to school in the fall.

Dr. Leonard Kreiser, associate professor of mechanical engineering at U.T., was Whitman's faculty advisor one semester in 1962.

"He seemed to be more mature than most people his age," Kreiser said. "He seemed to be vacillating between artistic and engineering endeavors. He was well liked by students in his classes. He did very good work, very neat work. He seemed very happy in his family. He brought his wife once and introduced her."

Charles' grades improved markedly with a lighter load in the first semester of 1962-63. He came up with one "A" and four "Cs."

Something caught up with him, though. The Marine Corps decided Charles' grades didn't match the promise and potential required. He had to withdraw and rejoin in his old rank the 2nd Marine Division at Camp Lejeune, N.C. That was on Feb. 12, 1963. He had to serve out his enlistment.

Then military discipline snared him.

He was convicted of violation of lawful order by a special court-martial for loaning money for profit and gambling. His rank was reduced to private. He was sentenced to 30 days restriction and hard labor but not confinement. He had earned the Good Conduct Medal prior to this discipline and was entitled to wear the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal for his service in Cuba.

Ronald Russell, 23, of Bremerton, Wash., was a Marine buddy at Camp Lejeune in the first half of 1964. Russell was a lance corporal and Whitman was still a private.

"Whit had so much going for him, so much spirit, so much future," said Russell. He told Charles he and Dorothy Jennings of Richmond weren't sure about getting married.

"Whit talked to Dorothy and me about marriage. He told us the good and the bad about getting married. He must have talked about three hours, and we listened. He told us of his love for his wife Kathy, about how happy they were. Whit convinced us we should get married . . . If we had had a son instead of a daughter, we would have named him Charles Whit Russell."

Whit-Charles planned ahead for the end of his enlistment in December 1964. He attended summer session at East Carolina State College that year and picked up three hours credit in history.

Kathy and Charles came back to Austin to stay and he picked up at the beginning of the second semester of the 1964-65 school year at U.T. He changed from mechanical to architectural engineering and his grades were the best ever. He got three "Cs," one "B" and an "A" in building construction materials and methods.

"We met two years ago when he switched," said fellow stu-

dent and friend Frank Greenshaw. "There wasn't a person around there who didn't like Charles. He was torn between his artistic talents and engineering, so he switched. He was one of the most vitally interested individuals in the class."

Charles took a summer course at Alvin Junior College, between Galveston and his wife's hometown of Needville in 1965. He picked up three more hours credit, this time in government.

From April until June 1965 he worked in the afternoons as a teller at The Austin National Bank at \$1.25 an hour. His boss was Assistant Cashier Eddie R. Hendricks.

"I thought at the time," says Hendricks, "that he was an outstanding person, very likeable, neat and nice looking. I never knew the boy well. He left."

He held a job at NASA as an engineer's aid while at Alvin.

During the first semester of 1965-66 at U.T. Charles rang up three "As," one "B" and dropped one course in calculus.

Early in the spring semester his mother separated from his father and sent for him to come get her after 26 years of marriage. Mother was coming to her firstborn. She took an apartment at the Penthouse.

The father started phoning Charles every other day or so.

"I have spent many a dollar since then on the telephone trying to work out our problems," said the elder Whitman. "I love my wife very dearly."

He said Charles (not Charlie, not Whit) had nothing to do with his wife's decision to leave.

"There was no animosity," he said. "The only animosity was that I fought like the devil to get her back."

Charles and Kathy were living at 1001 Shelley Avenue, Apt. A.

He was taking 20 hours, which was too much of a load. He was worrying more than ever about his grades, although he was averaging "B." His wife was teaching at Lanier, where she was successful and popular. He had tried being a scoutmaster and then assistant scoutmaster for First Methodist Church but gave it up, although the Scouts thought he was great, because he was overscheduled and under too much stress.

Sidney Joe Boyd, 12, son of Mr. and Mrs. Lindy L. Boyd, was in Charles' Boy Scout Troop 5. He said all the boys called Whitman "Porky" because he ate all the time. He told his parents the scoutmaster helped the boys a lot with guns.

"My," commented Mrs. Boyd on meeting Whitman, "he seems like such a nice man." "He is nice," said Sidney. "But he has a lot of headaches." The Whitmans' landlord was W. G. Bodling.

"He was a nice fellow," said Bodling. "He didn't seem to drink and he paid his rent on time. He sounded a little worried sometimes, but you know how students are. They have a lot on their minds."

By March 29 this year Charles had had it.

He did the most difficult thing such a man can do. He asked for outside help of the most personal and soul revealing kind from strangers. He sought out Medical Doctor Jan D. Cochran who prescribed the mild tranquilizer Valium and referred him at his own request to the psychiatrist upstairs, Dr. Maurice Dean Healy.

Dr. Healy has told that story of a two-hour consultation. Charles was oozing with hostil-

ity. Something was happening to him and he didn't seem to be himself.

Charles said his father was brutal, and extremely domineering of the family.

Charles was very fond of Kathy, but he did use his father's tactics and he had twice beaten her. Lately, though, he had made a more intense effort to avoid losing his temper with her and she had less fear of him.

Charles is very disconcerted at making "Bs" when he is capable of "As." He has overwhelming hostility with little or no provocation and sometimes thinks of going up on the tower with a deer rifle to shoot people. His greatest goal is to excel his father in high society and every other way.

Dr. Healy told Charles to come back in a week, and phone earlier if he had any other experience to discuss.

Charles made the critical decision affecting the living and the dead. He decided he could fight this problem and whip it on his own without the help of a psychiatrist. Two hours had been enough. He didn't go back. He didn't call.

He did not admit there might be something he couldn't handle, something too big for Charles.

He had been the Golden Boy, the nice guy, the All American Boy too long.

By June 1 he had ended the semester with two "Cs," three "Bs," and two "As."

President Lyndon Baines Johnson and Lady Bird sat on the west side of the south quadrangle under the Tower the night of June 4 to watch daughter Lynda Bird graduate with honors.

Charles entered summer school.

On June 17 he applied for a job as engineering laboratory assistant and listed his new home address as 906 Jewell.

Dr. Clyde Edward Lee, research engineer at the U.T. Bureau of Engineering Research, said he hired Whitman as an assistant because he needed money for summer school.

"He was carrying a rather heavy course load, 14 credit hours, but he said the courses were important to him and he wanted to get them out of the way," said Lee. "He was an unusually good worker, was prompt, and asked real mature questions concerning the objectives of the project—not just his job."

Neighbors of the Whitmans on Jewell liked the young couple. "All the kids in the neighborhood played at the Whitmans," said Mrs. D. W. Nowotny of 910 Jewell. "He loved children and they loved him."

The children played on an exercise rope Charles put up.

Judy Nowotny, 19, who rode to the campus with him often, said he was the nicest person she knew at the University. He was full of jokes and fun, but a little worried sometimes.

"He loved guns," said Mike Merino, son of Mr. and Mrs. John Merino of 911 Jewell. "He was always going to the rifle range."

Charles had talked about graduating next May and going to Law School. When his trial came up in Corporation Court on July 9 for running a red light earlier in the year he decided to test his legal talent and aptitude by defending himself.

Police Chief Bob Miles said Whitman did a brilliant job. But he lost and was convicted.

That didn't help. The last time his father talked

to Charles on the phone from Florida was Monday, July 18. The call lasted 30 minutes.

"There were no hard feelings," the plumbing and septic tank contractor told newsmen at his expensive home on Aug. 2. "Not at all. In fact, we set up plans for a hunting trip to Texas and Mexico this fall."

"I told him he was working too hard and he ought to slow down. He was trying to do the impossible."

"But he didn't hear me."

"He was trying to prove a point. I guess we all are."

The father told newsmen he loved all three of his sons.

"At times," he said, "Charles did get angry with me for telling him he was working too hard."

On July 22, two of those sons, Charles and John, visited the 28th floor, 307-foot high, four-sided observation deck with its panoramic view of Austin. Charles had been there many times before.

There were reports, doubted by co-workers and friends in Austin, that Charles had visited the 49th floor observation tower of the First National Bank in Dallas on Thursday, July 28. Co-workers said he was on the job in the UT engineering research lab.

Dr. Lee said the boys working with Charles on Friday, July 29, said he was in good spirits. "There were no signs he was depressed," said Lee.

Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence Fuess, a college couple who list themselves among the Whitmans' best friends, visited Charles at his home from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. Sunday, July 31.

Mrs. Fuess works in the computer section of the state controller's office while her husband shared Whitman's architectural engineering major.

"Charles was in quite high spirits," Mrs. Fuess said. Otherwise, he was quite normal, except he seemed relieved. Strangely enough, though he had a quiz Monday, there was no stress at all.

"Usually before a quiz he was quite tense."

"He was talking about Kathy

with much more sentimentality than usual. You don't sit in front of your best friends and just moon over your wife. He was unusually tender."

Mrs. Fuess had an unusual insight into Charles Whitman, considered so easy going by so many of his intimates.

"He was always to the point of hypertension," she said. "Even in his everyday life."

The day after the Tower slaughter by sniper Charles Joseph Whitman, who left a series of notes suppressed by the police and the Travis County grand jury to protect the innocent people affected, the father told newsmen at his home his son was always a crack shot.

"I'm a fanatic about guns," the father said. "I'm a great hunter. My boys know all about guns. I believe in that."

The elder Whitman was facing newsmen for the first time since Charles killed his mother and his wife Sunday night or Monday in the wee hours, and then slew from the U.T. Tower observation deck 13 others, including an unborn child. It was an insane assault on life itself which he had failed to master in any other way.

Police bullets riddled and killed him at close range after perhaps 90 minutes of incompressible violence.

"My son," said the father in a level tone, "has committed a crime that is a great horror to the whole world. I know you all realize that this boy is sick. I don't know what else to say about him."

"He was trying to prove himself . . ."

Whitman expressed sympathy for the victims and their relatives.

"But right now," he said, "there doesn't seem to be anything I can do. I am worried right now about my own problems."

The last words of Charles were those he wrote that last weekend, interrupted when the Fuess couple visited Sunday night before he left to pick up Kathy at her information operator job at Southwestern Bell Telephone Company.

Chief Miles, before the Grand

Jury decision to suppress the notes, discussed with reporters certain key parts.

The notes tell of depression, repressed violence and severe headaches although on March 29 the form he filled out for the Health Center psychiatrist had reported no headaches.

One note said he knew he was mentally distressed. He requested an autopsy to determine why.

"Considering the situation," said Miles, "he was quite rational in his notes. He seemed to be completely bewildered by the things that were happening to him."

"He said he had decided to kill his wife and mother but didn't know why he intended to do it, whether it was compassion or love or wanting to spare them embarrassment."

"He said if there was a hereafter, they are there, and if not, they are out of their pain and misery."

"He had decided the world was not worth living in, but there was nothing to indicate he would go to the tower and do what he did . . . He had had severe headaches. The last three months he took three large bottles of a headache remedy."

Miles said Whitman left one note beside the body of his wife at their home, another in the apartment of his mother, and a third on the door of his mother's apartment to advise callers she was sleeping late.

He said the notes showed "the stress this man obviously was under."

Miles said in one note the mass killer wrote that he "hated his father with a mortal passion."

Out in San Francisco, Marine Capt. Joseph Stanton, who was executive officer of Charles Joseph Whitman in the 2nd Marine Division, said news of his end "really took the wind out of me."

"He was a good Marine," Stanton said. "I was impressed with him. I was certain he'd make a good citizen. . . . I wrote him from Viet Nam and got an answer. . . . I almost went to Texas when I was on leave recently. Now I sort of wish I had."



. . . who died a murderer's death atop a tower