

The Last Night: Wife and Mother Killed

By JERRY HALL
Staff Writer

When Charlie Whitman opened the door of his home on Jewell St. in South Austin last Sunday afternoon he was outwardly calm, perhaps more than he had been in recent weeks.

Lawrence Fuess, a fellow architectural engineering student, and his wife had come to call. Fuess later was to comment that Charlie seemed "more settled" than usual.

It may be that Charles Joseph Whitman at that point already had reached a plateau of insane serenity within his mind. Many psychiatrists believe when a mentally disturbed person finally makes a difficult decision or picks a course of action on a particular problem, they settle down, at least on the surface.

Then they become like an arrow already speeding from the bow — or the slugs soon to spew from Whitman's guns.

There's no turning back. Sometimes they can be turned aside, but not often.

What triggered Whitman is impossible to know. Some doctors say it may have been pain from the tumor growing on his spinal stem. The growth was not malignant.

Another psychiatrist, declining use of his name, theorized Whitman was smart enough to have possibly deducted for himself what was causing his headaches.

"It was an inoperable situation — the tumor at the spinal stem — and he could possibly have known that he was going to die, hence was driven beyond the sanity line," the doctor said.

When Lawrence Fuess and his wife arrived at the house on Jewell last Sunday Charlie Whitman apparently was writing a letter. It may have been one of the notes he left.

It was sometime after 6 p.m., but before dark because Kathleen (Kathy) Whitman already had gone back to finish her split shift as an operator on

the "information board" at the Southwestern Bell Telephone Co. building at 9th St. and Colorado.

But there still was daylight, because a neighbor later remembered seeing Charlie and his visitors walk to the curb to buy some ice cream from the Blue Bonnet vendor passing by. Later, in talking about Whitman's calm exterior, Fuess was to say "Charlie used to bite his fingernails, and that worried him because he felt it wasn't manly."

"Lately, he had stopped that. The nails appeared smooth and long for him Sunday night," Fuess said.

Whitman might have seemed calm on the outside because less than 24 hours away from infamy, he probably already had shifted gears in his turbulent mind. His mind was in overdrive, and only a hail of gunfire would put a halt to those twisted mental processes.

Kathy wasn't home, the Fuesses stayed over an hour. As they departed in the hot

dusk they couldn't know they soon would share their acquaintanceship with Charles Joseph Whitman with the world.

From the time the Fuesses drove away until the thunder of guns in the Monday noon sun, Whitman's actions can be only partially documented.

Kathy was due to get off at 9:30 p.m. He was always there to meet her. Police still have not confirmed the sequence of death for the two Mrs. Whitmans, wife and mother.

But if notes found later are to be believed, Mrs. Margaret Whitman may have died at her son's hands first in her apartment at the Penthouse.

In one of his notes timed at 12:30 a.m. Monday (half-past midnight), Whitman wrote that he had killed his mother. "If there is a heaven, she is there. If there is not, then she is out of her misery," Police Chief R. A. (Bob) Miles later quoted the note.

It was not until the second note, timed at 3 a.m., that Whitman said his wife and

mother were both dead.

Justice of the Peace Jerry Delana has said Mrs. Whitman may have had a flash of danger because her hand was crushed badly "as though caught in a door." She was stabbed and shot, but not in bed as it was first thought because rugs were found to be covering blood spots on the floor.

But then comes the first, major unanswered question. If she was the first, and regardless of the time, why did Mrs. Whitman not scream or make a noise if she knew there was danger?

It is doubtful that Mrs. Whitman ever faced danger. Whitman killed unsuspected — from the back, from the top, in the dark. The only shots he fired face-to-face came to a pair of teenage boys at the top of the stairs at the tower.

Even then, he let four persons live — though two were wounded — when he had them all trapped and could have methodically picked them off. He killed his wife as she slept.

He started the mortal wounds to a woman at the top of the tower with blows on the back of the head.

The only man he met face-to-face he let live. This man and a woman companion were leaving the observation deck apparently after Whitman had killed and hidden the body of the receptionist.

It is more likely that he first attacked his mother from behind — that her hand was injured by the same blows that knocked off the back of her skull. Why did she not scream?

Perhaps, and only perhaps, she had been choked beyond sense. The black attaché case Whitman carried to his mother's apartment was found Monday in his automobile. It contained only a five-foot length of small rubber hose.

The possibility of shooting his mother seems remote in the Penthouse. Occupants of the apartment below report that they can easily hear a clothes hanger dropped on the floor of Mrs. Whitman's apartment.

Although her death was a mystery when it was discovered and although she was a central character in the whole costly drama, Mrs. Whitman's body was not sent for an autopsy.

One thing is certain: Whitman's killing of his mother had to be the "perfect crime" for at least 12 hours — at least until he got to the top of the tower. If he had not left notes, if he had not gone to the tower, if he had not killed his wife, the slaying of his mother might have been that perfect crime.

He had given the night watchman full opportunity to see Mrs. Whitman asleep in bed, room in neat order, as he left the building. The watchman did not take the opportunity, but the crime held up for more than 14 hours — longer than Whitman lived.

What really happened behind the closed door of Apartment 505 will never be known fully.

There can only be speculation as is true for so much of Sunday and Monday's nightmare.

But for the sake of continuity, take up the thread of grim events at 9:30 p.m. when unsuspecting and seemingly without a care, Kathy Whitman rode the elevator down from the third floor of the telephone building with her friend, Kay Pearce.

"I hope," Kathy told Kay in a joking vein, "that we don't stop off by the Dunkin' Donut again for donuts. They are ruining my diet."

The Dunkin' Donut, in the 600 block of Congress Ave., is a new all-night place where Charlie and Kathy apparently had been stopping off since it opened three weeks or so ago to pick up donuts to take home.

Employees there do not remember them, however.

Kathy had gone to work at 8:30 a.m. Sunday, stayed on the job until 1 p.m., gone back at 6 p.m. and then off for the day — and for eternity — at 9:30 p.m.

Sometime before 7 p.m., after Kathy had been back on the board about an hour, Mrs. Ruth Perry, one of the supervisors made a "spot check" on the young woman's job performance.

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KATHY WHITMAN
... 'til death do part'



MARGARET WHITMAN
... dead by her firstborn

It's a routine thing, something required for all telephone operators.

Mrs. Perry said Kathy told her immediately she was "only working this summer and I'm anxious to get back to teaching." At 23, teaching biology in a senior high school seems improbable, but Kathy was mature.

"She acted a lot older than she looked," said Patricia Barber, another of her co-workers. Mrs. Perry told Kathy she was doing fine work — "Keep it up."

She explained that she had worked for her immediate supervisor, Mrs. Margaret Winn, as a long distance operator while she was still a University student in 1961 and 1962.

"Kathy was very efficient, a sweet girl with a winning smile," said Mrs. Winn. "There was never a hint of difficulty between her and Charles."

After Mrs. Perry made her spot check it was time for Kathy and another friend, Linda Damerau, "to take a break" about 7 p.m.

"We didn't drink coffee," Linda recalled, "or a coke or anything. We just went into the lounge and sat down on the sofa. Kathy noticed last week's Life magazine — you know, the one with the pictures about a birth."

"She said she couldn't imagine what it would be like to have a baby. But she was very interested in it, being a biology teacher and all. She remarked that someday she hoped she and Charles would have children."

This possibly would have been shortly before Charles was making ready to leave his home on Jewell to pay a visit to his mother.

Kathy earlier told Kay Pearce her mother-in-law was now living in Austin. "She didn't say anything about her in-laws being separated, but she did say Charlie was getting too large and was going to have to go on a diet, too."

"We all laughed about that," said Patricia Barber. "Kathy wasn't fat or anything. I didn't even recognize that wedding picture because it made her look heavy."

"But," continued Kay, "she said Charlie's mother always had some cake or candy or cookies or something at her place and Charlie was beginning to get out of shape."

Within hours, Charles J. Whitman, the son for whom the mother fondly made cakes and cookies, was tacking a note on her door to "Roy," saying that his mother was ill and not to disturb her because she

would not be able to work Monday.

Roy is a caretaker and houseman at the Penthouse. Inside the room, Charles had carefully fixed his mother's body to appear that she was sleeping. She was a cashier at Wyatt's Cafeteria.

Back at the phone company, Kathy and Kay Pearce rode down the elevator shortly after they got off work.

"We stopped by and put up our heads," said Kay. "Then going down she made the remark about stopping at the donut place. I saw her get in a large dark car. I couldn't see the man."

The employees entrance at the phone company is on 9th St., which goes one-way east.

"She said 'bye' and I said 'bye, see you tomorrow,'" Kay recalled. Then they drove off and turned right on Congress Ave.

That's the last word Kathy Whitman uttered except to the open-faced, pleasant-looking young man whom she promised 2½ years ago to "love, honor and obey until death do us part."

It was Linda Damerau with whom Kathy trained for her summer job earlier this summer, and it was perhaps Linda to whom she was closest at the telephone company.

"We started training on June 6," said Linda. "She always was quick and alert and easy to get along with."

To a woman, supervisors, operators and all, her co-workers at the phone company found it hard if not impossible to believe what psychiatrist Dr. Maurice D. Healy, brother of Rep. Bill Healy of Paducah, said Whitman told him during a visit last March.

Dr. Healy's notes show Whitman said he had "physically assaulted his wife twice."

"I just can't believe he ever beat her," said Mrs. Winn. Nor could any of the other girls. "If he did, she certainly hid it well."

None of the telephone company workers ever met Charles and had only seen him at a glance.

"But she loved him, there's no doubt of that," said one of them.

Kathy liked to read. She read "big, thick volumes," in keeping with her chosen job as a biology teacher. She was very neat, liked to sew for herself and was always well dressed.

For several days she had been talking about a student picnic coming up at the lake next Saturday and had made arrangements to "trade out" with Patricia Barber on work days so she and Charles could attend.

She was to have worked for Patricia Wednesday and Pat would have worked next Saturday.

On her job application, Kathy Whitman wrote that she liked volleyball, had worked on the newspaper and annual staff in high school at Needville and was a band twirler. She also was in the Future Homemakers of America.

She gave as references the banker, the superintendent of schools and the druggist in her hometown. She worked last summer at the Clear Lake Yacht Basin near Needville as a bookkeeper.

Kathy was born July 12, 1943. She was 5 feet, 4 inches tall and gave her weight as 120 pounds and was right handed.

"The only time I ever heard her complain," recalled one friend, "was about how high the telephone bills were, not only now but while her husband was in the Marine Corps."

The telephone operators have voted to donate to a memorial being planned for Kathy at the Methodist Church in her hometown of Needville.

This was the Kathy Whitman who came down with confidence to meet her husband at 9:30 p.m. Sunday. Gay, apparently free from worries — except for the diet — and serenely looking forward to teaching this fall.

Incidentally, Kathy often brought her own lunch to her job. More than seldom it con-

(See CHARLIE, Page A24)

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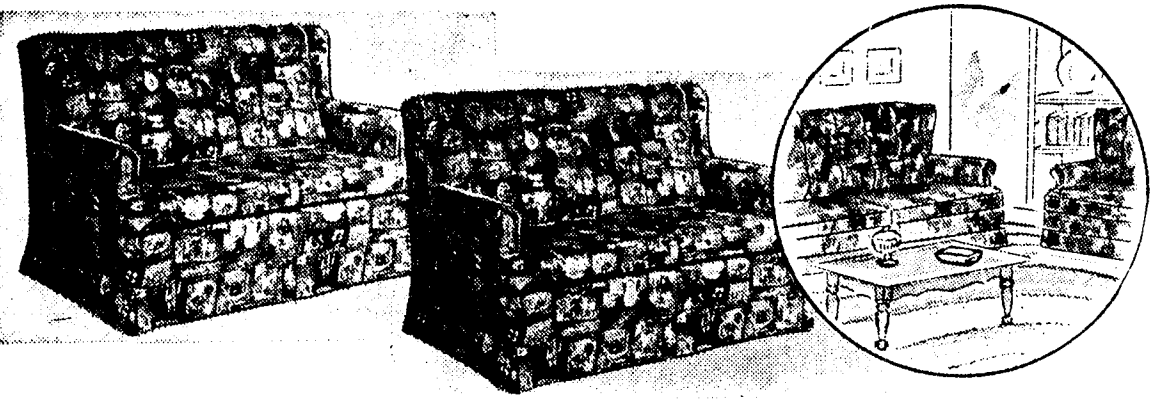


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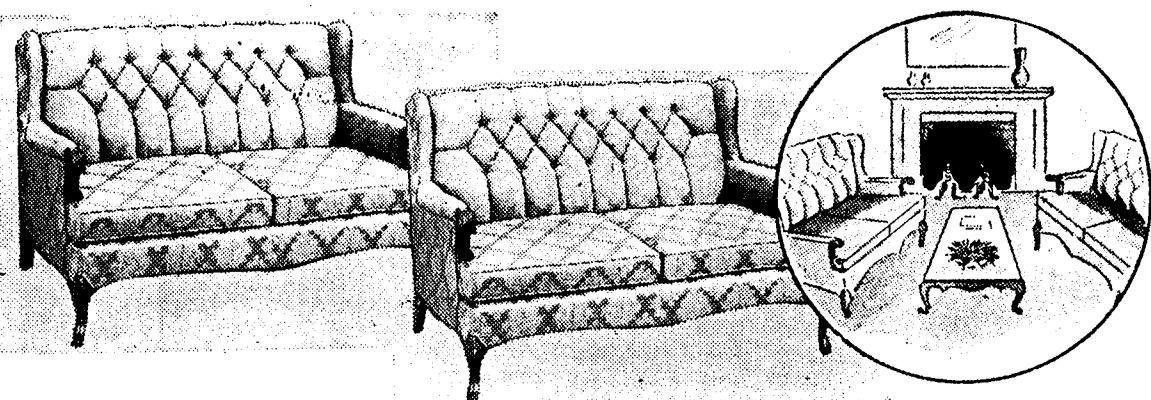


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